

THE SYNODAL CHURCH: A PATH TOWARDS ENNOBLING WOMEN RELIGIOUS

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Abstract

The path of synodality, with its emphasis on participation, communion and mission is a hope filled and grace filled endeavour. Women, in particular women religious, hope to have better opportunities to share their talents and potentialities in leadership roles and the ministry of the Church. The patriarchal influence of the ecclesiastical system made women and their contributions invisible in the past, and some supporters of the old tradition are still tempted to do so. The synodal Church opens up many areas of discrimination experienced by women and calls each member of the Catholic Church to transform this evil of exclusion with an attitudinal metanoia. It will surely bring about the praxis which ennobles women religious in particular and women in general. Sincere acknowledgement and appreciation will enhance women religious' contributions rather than underestimating and exploiting them with the hierarchical power traditionally exercised in the Church.

Key Words: Abuse, Dignity, Discrimination, Leadership, Participation, Patriarchy, Synodal

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Introduction

Women religious in India outnumber priests¹ just as women outnumber men among Indian Christians.² Despite having more numbers, the inferior status of women religious prevails in the life and ministries of the Church. The notion of the inferiority/subordination of women was propagated through various philosophical theories, biased interpretations of Biblical passages, and cultural and traditional practices. By being deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ, women religious in the 3rd millennium can be empowered³ and contribute substantially to transform the existing discriminatory attitude towards them. By overcoming their internalised versions of patriarchy and hierarchy, women in Consecrated Life would be respected and accepted as the apostles of Christ.

A profound reflection on the humanity of Jesus in terms of human relatedness focuses on Jesus, who treated men and women as equals. In his life and ministry, Jesus taught new values through demythologizing the false notions and practices of the power of authority in the society and challenging the ethical, social and cultural barriers of his time. He stood for the cause of women all through his ministry, based on love, inclusiveness, discipleship of equals and justice. In order to liberate them from discriminatory attitudes such as considering women as impure, inferior, and unworthy, he touched them, healed them, and appreciated them.

The evaluation of the past and present situations of women in religious life reveals the truth that they have not been respected and accepted as dignified members of the Church. Knowing and experiencing Jesus as the one who considered women as true images of God and taught by word and deed the rightful ways to treat them as equal in dignity and responsibility ushers in an authentic and optimistic spirituality in which women are neither side-lined nor marginalised. Women religious across the globe are in need of

¹ While the number of priests and brothers in India is 28,000, the number of sisters and contemplatives is 1,31,500. Lazar T. Stanislaus, "Mission *Inter Gentes*: The Role of Consecrated Persons," in Lazar T. Stanislaus, ed., *Prospects and Pathways in India: Missio Ad-Inter Gentes*, Mumbai: St Pauls, 2019, 56.

² Shemin Joy, "Christians in India Have More Women than Men," <http://www.deccanherald.com/india/christians-india-have-more-women-2147440>, accessed 18 March 2024.

³ *Vita Consecrata*, no. 1 affirms that the consecrated life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ, is a gift of God.

recognising their equal worth and potentialities as well as their noble role as advocates of a spirituality of courage and compassion.

Pope Francis has consistently expressed his desire for more discussion about the role of women in the Church. It is because of his awareness that any discrimination, whether it affects the whole group or only a part of it, is unjust and unacceptable. This attitude envisions a Church that fosters the radical equality of the Gospel. The recent statement of ecclesial authority that “if women do not feel comfortable in the Church, we have failed our living as Christians”⁴ can be viewed as the transformation brought about by the synodal way of thinking. The attempts to affirm and promote the role of women in the Church through the focus of establishing a synodal church fill the hearts of many consecrated women who are denied their equal dignity. The synodal way of listening to women religious could disclose many of the ways to eliminate the elements of injustice in perspectives, language, and interpretation of female gender present in the Church activities of the 21st century.

1. The Contemporary Challenges of Consecrated Women

Since women religious are attuned to live their consecration through an affective dedication to God and intimate union with God, the images of God they are introduced to play a crucial role in nourishing and fostering their interior relationship with God. In the Indian Christian structures of patriarchy and its traditions, the reinforcement of male power, prestige and dominance make women practically invisible, and the spiritual quest is primarily depicted as a male privilege. The stereotyped ideas about women such as that they are inferior to men in all aspects of life and hence are of less value, have been transmitted through various, now scientifically proven faulty, teachings of the Church fathers, theologians and scripture scholars.⁵

⁴ “Hollerich: If Women Feel Uncomfortable in Church, We Have Failed,” <https://english.katholisch.de/artikel/54711-hollerich-if-women-feel-uncomfortable-in-church-we-have-failed>, accessed 26 July 2024.

⁵ Diodore of Tarsus (300- ca.392), an Antiochene, held that the image consisted in domination, which he thought was not a characteristic of the female since according to Paul, she is subject to man, (Diodore, *Fragmenta in Genesis* 1:26 PG 33:1564C-1565A; cfr W.J. Burghardt, *The Image of God in Man According to Cyril of Alexandria*, Woodstock, MD, Woodstock College, 1957, 59-60, and 139); Augustine (354-430 CE): Women were subjected to men by the order of creation and their embodiment was the specific focus of inferiority. He writes that “the woman ... with the appearance and distinctive physical characteristics of her sex, was made for the man from the man ... I have sufficiently searched for God’s purpose in

The sad truth is that these teachings are internalised by many women religious too. These internalisations of gender injustice profoundly affect women's experience of God and hence, their relationship to Jesus.⁶

1.1. Patriarchal Influence

Some of the spiritual exercises in Christian religious contexts are retreat, recollection, confession, Eucharistic celebration, meditation and prayers. All these are developed profoundly in a patriarchal context and a good deal of their preparation and direction are done by men. The effect of the experience of male dominance on the religious experience and spirituality of women can be identified in all the activities which exclude women or keep women inferior to men in the Church. On the other hand, women's autonomy and their spiritual

making the woman as man's helper," (Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis (De genesi ad litteram)*, J.H. Taylor, tran., vol. 2, Ramsey, NJ: Paulist, 1982, 82-83; cfr E.A. Matter, "Christ, God and Woman in the Thoughts of St Augustine," in R. Dodaro and G. Lawless, eds, *Augustine and His Critics*, London: Routledge, 2000, 167); Cyril of Alexandria (376-444 CE): By inducing Adam to sin, woman had become death's deaconess, (Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarii in Lucam* 24:9 PG 72:941; cfr W.J. Burghardt, *The Image of God in Man According to Cyril of Alexandria*, Woodstock, MD: Woodstock College, 1957, 131); Gratian: In *Decretum* (ca.1140), which is a founding work of canon law, he states that woman was not made in God's image: "*Hec imago Dei est in homine, et unus factus sit ex quo ceteri orientur, habens imperium Dei, quasi unicarius eius, quia unius Dei habet imaginem, ideoque mulier non est facta ad Dei imaginem,*" (A. Richter and A. Friedberg, eds, *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, vol. 1, Graz, Akademische Druch, 1995, 1254; cfr M.C. Horowitz, "The Image of God in Man: Is Woman Included?," *The Harvard Theological Review* 72, no. 3/4, 1979, 177); Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE): The woman should not have been made in the first production of things, because for him "the female is a misbegotten male." He states that nothing misbegotten or defective should have been in the first production of things. Therefore, woman should not have been made at the first production, (R.M. Hutchins, ed., *The Summa Theologica of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, Chicago, IL: William Benton/ Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952, 1.92.1, 488); and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986 CE): Since Eve was created from the side of Adam she is inferior to him. "Eve was not fashioned at the same time as the man; she was not fabricated from a different substance, nor of the same clay as was used to model Adam; she was taken from the flank of the first male. Not even her birth was independent; God did not spontaneously choose to create her as an end in herself and in order to be worshiped directly by her in return for it. She was destined by Him for man; it was to rescue Adam from loneliness that He gave her to him, in her mate was her origin and her purpose," S. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, H.M. Parshley, tran. and ed., London, Vintage, 1997, 173; cfr I. Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach*, London: Harvard University Press, 1993, 18.

⁶ Janet K. Ruffing, "The God-Quest and the Gift of Religious Life to the Church," *Vinayasādhana* 4, no. 2, 2013, 20.

potentiality are focused and dealt with very rarely or very feebly in the past. Even the life and spirituality of Mother Mary were also explicated by using the images which support the patriarchal and kyriarchal systems. It would not let women unfold themselves as resourceful and competent humans.⁷

The exclusive focus on masculine images for God in our Scripture, prayers, Church documents and Congregational documents, and the practice of using masculine terminologies as the best and correct usage (patron instead of patroness, men instead of human beings or people, founder instead of foundress, fraternity/fraternal instead of sorority/sororal or sisterly, brothers/brethren instead of brothers and sisters, sons instead of sons and daughters, fathers instead of ancestors and fellow men instead of fellow beings) are some of the overt effects of male dominance on women.⁸

1.2. Masculinisation of Religious Experience

Christian spiritual tradition often entails the Spirituality of Christian warfare, Spirituality of a Journey/pilgrimage from this world to the next, Spirituality of mountain climbing, Spirituality of sportsmanship, Spirituality of a sinner/slave before the Judge/King and the Spirituality of carrying one's daily cross. The image of Christian warfare reminds of the historical context of battle and war. Women who have never been to war are urged to be virile in their spiritual lives to conquer themselves, to be soldiers of Christ in the spiritual army of God, and to acquire by force the manly virtues.⁹

The journey model communicates that whatever is perceived to be worldly distracts from arriving at the goal of the promised land,

⁷ Jacob Parappally, "Marian Images and Devotions Through the Ages," in R.K. Samy, ed., *Mary in Our Search for Fullness of Life*, Bangalore: NBCLC, 2006, 37.

⁸ The following incident illustrates my point. In the Nicene Creed we recite, "For us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven." Just before the doctoral defence, all the research scholars are asked to recite this in the Institute. One of the women religious expressed her difficulty to recite this part because, she believed that being a woman, it was meaningless for her to recite that Jesus came down only for men. Hence, instead of "for us men," she recited "for us men and women." The authority asked her to repeat 3 times till she said: "For us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven" and only then allowed her to defend the thesis. Further, the negative criticism for using the inclusive terminologies was also expressed in the Doctoral Students' meeting in the Institute.

⁹ Philomena D'Souza, "Birthing of a Spirituality from Women's Perspective," in Evelyn Monteiro and Kochurani Abraham, eds, *Concerns of Women: An Indian Theological Response*, Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2005, 154-155.

paradise. "As spirituality is associated exclusively with growth in prayer and virtue, the normal day-to-day chores and relationships which consume the energy of most women, would be seen as worldly preoccupations which distract them from their goal."¹⁰ The images of mountain climbing and sportsmanship remind us of physical achievement, constant self-discipline, competition, and reward.

The next image has its root in feudal culture, i.e., sinner/slave before the Judge/King, and "is evocative of the historically dehumanising experience of most women in their relationship with men ... Presenting women's obedience and self-surrender as a religious goal should be seen with caution, since it has so often been used by men as a tool for domination. The spirituality of carrying one's daily cross is what women have always done. Self-sacrifice motifs and attitudes of subservience are promoted for women as expected virtues."¹¹ In fact, through the masculinisation of religious experiences women have been consistently taught to value only one type of religious development- self-denial and sacrifice of one's own needs for the sake of others. Whereas men have been taught to couple self-denial with prophetic courage to resist unjust authority, women have been taught to see all male authority as God-given, and joyful service to authority as willingly carrying one's daily cross ... any assertion of one's own desires is considered to be a sign of selfishness and pride ... Encouraging self-denial is in a way promoting conformity to a male-approved/male-befitting role.¹²

Many Church fathers and theologians presented women as sources of temptation and articulated the image of woman as the gateway to hell.¹³ Many of them expressed in their theological and spiritual writings that only man is fully created in the image of God. Women are often blamed for Eve's error and perpetuated the notion that

¹⁰ Philomena D'Souza, "Birthing of a Spirituality from Women's Perspective," 155.

¹¹ Philomena D'Souza, "Birthing of a Spirituality from Women's Perspective," 155.

¹² Philomena D'Souza, "Birthing of a Spirituality from Women's Perspective," 156.

¹³ "You, O woman, are Eve ... the gate of the devil, the traitor of the tree. You are the one who enticed the one whom the devil did not dare approach," (Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum* I.I). Tertullian adds that you broke the image of God, man (*hominem*); because of the death you deserved the Son of God had to die, (Tertullian, "On the Apparel of Women," S. Thelwall, tran., in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994, 14).

women are the embodiment of all that is evil. Hence, controlling her became a part of attaining mastery over one's spiritual life. There exists somewhat suspicious attitude towards woman and her body in many religions- like source of sin and contamination- and there are prescriptions of many rituals for purification. Since women are seen as sex objects, they were somehow considered as less spiritual than men.

Because women were considered inferior to men, their real possibility of participation in the official ministry of the Church did not function in the shaping of the religious imagination and self-understanding of Catholic girls.¹⁴ The majority of them have developed an understanding that they have to go to God through and with the permission of men.¹⁵ The views which divinise males reinforced the subordination of women in all spheres by excluding femininity from the sphere of the divine. Women's male-dependent roles assigned in the Church set a limit to their vast resources of creative leadership. It has deprived women of a sense of themselves and of other women as leaders and limited their opportunities in the sphere of leadership.¹⁶

Sandra M. Schneiders brought to light the reason behind women's tendency to accept the monopoly of leadership and authority of men with whom they work as normal and unquestionable, as follows: "women who experience themselves as always subordinate to men, and who depend on men for affirmation and approval, are very threatened by the emergence of leadership potential in other women. Indeed, many women actually mistrust women in ministerial situations and prefer to work for men."¹⁷

2. Synodal Church to Enrich Women Religious

Synodal Church signifies a Church in which all its members- the pope, bishops, clergy, religious and laypeople- men and women- walk

¹⁴ Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Effects of Women's Experience on Their Spirituality," *Spirituality Today* 35, no. 2, 1983, 101.

¹⁵ The process of masculinising of Christian religious experience has deep roots in the history of spirituality. From the time of Baptism till the funeral rites, men are projected in the important role of mediating God. It can be observed in our time too that we women relate to God rather exclusively through men, (Philomena D'Souza, "Birthing of a Spirituality from Women's Perspective," 157).

¹⁶ Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Effects of Women's Experience on Their Spirituality," 105.

¹⁷ Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Effects of Women's Experience on Their Spirituality," 105.

together in all aspects of the Church's life and mission.¹⁸ It reminds us of the historical fact that women served together very actively with men in the early years of the ecclesial community. The efforts of the Church to reinstate greater participation of women can and will surely help to transform the attitudes which deter their equal participation in the life of the Church as God's images. By affirming the fundamental equality of women and men in Christ, the Church can accomplish her role of being the Sacrament of Christ in this world. It foresees a better witnessing Church by keeping women in the leadership positions of the Church rather than assigning them subordinate positions.

The characteristic signs of the Synodal Church are "founded on the common baptismal dignity and identity; within the horizon of communion and mission; synodal in its institutions, structures and procedures; listening Church; humble; encourages encounter of dialogue; not afraid of variety; moves from 'I' to 'we'; open, welcoming and embracing all; fearlessly confronts relationship between love and truth; has the ability to manage tensions; nourished by liturgy; and it is the Church of discernment."¹⁹ This way of understanding the Church opens up diverse means to remove the elements of discrimination against women which unfortunately still prevail in the Church.

One of the ways is journeying together by mutual listening. The discrimination experienced by women religious in the Church can be erased by this journeying together through better participation in the ministries and decision-making process of the Church. Journeying together with mutual collaboration and understanding opens up new ways to see reality from a new perspective. The consecrated women can be freed from all their blocks of actively participating in the life and mission of the Church through the proper acknowledgment of women who had equal participation in the early Church. This would empower them to carry out their legitimate role and responsibility in the Church better.

The assertion of equal worth and dignity for women is very important. It ennobles women religious because many of them do not know the historical background of considering women inferior in

¹⁸ P. Mangai, "Pope Francis, Synodality and Synod 2023," *VJTR* 85, no. 9, 2021, 4-5.

¹⁹ Y. Karunanidhi, "Instrumentum Laboris for the XVI General Assembly of the Synod: Summary, Reception and Review," *The New Leader* 136, no. 17, 2023, 10-11.

Christianity and its various teachings in contrast with the teachings of Jesus and the practices of the early Church. The approaches to stop considering women religious as silent spectators and passive participants in the Church can be established through sharing the positive contributions of women in different areas of the contemporary world and in the early Church. Establishing a broader collaboration between priests and women religious by eliminating the attitude of undervaluing and in some cases ignoring the contribution of women religious, often making them the cheap labour force in the Church, enhances their dignity and enables them to be better visible with their vibrancy and dynamism.

Inclusion of women religious along with other women to decide matters concerning women at the parish and diocesan levels will reduce the after-effects of masculinisation of religious experiences and patriarchal influence. Jesus, who wished the liberation for all, encourages women religious today to recognise and accept the role of being apostles and prophetesses for him. Women religious are called to live and propagate the messages of Jesus rather than the theology and Biblical interpretations which promote masculine monochrome of leadership in the Catholic Church.²⁰ The synodal way of confronting others with respect and love stops the various abuses towards women religious still existing in the Church due to a distorted way of exercising clerical power. Synodal listening of the women religious who experience a lack of recognition in the Church can create a conducive atmosphere to work and contribute their best for the expansion of the Gospel messages of love, justice, equality, and peace.

Synodal Church as a participative Church, living in communion and moving forward by listening to each other and learning from one another, helps women religious experience Jesus as the one who values, admires, loves, and cares for them with their intimacy, connectedness, relationality, affective response, receptivity, and attentiveness. It emancipates many of them from their insentient attachment and blind following of masculine approaches. It gives the

²⁰ Even to celebrate Women's Day many invite the Parish Priest as the Chief guest. Flocking towards the parish priest to receive the Holy Communion is common, even if women religious are also involved in giving the Holy Communion. Inviting the priests for retreats, recollection and courses for the sisters even though there are women religious as resource persons. Very few women religious are given opportunities to teach in the Seminaries and theological institutes.

women religious who are trained in theology, philosophy, and canon law to contribute more reflections from their lived experience in order to stop the discriminatory attitudes and practices existing in the Church towards them. When they experience a Church that is synodal, the historical instances of reinforcing women's subordination that is developed on the basis of patriarchal construction will be pushed to the back burner and they will become hopeful about their dignified way of living in the Church. It surely opens opportunities for women religious to reflect upon Jesus' identity and ministry with a wider vision. The focus on Jesus who was daring to transform the social situation in order to establish a meaningful existence for women encourages them to actively involve in all the women's empowerment activities.

Hence, through a Synodal Church, the confirmation of women's full equality with men can be obtained and it can be a firm source for an affirmative and transformative feminine spirituality. It helps to eliminate all forms of gender-based domination and discrimination against women in the Church. Since in Christianity the foremost priority in the spiritual life is given to the experience of God, the images of God and the expressions of relating to God are very important aspects of living a spiritual life. It is also associated exclusively with the growth of prayer and virtues. The spiritual growth of women religious who have difficulty with the patriarchal images of God can be transformed through the participatory and communitarian living of the Synodal Church.

In the Indian Christian scenario, women religious in general are not often recognised as equal with men religious.²¹ The comprehensive, independent, responsible, and creative manifestation of women and their intuitive impulses, are deeply elaborated by Jesus. It is obvious in his attitude towards them, especially to the one who had 12 years of haemorrhage (Lk 8:43-48), the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-42), the woman brought to Jesus by the Pharisees and Scribes (Jn 8:1-11), the bent woman who was addressed as a daughter of Abraham (Lk 13:16), the women followers who helped Jesus and the disciples (Lk 8:3), Mary who anointed Jesus at Bethany (Jn 12:1-8) and Martha (Jn 11:20-26). He never approved of treating women as sex objects or their bodies as impure or a source of contamination. On the contrary, he offered all of

²¹ Even though more than 15 women religious are having PhD in Science, no women officials are in the CBCI Office for Education and Culture. Similar discriminative practices are many in Indian Church towards women religious.

them a dignified life. A Synodal Church that makes extra efforts to include those who are normally sidelined or ignored by society can be a sure source for ennobling and empowering women religious in the Church.

The enslaving, oppressive, divisive and dehumanising experiences of women religious can be eliminated through cultivating ways to be more reasonable, free, honest, generous and gentle. The Synodal Church resonates with the idea that women religious could experience from parish priests, bishops and cardinals the same attitude and treatment as they would from Jesus who was open and responsive to eliminate the reality of oppressing and discriminating against them. It creates many women religious who are endowed with the responsibility of being liberating prophetesses, promoters of creativity, solidarity, and hope, and enhancers of cultivating equality, freedom and justice. The Synodal Church emphasises following Jesus Christ and recapturing his attitude of being open and responsive to the needs of the poor and powerless. It transmits a Church that stands for the services of the poor and powerless.

Recognising women as equal members of the Church, invites also to appreciate their services in the Church. Women religious who do services in the institutions of the Church should be paid equally without any discrimination. By being aware of their equal dignity and worth (rather than being inferior and impure), and entrusting them with the responsibilities of planning and decision making, the practice of keeping them on the margins and periphery of Church structures can be stopped. The Synodal Church's encouragement of inclusivity and participation surely commits Church leaders like Parish priests and Bishops to be the models of establishing a more incisive presence of women and collaborating with them in more activities of the Church. The programs that offer the empowerment or ennoblement of women can be given at the parish and diocese levels. Women religious theologians can be brought to the parishes in order to help other women to be more active. This also will help them to reduce their feelings that nobody listens to them in the Church and that they have no voice in the Church.

When women's experience of discrimination, silencing, sexual abuse, and exclusion within the ecclesiastical sphere are brought to the surface, the indifference and silence on the part of Church leadership to the victims are shown to be unfair, unjust and contradictory to the message of Christ. Church has to be experienced by all men and

women as an instrument to step beyond the boundaries of gendered identity constructions that have devalued women over the ages. The Synodal Church that calls for journeying together is bound to eradicate the existing situations in which a lack of sensitivity to women's issues prevails. There is an impending need to acknowledge the injustice and abuse experienced by women in their homes and churches and it can be seriously worked out at the parish level. Instead of using the pulpits for paternalistic preaching that either denies the existence of inequality and abuses experienced by women or advice women to be submissive, the rights that guarantee gender equality and the means to transform the patriarchal attitude of keeping women at a low level can be emphasised. The failure to denounce abuse and violence experienced by women promotes the covering up of the abuses experienced by lay women and women religious and the exploitation of them will continue without any difference. The serious steps to be taken to stop the abusing mentality towards women by promoting the activities of women's commissions and cells. Many lay women and women religious can be trained to be lawyers, counsellors and social workers and appoint them to the parish and diocese Grievance Redressal Cells.

The Synodal Church invites women to become aware of and accept that they are capable of serving the Church with its vast existing needs such as active involvement in the world, evangelisation and public ministries of the Church to empower the discriminated ones, especially women, and to educate the members about their rights to live as images of God. Each woman religious must know that the Church has very noble teachings for women. It is an undeniable responsibility of the Church to communicate that equality between women and men lies principally in the Biblical foundation of the creation of humans in God's image. The affirmation of women figures who dared to be courageous persons and question the injustice they have experienced (the daughters of Zelophehad- Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah in Num 26:33) in the Scripture and traditions of Christianity surely inspire many women religious to uphold their equal dignity to establish gender equality.

Another important contribution of the Synodal Church for women religious is to make known the sources of the unfair practices towards women observed in Christianity in the past so that they may be able to understand and accept the new ways of Biblical interpretations and reflections based on the scientific findings which are given by many theologians, Church authorities, and scholars. Many of them insist on

a radical change in the attitude by which women are considered not equal with men, but inferior to men physically, mentally, intellectually, socially and spiritually; they are only to serve men and children in their families; and they are the cause of sin. Provide them with more opportunity to engage in scholarly research that facilitates their affirmation of the equal dignity of men and women and their importance in family, Church and society which has its roots in Scripture and traditions. The 21st century is blessed with scientific and technological progress. Many women have contributed and still do to the various developments in society. But the unwillingness to recognise and cherish the contributions of women to enrich individuals in the circles of families and friends and humanity at large is still a disturbing reality. This unfortunate and incorrect state of affairs has happened due to a lack of proper knowledge and attitudinal refinement.

Conclusion

The document *Dignitas Infinita*, given by the sacred Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, on 8th April, 2024, explains and affirms the dignity of the human person. The document clarifies that in the creation of human beings, “the ‘image’ does not define the soul or its intellectual abilities but the dignity of man and woman. In their relationship of equality and mutual love, both the man and the woman represent God in the world and are also called to cherish and nurture the world. Because of this, to be created in the image of God means to possess a sacred value that transcends every distinction of a sexual, social, political, cultural, and religious nature. Our dignity is bestowed upon us by God; it is neither claimed nor deserved. Every human being is loved and willed by God and, thus, has an inviolable dignity.”²²

In this 3rd millennium, the clarion call of the Synodal Church is to ensure all its members their rights and obligations. The women religious in the Church, by inculcating faith-oriented boldness to address the issues, not covering them up, should be accepted and treated as dignified persons who have all the rights of being the disciples of Jesus. Their active involvement with other women to bring out the feminine views could be reflected in the final decisions of parish and diocesan activities. It ensures the participatory structural renewal that the Synodal Church envisioned. As a sacrament of the eternal Trinitarian communion in history, the Church could practice

²² Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, *Dignitas Infinita*, no. 11, 5.

the dynamic involvement of women in its ministries in the model of the early Church. The Church practices this communion in a synodal way/manner. If the Church stands to encourage women religious with all their good works, it can surely bring Christian lifestyle and style of animation like in the apostolic era.