

THE PEOPLE OF GOD AND THE SYNODAL JOURNEY

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Abstract

The Synod on Synodality is for a deeper reception of the communion ecclesiology of the II Vatican Council into the experiential modes and styles of Christian life in the world. Synodal mode has to be the essential style and structure of the Church in the third millennium. Hence, a rediscovery and re-launching of the synodal way has to be infused more into the ecclesial life at all levels and spheres for deeper communion, participation and successful mission. People of God, on their pilgrim journey through the history, have to be co-responsible in the evangelizing mission of the Church, through a Trinitarian communion, for fuller life and building up of the body of Christ, the Church, in the world.

Key Words: Synodal Way; Communion Ecclesiology; Pilgrim Church; Synodality; Ongoing Salvation; Participative Communion; *Sensus fidei fidelium*; Divine Pedagogy; Body of Christ; *Lex orandi, Lex credendi, Lex agendi*; Pilgrim Journey of the Church; Orthopraxis; Synodal Conversion; Trinitarian Communion.

Introduction

The process of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops was inaugurated on 9 & 10 October 2021. The entire process of the Synod has many novelties. This Synod is conducted in an elaborate manner based on the Apostolic letter *Episcopalis Communio* (2018) of Pope Francis. It has a two-years long process on the one hand and on the other the theme, *For a Synodal Church: Communion,*

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Participation and Mission, is directly dealing with the very nature, structure, style and the patterns of the life of the Church as a universal sacrament of salvation (LG 48). Moreover, this Synod has to go beyond the parameters of a mere ecclesial event, to the level of consolidating 'synodality' as "the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission."¹ Hence, this Synod has a final phase for implementing the decisions, as specifically instructed by the Roman Pontiff at the conclusion of the Synod. The canons of the Western and Eastern Churches have also already assimilated the validity of the Synodal mode of Church life.² In fact, the Synod on Synodality is for the reception of the communion ecclesiology of the II Vatican Council into quite practical modes and styles of Christian life in the present world. This is made clear in the Preparatory Document for the Synod, "the purpose of the Synod, and therefore of this consultation, is not to produce documents, but 'to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands'".³ Hence, the present concern in this article is to describe the wider arena of biblical and theological basis for evolving new modes and styles of life in the Church.

1. The Synod on Synodality

The present process of the Synod on Synodality is a concerted effort for a deeper reception of the communion ecclesiology of II Vatican Council, in quite practical terms, in the life of the Church. In fact, the basic programme of this Synod is for prayerfully listening, reflecting and discerning, in the present historical context, for evolving the required practical ways of life in the Church. It is because the Church

¹Cf. Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops, *Preparatory Document for the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 07.09.2021, Vatican, no.10 (abbreviated as *Preparatory Document*); International Theological Commission (ITC), *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, (2 March, 2018), Vatican, nos. 6, 34, 70 (abbreviated as *Synodality*).

² Cf. CIC cc. 342-348; CCEO c. 46.

³ Cf. *Preparatory Document*, no. 32.

has to serve the fast-changing world in a constructive manner. The needed practical ways would evolve only from the renewed communion and effective participation of all the faithful for the fruitful mission of the Church as a true witness of Christ in the mode of being salt of the earth and light of the world (LG 9, 33). The goal of the Synod is to prayerfully reflect and discerningly establish more effective modes and styles of living the Gospel values, as bearing witness to the Kingdom of God, in the rapidly changing world situations. Hence, this Synod has to discern the nature and the modes of functioning of the People of God, as the Church of Christ, in the world. Only by the effective reading of the signs of the times the People of God can bear witness to the Kingdom of God in the secular world (GS 4). In such a context the synodal process is equally a gift and a challenge simultaneously that demands a rope-walking in many respects. First of all, going far beyond all conceptual viewpoints (doctrinal orthodoxy), the whole Church has to attain appropriate orthopraxis in concrete life situations from time to time. This process is actually translating the doctrinal faith into experiential activation of faith in life situations. Secondly, this process includes teaching, interpretation, new legislations and social public action, etc., based on the doctrinal faith and the organic traditions of the Church. So, the concerns are addressed by active faith, liturgy, catechesis, canonical reform/legislations, pastoral ministry and evangelical administration for a life of Christian witnessing for universal salvation. It is because of this Pope Francis declared, "It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium."⁴ In fact, the envisaged synodal process requires an interdisciplinary approach so as to evolve apt modes of Christian behaviour and action, as specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God.⁵ In such a reform of ecclesial life new steps are to be taken in catechesis, canonical reform together with new pastoral and administrative guidelines.

2. II Vatican Council and the Re-launching of the Synodal Way

The II Vatican Council has made the Church successfully pass through the threshold of the re-discovery of the nature of the Church as a sacrament and a mystery for the universal salvation (LG 2,40,45).

⁴ Pope Francis, Address for the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015).

⁵ Cf. *Preparatory Document* no. 10; CTI Document, *Synodality* nos. 6,34,70.

As this sacramental mystery of the Church is active in the world, the ground realities of the fast-changing world are the contextual factors in which this sacramental mystery, the Church, has to be active and productive. The mystery side of the Church is invisible. Even this invisible reality of the Church is active beneath the sacramental visibility of the visible Church through the life of her members. The united body of the believers need to live in a covenantal communion that engenders active participation by which the mission of the Church would be actualized in the world. From time to time the Holy Spirit is providing the needed gifts and charisms to the people of God to make progress in the economy of salvation through the human history. All these factors demand a re-launching of the 'Synodal way'.

In the apostolic period, one finds a more charismatic pattern of the function of the Church with more awareness regarding the presence and actions of the Holy Spirit on the believers. This factor is made more evident through the incidents and developments reported in the *Acts of the Apostles* (Acts 1:8,16; 2:4,38; 4:8,31; 6:5; 8:17; 9:17; 10:44-47; 11:15-16; 19:6). Those reports of the *Acts of the Apostles* serve as paradigms and instructions for the posterity to go along in the community of Christian believers as one People of God. But, later in the social and structured life of the Church, on account of cultural osmosis, the charismatically guided communities became predominantly structured to become more juridical under the Roman juridical systems and with doctrinally ordered teachings under the predominant Hellenistic analytical, dialectical and ontological systems. Juridical and ontological ways of descriptions of the Church take care of the objective and strategic functions and modes of the Church. Such descriptions and visions are good to maintain the already attained fruitful ways of life in the Church. But the predominant nature of the Church is an organically evolving mystical and sacramental instrument of salvation in the world. The whole evolving process is governed by the risen Lord and guided by the Holy Spirit. Hence, there is the urgent need of human openness to the governance of the risen Lord and the guidance of the Spirit from time to time for the timely building up of the Body of Christ, the Church, which is dynamically growing in the world.

3. The Synodal Way and the Church

In the first millennium Christian life was a 'way of life' that was praxis oriented. In the early Church the Christian believers were called 'the people of the way' (*Acts* 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Jesus himself described himself and his teachings as 'the way, the truth and the life' (*Jn* 14:6). The nature of the Church was described as a 'pilgrim people' in the mode of 'journeying together' (synodal mode). Sacramental and social life of the Church became governed more by the way of doing things, of course as taught by the Lord, and on the traditions of the Apostles, rather than any specifically structured social mode of life affixed to culturally defined systems, such as, Hellenistic or Roman. The first Apostolic Synodal model of ecclesial life is well reflected in the Council of Jerusalem (*Acts* 15) where the question on the legality of admitting gentiles to the Christian fold was resolved with synodal consensus and unanimity. Later, the Apostolic synodal mode of life in the Church assumed specific local, social and cultural modes of life styles. A first structured mode of synodal exercise can be seen in the Council of Nicaea (325 AD). Through the later councils there evolved the gradual clarifications on the needed symphony and synergy in synods and councils.⁶ This might have been stimulated by an age-old Roman maxim that was inspirational to the Church of the first millennium, "*whatever concerns all should be deliberated and approved by all*" (*Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari et approbari debet*).⁷ This ancient maxim provides a general background to the synodal legacy.

While synodal mode of life continued more firmly in the Eastern Christendom, the Western Churches were leaning to the Roman imperial mode of governing and administrative systems. With the Gregorian reform there began more and more Romanization in the form of uniformity and centralized decision making. In a sense Churches of the East and West began to move on different grades of synodality with more independence and having less amount of genuine 'walking together'. Thus, the rift between the Orthodox East and the Catholic West evolved. At the same time the Churches of the Syriac Orient were going on in their own specific traditions. Later the Western Churches, in the middle-ages, began to move under the feudal legacies of life and administrative systems.

⁶ Cf. ITC, *Synodality*, no. 30.

⁷ Cf. ITC, *Synodality*, no. 65.

The Reformation movements actually changed the ecclesial map of the Western Church by giving birth to many denominations. All those denominations altogether developed a very broad type of federal system which might be qualified as 'synodal.' Due to many challenges of disintegration and the dangerous disunity in the Church actually necessitated the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Naturally, by the pressure of such ecclesial developments, Catholic Church was opting for a mode of centralization and uniformity patterns in view of orthodoxy and unity in the Church that were necessary at that time. The reception of the teachings of the Council of Trent had much fruitfulness. But the wider significance and importance of the role of the People of God in terms of Gospel witnessing life, evangelization and involvement in the world developments, etc., became side-lined by the mainline ministry of the Catholic Church in general. Later the inconclusive undertaking of the I Vatican Council (1869-70) was only ray of hope. Due to the political turmoil, on account of the forceful annexing of papal states to Italy, the council could not complete its envisaged programme of action.

4. Rediscovery of the Synodal Way

By the 20th century world developments II Vatican Council rediscovered the dynamic, mystical and sacramental nature of the Church by going beyond the earlier social, juridical and ontological self-definitions of the Church. The reception of those mystical orientations and the sacramental mission of the Church by the Christian communities all over the world still lag behind. This means that the People of God still need deeper reception of the teachings of the II Vatican Council in the mode of resourcing (*ressourcement*) from the roots of Christianity. In order to enhance such deeper resourcing, the needed renewal of the structures and functions of the Church, by way of updating (*aggiornamento*) the social and juridical norms are to be made. The present call is to re-launch the early Christian synodal way of life and mission in the Church. Hence, Pope Francis, a few days before the inauguration of the Synodal process of the Synod on Synodality (9&10 October, 2021) declared, "the theme of synodality is not a chapter in a treatise on ecclesiology, much less a fashion, it is not a slogan or a new term to be used and exploited in our meetings. No! Synodality expresses the nature of the Church, its form, its style and its mission. Therefore, we speak of a synodal Church, thus avoiding considering it as one title among others or one way of

thinking about it, envisaging alternatives."⁸ Beyond affirming the already attained theological learning and 'communion consciousness' in the II Vatican Council, what is now aimed at in the Synod on Synodality in the Church is to attain appropriate styles and modes of ecclesial communion life, as new modes of *vivendi et operandi*.

In the present background, Synod on Synodality aims at a deeper resourcing from the salvation historical fountains, as gathered from the scriptural revelation and from the organically developed fruitful traditions of the People of God so far. It is, in fact, a re-launching of the Synodal Way in the Church as a genuine sequence to the way in which the early Church was progressing. It has to be done with proper discernment and salvific insights, under the guidance of the Spirit.

5. Divine-Human Journeying-together for Fuller Human Life

Church is a divine-human entity. The divine and human aspects are always united in a mysterious way in the Church according to that pattern in which the divine and the human are essentially united in the incarnate Son. The risen Lord brought into existence the *ekklesia* (the called-out people) by the power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:3-4) in order to continue his mission as a 'working together.' This called-out people is entrusted to continue the mission of the Son in the world (Mt 28:19-20 *et par*). The divine factors are perennial and immutably effective by the power of the divinity active in the world for the universal salvation. But the human factors are always in need of continuous resourcing and updating according to the rate of the developments in the history of salvation at a given period based on the human development in the world. The human secular, civic, social and religious developments in the world are willed by God in the process of universal salvation. At the same time those developments, such as, globalization, social communication, ecological concerns and ecumenical progress, etc., are to be discerningly and insightfully processed and profitably engaged in by each person at the individual, social and global levels, as required by the basic divine plan of salvation.

The divine spiritual thrust and guidance have to be embodied at all human levels by the corresponding and complementary human

⁸ Cf. Papal Address to the Diocese of Rome on September 18, 2021.

actions in the light of the divine inspiration endowed in humans by way of the 'image and likeness of God' (Gen 1:26). In addition to the divine imprint of 'image and likeness of God' proper instructions (laws) were also given to the initial pair of humans, as to eat from all trees but not from a particular tree (Gen 2:16-17). This is a prototype of all laws. Thus, from the beginning of human existence, in the history of salvation, commandments and laws remained essential components and dynamic assistance for salvation. From another angle, humans, as they are called-out by the Lord need to be ever attentive to the God-given instructions (laws) for attaining salvation. This situation is spiritually, theologically, and socially interpreted as the need of the Church ever getting reformed (*ecclesia semper reformanda*). Establishment of laws, interpretation of laws and juridical services stand as modes of protection, warning and guidelines for proper human responses to God and to one's neighbours. The finite human persons and the People of God as a whole need to get reformed, justified and adapted to the salvific process going on in the world, especially according to the signs of the times.

6. The Ongoing Salvation and the Participative Communion

The scriptural episodes in general, both of Old and New Testaments, speak of the journey of humanity in union with the divine instructions under the divine plan of salvation. The divine purpose of installing the 'image and likeness of God' in humans, created as male and female, has potentials for social and cosmic engagement and communion (Gen 1:26-28). Such a mode of creation and the Paradise stand as proof for the needed engagement under the divine commandments (Gen 2:15-17). By such an engagement with humans, God entered into a covenant with humans so as to offer all the fuller life. But humans on their part began to turn disobedient and unfaithful in their covenantal life. Yet God who is rich in mercy offered the path of repentance, healing and return to the road of salvation through further covenants. God renewed the covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses and other intermediaries. Whenever human selfishness hindered the divine economy, imperfections crept in. Imperfect humans need repentance and conversion as the apt way to proceed forward. It is because the Church is in need of continuous reform in order to attain the needed participation and communion with God and humans as well as the created world. It is in this way the synodal conversion is a prominent process in a synodal Church.

7. The Pilgrim People of God and the Pilgrim Church

'Walking with the Lord your God of creation' is a great ideal and goal of the Old Testament teaching. The first parents, Noah, Abraham and other Patriarchs as well as their descendants were all instructed to walk on the road shown by the Lord God. Enoch (Gen 5:21-24), Noah (Gen 6:8-9), Abraham (Gen 24:40), and others walked before God and became righteous and blameless before God. To the people of Israel the instruction was to "Observe the commands of the Lord your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him" (Deut 8:6).

So also, in the New Testament, Jesus instructed all to walk in his light which is the light of life against all forms of darkness (Jn 8:12). Moreover, those who follow him would not fall into darkness but have the light that leads to life. "Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son" (2 Jn 1:9). So, "Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'" (Jn 8:31-32). Jesus instructed his disciples, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (Jn 16:13). This in other words, amounts to walk according to the divine plan and economy. From the human part the perfect and salutary way is to walk along the divine plan and economy.

Through Abraham and the Patriarchs, a people were convoked as the first form of the 'People of God'. From time-to-time shepherds and prophets were given to them by the Lord to guide and lead them in their particular historical circumstances, in faithfulness to the covenant they have entered with the Lord. In order to travel forward by being faithful to the covenant, people needed constant conversion of their heart. The two aspects of their covenantal life are conversion of hearts to the will of God and rendering justice in their relationship with the neighbours. Wherever and whenever justice fails in the society that amounts to the failure of the covenant. In order to have proper conversion to the Lord as well as to do justice outwards, they were offered a new covenant with new commandments that are engraved no longer on stone tablets but on their hearts (Jer 31:31-34).

Thus, for the process of conversion God promised them a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 11:10). Conversion was the open way before them to a new Exodus (Jer 37 and 38). From time to time the People of God needs to have exodus from many self-imposed captivities. This is the background of the needed reform in the Church.

The new covenant is actualized in Jesus of Nazareth by fulfilling everything according to the will of his Father and acting together with his Father with the power of the Spirit.⁹ He taught “the way of God” and his words and deeds were showing the way to the Kingdom (Mt 6:33; Lk 17:20-21; Mk 1:14-15). In truth He Himself is “the way” (Jn 14:6) to the Father through the inspiring Holy Spirit (Jn 16:13). He shows the way to the Father in communion with all humans; it is a way of ‘journeying together’. To journey on the way of the Son is to travel together, as the People of the New Covenant, on the road of Christ, by exercising the given charisms of the Spirit to each one (Jn 15:12-15) for the building up of the Kingdom. All disciples of Christ have received the power, duty and authority to continue the work of building up the Kingdom (Mt 28:19-20) by their reception of the Holy Spirit in baptism and confirmation. In such a building up when they are guided in discernment by their supernatural faith (*sensus fidei fidelium*) they will not err (LG 12).¹⁰

A major channel through which the Spirit guides all is the Word of God. God makes us hear the Word through many intermediaries, such as prophets and apostles as well as through historical events. While listening to others, it is God himself who continues to speak through the voice of each person and history. Coming together, meeting together, listening and speaking each other and doing together, in the form of ministry, are all channels of hearing the Word of God, for further journey on the road of salvation. Just as the Word of God can penetrate the depths of the hearts and minds, so every word heard from others mediates the voice of the Holy Spirit (Heb 4:12).

Sacred scripture provides many analogies and paths of listening to the Word of God. From the early Apostolic Church onwards the

⁹ Cf. ITC *Synodality*, no. 15.

¹⁰ Cf. *Preparatory Document*, 11,14; International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church* (2014), 40, 41, 90, 91; ITC, *Synodality*, 56, 64, 72.

People of God were called as a community to discern the will of the risen Lord, under the power of the Spirit. There are examples of such discernments, such as, the selection of seven Deacons for the just and orderly service, when there arose injustice in treating the widows of the Greek speaking Jews (Acts 6:1-6). The purpose is to attain perfect communion in the community of believers, as a sign of fuller life. So also, when there was reluctance regarding the admission of gentiles to the Christian fold, Peter was dramatically taught during his prayer time at Joppa with the four cornered large sheet filled with all types of animals, reptiles and birds (referring to all tribes and peoples of the earth) from which Peter was asked to kill and eat (Acts 10:9-16). But Peter was reluctant to do according to the Word that came to him on account of his Jewish traditional dietary laws. Peter had to come out of his inhibitive narrow Jewish mentality so as to accept all who believe in Christ. Peter was dramatically converted and became convinced of the need of accepting gentiles to the Christian fold, as he himself found the coming of the Holy Spirit on the household of Cornelius exactly as that happened on the Apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 11:15-18).¹¹ Holy Spirit was guiding the discernment that dramatically evolved at the house of Cornelius regarding the mission among the gentiles (Acts 10-11). The same pattern of conversion happened in the Council of Jerusalem regarding the spread of the Gospel among the gentiles (Acts 15; Gal 2:1-10). All those developments and very specially the council of Jerusalem provide paradigms for synodal processes, conversion as well as updating the *modus operandi* in the Church. All groups involved and all predominant aspects were addressed in the discussion/dialogue. There was serious and involved mutual listening. Everyone had the disposition to listen to the Holy Spirit. When decisions were approved the perception was that the discernment was from the Holy Spirit which prevailed as the catalyst for unanimity and communion in the community (Acts 15:28).

8. Participation for Communion and Mission

By a cursory look into the communal behaviour in the New Testament, one finds personal participation as the central factor that engenders and enhances communion and effective mission. Consider the interrelationship between Jesus and his apostles. During the washing of the feet of the disciples, when Jesus approached Peter,

¹¹Preparatory Document, 21-24.

there was stern resistance from Peter; but Jesus said, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with me" (Jn 13:8). So also, when the time came to fill the gap created by Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, the norm was to select someone who accompanied Jesus from the first moment of his public life till the ascension, as a perfect witness to the life of Jesus (Acts 1:21-22). Here the purpose of Jesus in selecting his twelve apostles also has been confirmed. The apostles were purposefully selected in order to be with him and to be sent out to preach in his name to the whole world (Mk 3:14). Jesus himself has erected the blessed Apostolic College as the nucleus of the service-team of the New Testament People of God. Close personal participation and inner communion were the hallmark of that community. Growing inner unanimity with its outer expression of unity needs to grow up by listening to the unifying power of the Spirit who works in all of them. The outer unity and the inner unanimity in concrete life situations present the sacramentarity of the believing community far above the institutionality.

The inner unanimity out of the inspiring Spirit and the outer participative communion that urges for the mission of bearing witness to the Kingdom of God are all signs of 'journeying together' on the road of salvation. What is basic to synodality is the 'journeying together' on the road of salvation as instructed by God in his mercy by divine self-revelation. This sort of merciful divine revelation is seen from the creation account onwards. To the self-revealing God humans need to respond by faith and obedience to fulfil the will of God. The first pair of humans were given the free will either to opt for faith and obedience or to deviate and fall away from having faith in God and consequently fall into disobedience to the instructions of God. "... If you eat you shall die..." Such instructions were given to humanity in all subsequent covenants, with Noah, Abraham, Moses and others. In Jesus, the incarnate Son, the instructions were embodied into human life of action according to the divine plan. Jesus was obedient unto death on the cross as the sacramental embodiment of fulfilling the will of his Father, together with the Spirit. Thus, Jesus himself in his paschal mystery showed how the divine instructions are to be embodied in the life situations for the salvific progress of human history by being obedient to the Father in the Spirit. Above all, the risen Lord admonished his disciples to make disciples of all nations, baptize them and teach them to observe all commandments (Mt 28:19-20). Thus, the crown of

discipleship and teachings is the observation of all that are taught and commanded. It means that all forms of Christian life should get perfected in the life of observance of what is believed. Life of observance is obedience to the Word of God, amounting to building one's house on the rock. Such constructions will withstand all odes of life and history (Mt 7:24-25).

9. Divine Pedagogy and the Progress of Salvation

Church is ever guided and governed by the Holy Spirit. Guidance of the Spirit enables the reading of the signs of the times so as to integrate world developments according to the divine economy. For the growth of the economy of salvation, charisms and gifts are given to the faithful by the Holy Spirit. All such gifts and charisms are to be exercised and coordinated in an orderly manner by the faith and practices of all believers for the progress of the economy of salvation. In view of such orderly and organized development, the Church has to use all human knowledge and wisdom.

For the development of the economy of salvation, human free will that is liable to wrong doing, has to function under the divine mercy and justice. It is divine pedagogy that teaches and guides human free will to get reconciled with divine mercy and justice. Whenever human free will goes astray, divine justice chastises out of divine mercy for reconciliation according to the divine economy. Ephrem explains the interplay of these three factors with an ordinary example. According to him humanity stands as if on a weighing-balance, where the free will of man on one side and the divine will on the other side. God's mercy and justice rectifies humanity that is on the balance with his loving kindness and chastising justice as two scales (*HFid* 12:3-5; *HEcc* 5:8).¹² The divine economy teaches humanity to get reconciled to the divine will and plan. While keeping the free will of humanity unhindered, divinity renders the teaching by chastisement to travel forward according to the divine plan, as a pedagogical step.

The teaching from the inspiring Spirit at every stage of human history is a necessity for 'journeying together' with God and with human beings in a synodal way of life. Always the risen Lord is the head and the Holy Spirit is the inspirer, as a teacher and guide. The

¹² Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith* (*HFid*), 12:3-5; and *Hymns on the Church* (*HEcc*), 5:8.

Spirit is teaching all in diverse ways. So, Church has to hear all and consider all believers with equal respect by listening and reckoning all channels of the pedagogy of the Spirit. It is by this way all can listen to what the Spirit has to say to the Churches (Rev 2:7).

The active role of the Spirit in the life of the people of God for the building up of the Body of Christ is highlighted by the Pauline analogy of the body (1Cor 12:12-31). In the body of the People of God gifts and charisms are poured out by the Spirit. All such gifts and charisms are to be exercised under the guidance of the Spirit. The body imagery stresses the unity and totality of the Church. At the same time, the Living-stone imagery in the Scriptures points to the dynamic nature of synodal journey with responsible individual participation in the life of the Church. The focal theophany in this regard is through Patriarch Jacob who anointed a stone at Bethel (Gen 28:10-19; Gen 12:8; Judg 1:23). Here Jacob is the type of Christ who anointed the body of believers as the temple of the Holy Spirit and Christians as living stones (1Pet 2:4-8) of that temple.¹³ Later the Rock at Horeb that gave water to the people in the desert (Ex 17:5-7) is the type of Christ, the Word of God.¹⁴ Christ himself is the Rock/stone; he called Peter and named him stone (Mt 16:18-19) and upon him the ministry of the Church was established.

10. Pilgrim Journey of the Church on Earth

The invisible Church became embodied and became visible on the day of Pentecost by the unifying and enlightening pouring out of the Spirit on the believing disciples. The Church by her embodiment in the world needs to remain in solidarity and communion with the whole humanity (GS 1-3). The visible Church, with her spiritual and physical institutions, senses and vigilance, has to read the signs of the times, scrutinize and review the world situation at every phase of her pilgrim journey. She is traveling, together with the whole humanity, to the Father. By the power of the overshadowing of the Spirit, Church has to work for the universal salvation, as far as the way is shown to her; yet God alone knows the fuller and deeper ways in which the plan of salvation is working for all (GS 22). The Church has a visible phase and stands as a society that needs the ministry of the Word and Sacraments for the salvation. This visible

¹³ Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, T&T Clark, London, 2004, 208.

¹⁴ Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 209.

phase of the Church has the tripartite integration through *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex agendi*. One needs to conform to the given law for the proper *lex agendi*. *Lex agendi* is precisely the law of love. The practical styles of this law of love are articulated and taught by the Apostles, councils, synods, and other bodies in proper circumstances.¹⁵ In this respect Canon Law is basically rooted in the scripture (Word) and stands as integral part of the Christian tradition.¹⁶

The consciousness of the Church's solidarity with the whole humanity has to be embodied in the life of Christians and in the Church as a whole. She has to confess that it is through the history of humanity in the world and through the world cultures that the 'eschatological Kingdom' is getting shaped. Human history itself is the story of that great pilgrimage towards the Father. The assertion of E. Schillebeeckx is quite meaningful, "in this sense it is true that *extra mundum nulla salus*, there is no salvation outside the human world. The world of creation, our history within the environment of nature, is the sphere of God's saving action in and through human mediation."¹⁷

In the history of salvation people have to move forward between two poles, the ideal pole of the scriptural revelation (Word of God) and the actual pole of the happenings of the history of salvation (the life of tradition). Each person/soul has the freedom of decision either to proceed forward to the ideal pole of the scriptural revelation for success or reject the inspiration of the Word of God and fail to get saved. But the merciful God provides to all individuals and communities the chances of repentance and conversion to the true path of salvation. A dynamic example for this is the story of Samson. Whenever Samson travels according to the divine plan he is eminently successful. But when he is selfish and self-indulgent in life he fails utterly. He is the best biblical type displaying human life in the world with all possible deviations due to vulnerabilities and successes in the context of obedience to the Word. One can be victorious as well as failed in the mode of Samson (Judg 14-16). There is high resonance between the life of Samson and the life of Christians in different sectors of life, especially when egoism, greed,

¹⁵ George Nedungatt, *Theology of Law*, Kanonika 28, PIO, Roma 2019, 36

¹⁶ George Nedungatt, *Theology of Law*, Kanonika 28, PIO, Roma 2019, 38

¹⁷ E. Schillebeeckx, *Church the Human Story of God*, Cross Road, New York, 1994, 12.

selfishness, self-indulgence, individualism, consumerism, etc., are predominant in a globalized society. Samson's rise and fall are teachings for repentance and conversion leading to reconciliation to the plan of God. Here one must read the need of synodal conversion in the Church for adhering to the salvific will of God by defeating selfishness and self-indulgences.

According to St. Ephrem the pilgrim journey of the people of God falls within the creative tension in time and space between the earthly Eden (the existential earthly situation) and the eschatological Kingdom (the ideal to be attained). The Christian path of salvation has to be made the 'way' by actually travelling on the given path by the community and the individuals. It is practically the orthopraxis. In this aspect one must meditate on the words of Psalmist: "Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet and Light unto my path" (Ps 119:105). In making the path as the actual 'way of life' Ephrem finds a progressive journey from the 'mysteries and types' of salvation in OT to the 'time of the Church' and the fulfilment of everything in the eschatological Kingdom. Ephrem writes:

The Type was in Egypt, the reality in the Church;
the sealing of the reward (will be) in the Kingdom

(*Unleavened Bread*, 5:23).¹⁸

In the Church all are on a way, on a pilgrim journey. In Paradise and in the Church the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life are erected as a guide and for the realization of salvation (*HPar* 6:7).¹⁹ The Word of God and the Eucharist are the two trees in the Church for attaining instruction from the one and the salvific communion from the other as depicted in the Eucharistic liturgy (*HPar* 6:7-8; *HEcc* 44:19-26).²⁰ Here all must see that "journeying together" is possible only through the communal listening of the Word of God and the celebration of the Eucharist.²¹

¹⁸Ephrem, *Hymns on the Unleavened Bread*, 5:23; Tr. R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 244.

¹⁹ Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* (*HPar*), 6:7.

²⁰ Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise* (*HPar*), 6:7-8; *Hymns on the Church* (*HEcc*), 44:19-26.

²¹ Cf. *Preparatory Document*, 27, 30.

The journey through the liturgy of the Word and that of the Eucharist by a Christian is a mode of eating from both trees of Paradise. Christians are to be enlightened, inspired and energized by the sacramental liturgy of the Church. Only then they can proclaim their faith actively in their daily secular liturgy of Christian actions, employment and engagements in the secular world. Adequate Christian modes and styles of life are to be evolved in the world for the integration between religious faith and secular life in view of evangelizing the world.

There is clear resonance and analogical connectivity between the 'Egyptian captivity' and the present-day captivity of humans under the misuse of science and technology. There is vehement quest for profit making, amassing of wealth, greed for power, consumerism, etc. Concern for human dignity and values of human life are often compromised. Human labour has been degraded as a commercial commodity. Benefits of artificial intelligence and robots are managed against human freedom and dignity. These are some signs of modern 'Egyptian captivity', that denies human dignity and moral uprightness that threaten the communion in the society.

The whole creation is diverse in existence. Humanity as a whole is diverse in culture, colour, language and living patterns. All these are intended by God. In reality the diversities bear witness to the richness of the diverse potentialities installed in humanity by the divinity, precisely through the gifts and charisms of the Spirit. What is needed is a healthy reconciliation and integration of all diverse gifts and charisms of the Spirit for the building up of the body of Christ through the fuller development of humanity.

11. Trinitarian Configuration for the Whole Humanity

On account of the 'image and likeness of God', who is Trinitarian, instilled in humans the 'journeying together' of each individual, with God and other humans, aims at the final Trinitarian configuration. The people of Israel, as called out through Abraham, Jacob and others, by their 'journeying together' was aimed to become a 'blessing to all nations of the world' (Gen 12:3). But they failed on account of their lack of faith, discernment and obedience to the Lord. With Jesus Christ, the Church, the new Israel, became embodied on the day of Pentecost in a visible manner as the sign and sacrament of salvific blessing to all. This role and function of the Church has to be fulfilled through service (*diakonia*) to the whole world, bearing

witness (*martyria*) to the salvific fruits offered by the risen Lord in the world, and by the effective communion (*koinonia*) gained through the active service rendered and the witnessing life in the world. In order to bear the burden and brunt of service (*diakonia*) to the whole world one needs the communion by the anointing of the power and energy of the Holy Spirit who is the real 'helper' and 'counsellor' to all (Jn 14:26; 15:26). Bearing witness (*martyria*) to the salvific fruits of the risen Lord is by mingling with the paschal mystery of the Son in one's life. It happens in the pattern of the corn of wheat that has to fall on the earth and break its shell for a new life (Jn 12:24), as the new creation in Christ. When *diakonia* to the world by communion with the Spirit and *martyria* by mingling with the Son's paschal mystery have been attained, one would be ready to approach the Father and get the imprint in communion (*koinonia*) with Him as the adopted child of the Father. This imprint is practically the writing of the law, the will of God, in one's heart as part of the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 11:19), in a new mode of life in the world.

The mystery of human creation in the image and likeness of the Trinitarian God is made fully revealed and actualized in Christ, for the recreation of all in the risen Lord. This mystery of recreation is entrusted to the ministry of the Church in the world. The depth of this ministry of the Church is made clear by II Vatican Council by stating that God has revealed the fuller mystery of human dignity in the incarnate Son and not merely the divinity: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. ... Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear" (GS 22). The quest for fuller humanity by a body-affirming and world-affirming vision of human salvation in *Gaudium et Spes* leads to the human commitment to this world as a gift of God and the space where salvation is in progress.

Against the individualistic Pelagian view and the interioristic Gnostic views of salvation, the importance of human body of the individual and that of the human society are stressed by *Placuit Deo* 14.²² Salvation is for the body and soul as a unified whole and that has its reflection in the fact that salvation is for the whole humanity

²² Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, Vatican. Letter *Placuit Deo*, To the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Certain Aspects of Christian Salvation, 22 February, 2018 (abbreviated as *Placuit Deo*).

in and through the communion of the whole humanity crowned in human communion with the Trinitarian God (PD 12).²³ Baptism and Eucharist in the Church are the source and medium of such a salvific communion.²⁴

Human society as a whole has to undergo social transformation (body level), moral transformation (soul/person level), and spiritual transformation (spirit level). By the power and enlightenment of the faith of the people, a transformation at the soul level of the society needs to come out with the inspirations of the Spirit. Social commitment, social solidarity, respect for human dignity, human rights, sense of social equality are the social and soul level values of the society. The soul of humanity thus transformed by the inspirations of the Spirit will in turn transform the social body (social level/society) according to the divine plan and economy. It is such a transformation that is aimed at by the 'synodal conversion' in the Church. Solidarity, development and communion of the whole humanity are the goals at that level of unity through unanimity. When the social body level services and the soul level social values of the society are attained and integrated, the society as a whole would be ready to progress towards its spiritual communion with the divine. There are several failures and impediments for the integral communion of the whole humanity, such as, egoism, selfishness, indifference, greed, discrimination, marginalization, injustice and corruption, on the way to integral redemption.

In the face of many social disintegrations, Church has the sacramental function of unifying and sanctifying the whole humanity and the whole creation according to the divine economy. This mode of service could be done by the 'walking together' of all believers in the Church in a synodal way. Church's service to the secular world has to be intensified by the Laity, as they only can penetrate into certain specific secular sectors of life as members of the People of God (GS 43). All attempts for communion of Churches and ecumenical endeavours are to take further steps for the communion of all peoples in the pattern of the Trinitarian communion.

²³*Placuit Deo*, 12.

²⁴*Placuit Deo*, 13.

Conclusion

The Synod on Synodality is to rediscover the early Christian legacy of the style and structure of the 'People of the Way'. From another angle setting the Church on the synodal way is translation of the conceptually rediscovered 'communion ecclesiology' of the II Vatican Council into an experiential mode of ecclesial life, as the needed orthopraxis. The relaunching of the early Christian 'walking together' (*Acts* 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22, 'synodal') is expected by God in the third millennium. From the biblical history as well as from the progressive history of salvation, one finds the synodal way of the People of God travelling as a 'pilgrim people' to the eschatological Kingdom of God. In the on-going history of salvation, the 'journeying together' of the People of God with God and with one another could be seen having its own ups and downs. But in the incarnate Son the mode of 'together on the way' can be seen perfectly embodied through the perfect union of the divine and human in one person. Such a union of the divine and human has to be achieved in all individual believers and in the whole humanity. This union has to be achieved by the People of God by the pilgrim journey through the world history. It is through the history the 'image and likeness of God' in all humans have to attain the maturity so as to attain the Trinitarian configuration and communion. The human triad of body, soul and spirit have to attain the needed trinitarian transfiguration according to the divine plan. At present the mission of the Church is to unify the humanity and the whole world according to the divine economy. The risen Lord and the Holy Spirit are working in all and at all times. The People of God need to discern the plan of the risen Lord and to hear what the Spirit is speaking to the Churches from time to time. According to the times and changes in the history, all have to discern how the Spirit is guiding all to work out the given charisms and gifts for the building up of the 'Body of Christ' through the 'fruits of the Spirit.'