

Editorial

**SYNOD ON SYNODALITY: AN INVITATION TO
HAVE A NEW JERUSALEM EXPERIENCE OF
PARTICIPATORY ECCLESIOLOGY**

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Pope Francis invites us to partake in a new Jerusalem Council experience in the Church today. In the Jerusalem Council, as depicted in the Acts of the Apostles, the synodal culture of the people of God is explicit. It is the archetype of today's synods in the Church. In Jerusalem council, we find in the New Testament a listening culture, a discernment process that takes shape among the people of God. Under the leaders, the elders are listening to the Holy Spirit, and there evolves the dynamism of synodality. A discernment process takes place there, whether circumcision is a necessity for admitting one to the Christian community. Before coming to Jerusalem, 'on account of this, Paul and Barnabas had fierce arguments in the community of Antioch.'¹ They go to Jerusalem to settle the issue. The elders in charge of the mother Church in Jerusalem met with the apostles, who made the supreme authority in the Church. Simon Peter addresses them and settles the issue definitively. The formula follows: "The Holy Spirit and we have decided."² How the Council of Jerusalem operated is an excellent example of how the People of God move forward – in an orderly and well-thought-out manner – and where each person has a specific position and role.³

Pope Francis says: "It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium."⁴ According to him, "From the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome, I sought to

¹ Acts 15:2.

² Acts 15: 28.

³ *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no. 22.

⁴ Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Occasion of the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

enhance the Synod, which is one of the most precious legacies of the Second Vatican Council. What the Lord is asking of us is already, in some sense, present in the very word “synod.” Journeying together — laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome — is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice.⁵ This October’s synod assembly claims unprecedented participation in a Synod of Bishops. Of the record-high 360-plus voting members, nearly 27% are non-bishops, including women and sizable numbers of laypeople, for the first time ever at a synod. But even with this widened degree of participation, it’s still true that the synod proceedings — and the media narratives that emerge around them — will likely be shaped by a few key actors. A few Catholic journals have identified 23 key movers and shakers to watch at the 2023 Synod on Synodality.⁶

It is said that the ecclesiological emphasis is going to be the characteristic note of the current synod rather than on sacraments and moral issues. Church is trying to pitch new tents to be inclusive of the marginalized. The theology of communion is getting new dimensions in the life of the Church. The fundamental equality of the people of God based on the reception of the sacrament of baptism and the functional inequality among them do focus on preaching the Gospel to the world. Thus, Pope Francis heads the Dicastery of the Evangelization, teaches: “Every member of the people of God, by virtue of baptism, is a missionary disciple of the Gospel so that each individual may effectively cooperate in the missionary work in his or her daily life, through prayer, witness, and works.”⁷ Pope Francis has emphasized that a synod is not a parliament, but rather an experience of the Church coming together around the Pope to help him discern. This principle “seems to have guided him in synods before, such as when he passed on approving the ordination of married men at the 2019 Amazon synod, despite significant support in the assembly for it. Only time will tell, though, how the Pope chooses to respond to the proceedings of the October synodal gathering.”⁸

⁵ Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Occasion of the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, n. 1.

⁶ Jonathan Liedl, “Synod on Synodality:23 Movers and Shakers at the 2023 Synodal Assembly,” in *National Catholic Register*, Vatican, September 25, 2023, 1.

⁷ Pope Francis, *Praedicate Evangelium* (Apo. Constitution), Vatican, 19 March 2022, art. 59.

⁸ Jonathan Liedl, “Synod on Synodality:23 Movers and Shakers,” 1.

The participatory role of the people of God in the decision-making process of the Church will be a barometer in this synod on synodality. Dialogue with other Churches is going to take new dimensions in this synod. Listening to the people at the borders will be the criteria for pastoral ministry in the Church. Already, the signal is given; women are getting the due share in carrying the serious responsibilities in the Church, which was the exclusive arena till today with men and clerics. Welcoming culture would be the trademark of pastors in the Church as *sensus fidei* of the people of God is going to decide the ecclesial functioning of the Church of the third millennium. Thus, Pope Francis teaches: "The *sensus fidei* prevents a rigid separation between an *Ecclesia docens* and an *Ecclesia discens* since the flock likewise has an instinctive ability to discern the new ways that the Lord is revealing to the Church."⁹

This issue of *Iustitia* takes up various themes, but the main trend of thought is synod and synodality in the Church. Paul Pallath writes on 'Primacy and Synodality according to the Common Tradition of the Church in the First Millennium,' Sajan George Thengumpally on Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* – A new vision on Church administration,' Benny Sebastian Tharakunnel on 'The Administration of Justice according to Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*,' Alex Alexander Velacherry on 'Pastoral or Pre-Judicial Investigation: A Canonical Provision for the Lay Participation in the Synodal Church,' Marylit CMC on 'the Obligatory Days of Feast and Penance in CCEO and the Right of a Particular Church *sui iuris* to Safeguard its Patrimony,' and Justin Vadakkal deals with the Establishment of an Oriental Province of a Secular Institute of the Latin Church.'

Paul Pallath traces the interrelation of primacy and synodality from the first millennium in his article, 'Primacy and Synodality according to the Common Tradition of the Church in the First Millennium.' After a brief account of the origin of the various types of synods and councils in the early Church, the author examines the apostolic canon thirty-four, which is considered the basic principle of synodality, especially in the East. The author then illustrates the affirmation of the synodal principle and the development of primatial authorities at various levels: Metropolitan, Patriarch, and Bishop of Rome, mainly based on the canons of the first seven ecumenical councils of the undivided Church. The last part of the

⁹ Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Occasion of the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, n.10.

article is devoted to the relationship between primacy and synodality, showing that a good functioning of both is necessary for unity and harmony in the Catholic Church.

Sajan George Thengumpally, in his article on 'Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* - A new vision on Church Administration' is presented. The author illustrates that the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* (PE) promulgated by Pope Francis on 19 March 2022 replaced *Pastor Bonus* of Pope John Paul II and reformed the Roman Curia. The new document embodies Pope Francis' unique vision of the Church administration. It invites the officials of the Roman Curia to arrive at a more missionary, pastoral, and spiritual way of functioning than a mere bureaucratic way of working. The document came out while the Bishop's Synod on the theme of 'synodality' was going on. Listening and walking together are experimented with in this Apostolic Constitution. This article elucidates basic visions that guided the reformation and summarizes the major changes in the functioning of the Roman Curia.

Benny Sebastian Tharakunnel examines 'The Administration of Justice according to Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*,' based on the reform of the Roman Curia made by Pope Francis through the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*. The author analyzes the role, structure, and function of the Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith and the three institutions of justice, namely, the Apostolic Penitentiary, the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, and the Tribunal of the Roman Rota. It also discusses the role they play in the administration of justice in the Church. The study analyzes the changes brought about by these four organs of the Curia, the reasons behind the reform, and their far-reaching positive impact on the life of the Church.

Alex Alexander Velacherry, in his article 'Pastoral or Pre-Judicial Investigation: A Canonical Provision for the Lay Participation in the Synodal Church,' evaluates the latest teaching on the tribunal procedure in the Church as envisaged by Pope Francis. The author explains that Pope Francis published the reformed norms on the matrimonial process of nullity through two Apostolic Letters in the form of *Motu proprio, Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus* (MIDI) for the Latin Church and *Mitis et misericors Iesus* (MMI) for the Oriental Churches. They came into force on 8 December 2015. The *Motu proprio, Mitis et misericors Iesus* (MMI) substituted with its new norms, the title XXVI of CCEO, chapter I, *the matrimonial process*, Article I, *Le cause per la dichiarazione della nullità*

matrimoniale (cann. 1357-1377). As an integral part of this reformed text, MMI added another section of Procedural Rules (*Ratio procedendi*) as the guidelines for applying these norms. This section introduced the new provision of Pastoral or Pre-judicial Investigation. The author concludes that this provision of a pastoral or pre-judicial investigation fulfills the objective at the concrete level besides making the lay people involved in the mission of the synodal Church.

Marylitt CMC, in her article, describes 'the Obligatory Days of Feast and Penance in CCEO and the Right of a Particular Church *sui iuris* to Safeguard its Patrimony.' Feast days and days of penance that exist in the Church have theological, liturgical, and canonical aspects. Considering the laws on obligatory days in the Eastern Code, the author states that they have to keep in mind that there are common and particular aspects of observation practices in Eastern Churches *sui iuris*. As a common law for all the Oriental Churches, the Code of Eastern Churches has recognized the patrimony of each Churches *sui iuris*. The Oriental Code also establishes the norms on feast days and days of penance in the matter of common discipline for all the Eastern Churches. Sacred times of the Church, such as Sundays, feast days, and days of penance, are the common manifestations of the faith in the Church. These days the community of the faithful is coming together to celebrate the mystery of salvation with the aim of foretasting the heavenly joy. Thus, the author argues that the common and particular norm for the sacred time is essential for all Churches *sui iuris*.

Justin Vadakkal analyses in his article 'The Establishment of an Oriental Province of a Secular Institute of the Latin Church.' He describes that a member of the secular institute of the Latin Church from Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church has a Syro-Malabar ecclesial patrimony, and to live accordingly, he needs to be incorporated into the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church both *de iure* and *de facto*. So, he asks whether a secular institute with members of another Church *sui iuris* is obliged to have a province. What are the juridical effects of such an ascription? This study tries to answer these questions and also attempts to explain how to establish an Oriental province of the secular institute of the Latin Church. This study mainly discusses the following aspects: a) a brief note about the Decree on Eastern Churches, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*; b) Canonical provisions of CCEO for Latin religious institutes; c) Juridical need of a province and how it is ascribed to a Church *sui iuris*.

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This synod that takes place in the Vatican in October 2023 is historic because Pope Francis leads the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to keep the Church relevant today. It is not an exclusive synod of the bishops. It is the rediscovery of the participation of all groups of the people of God. It is a departure from past synod traditions. Therefore, it may draw criticism from the Church. More lay faithful are going to play a significant role in the conduct, discussions, and debates. For the first time, lay Christian faithful are voting in a synod along with the bishops in the decision-making process of the synod on synodality. According to the International Theological Commission, "Synodality, in this ecclesiological context, indicates the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which manifests and concretely it realizes its being communion with each other in walking together, in gathering together in an assembly and in the active *participation* of all its members in its evangelizing mission."¹⁰ Finally, Pope Francis instructs the Church leaders: "But in this Church, as in an inverted pyramid, the top is located beneath the base. Consequently, those who exercise authority are called "ministers" because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all. It is in serving the people of God that each bishop becomes, for that portion of the flock entrusted to him, *vicarius Christi*, (20) the vicar of that Jesus who at the Last Supper bent down to wash the feet of the Apostles (cf. *Jn* 13:1-15). And in a similar perspective, the Successor of Peter is nothing else if not the *servus servorum Dei*."¹¹ Let the new Jerusalem synodal experience that may happen in these synods revive our Church so that it becomes more and more relevant today.

¹⁰ International Theological Commission, *La sinodalità nella vita e nella missione della chiesa*, testo e commento a cura di P. Coda – R. Repole (Bologna EDB), 2019 (henceforth CTI, *Sinodalità*); cf. also S. Madrigal, ed., *La sinodalidad en la vida y en la misión de la Iglesia*, (Madrid: BAC, 2019) n. 6.

¹¹ Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Occasion of the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 21.