

Editorial

Synodality and Formation

“The more we grow in a synodal style of Church, the more all of us as members of the People of God — faithful and Pastors — will learn to feel cum Ecclesia, in fidelity to the Word of God and Tradition”- Pope Francis

Walking Together: The Way of Synodality by Pope Francis talks about the dimension of listening and participation in the life of the Church—two things that the Pontiff has considered essential for the mission of the Church. In the preparatory document, we read that the purpose of the Synod is “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, create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands.” Hence the central theme is to explore and make Synodality a part of our formation.

Synodality, in its essence, is how the Church is and acts and is not considered a method of doing things. *Lumen Gentium* (1965) connects it to the ecclesial way of understanding the ecclesiology of the people of God. The document’s key architect, Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens, used Synodality to interpret the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. Dr. Murodch told the Catholic News Agency that though Pope St. Paul VI established the modern Synod of Bishops in 1965, the practical reality of synodality is ‘nothing new’ (Condon, 2018). The involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church (International Theological Commission, March 2018) are one of the central aspects of Synodality. The term synodality is often used “to describe the fraternal collaboration and

discernment that bodies like the Synod of Bishops were created to express” (Condon, 2018). Synodality invites every baptized Christian to be a part of this journeying together. They need to become a representative of the various structures and processes of ecclesial discernment irrespective of their culture, charisms, gifts, and ministries and include the diversity of the Church.

Theological Features

The history of the Church is riddled with a lot of trouble and hurt among the Bishops, Cardinals, priests, and the faithful. Synodality is seen as a way of realizing the resources of the whole family of Christ and healing the Church’s wounds. The graced fraternity or solidarity can see humanity’s ultimate reality when the Church lives in a synodal life. The lived experience of the Church and the Magisterium of Vatican II has long expressed the maturation of the ecclesial consciousness. Though the term synodality is not explicitly found in the teaching of Vatican II, the concept can be found at the renewal of the Council committed to cultivating a common home for all to flourish. The idea’s origins can be taken back to the life of Jesus Christ, who sacrificed His life for all mankind. The purpose of God for humanity hence cannot be achieved without the grace of God, but through the Church who practices the concepts of communion, participation, and mission.

Fruits of the Renewal Promised by Vatican II

Pope Francis remarked that synodality offers a suitable framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry, which is based on the doctrine of the *sensus fidei fidelium*. He insists that the shape of the Church should emerge from the Gospel of Jesus to show creative fidelity to Tradition. Besides creating an ecumenical commitment of Christians, synodality also invites all to walk together on the path towards communion and understand and experience the Church where legitimate differences should be understood in the light of truth. Creating a synodal Church is a necessary precondition for the missionary energy of the people of God.

Listening and Dialogue for Communal Discernment

The success of implementing the synodal life of the Church is because of a group of genuine communication of faith, life, and missionary

commitment among its members. It brings depth to the meaning of *communio sanctorum*. In its real sense *communio sanctorum* consists of the communion of holy things and the communion between the faithful who have been made holy. The Church can flourish through love for each other and growing through sharing the love of Christ. The gift of the Holy Spirit is one where the baptized manifest “the equal dignity of all baptized, a universal call to holiness, the participation of all the faithful in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Jesus Christ; the richness of hierarchical and charismatic gifts; and the life and mission of each local Church (International Theological Commission, March 2018, 46).

Listening is Trinitarian. The Trinity of God is listening to the people’s plea and is related to the contemplation on the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. The act of listening and dialoguing in the Trinity launched the project of the salvation of humanity (Cleemis, 2023). Listening is also Christological consisting of a vertical dimension referring to Christ listening to the Father and a horizontal dimension referring to Christ listening to the people. In addition, listening is ecclesial, where one needs to listen to God and fellow faithful- both of which are necessary complementary dimensions. The Synodal dialogue hence expects courage in speaking and listening as it entails engaging in dialogues with speakers who may have better linguistic skills or brusque arguments. The dialogues should be able to express communal discernment using the Holy Spirit as a powerful agent. One must be open to accepting what the Spirit suggests in other people’s positions “for the general good” (1 Corinthians 12,7).

Synodal Transformation and Spirituality

Synodality consists of a process of conversion, the unearthing of ways in which the Spirit can be active in the community’s life. New and alternative ways of understanding and interacting with those beyond those of normal social, political, and ecclesial habits. A move should be made to remove the barriers of mistrust and the hermeneutics of suspicion, which are a part of our culture. Synodality seeks to form more than reformation and development, which only truly be achieved through a willingness to serve and a desire to follow Christ.

Virtues of Synodality: Faith, Hope, Love

In his Letter to the Galatians, Apostle Paul speaks about a liberating and new path of Jesus, Crucified, and Risen. The theological virtues of faith, hope, and love have forever been the bedrock of Christian life. It is essential in a world with its indifferences, oppositions, sufferings, and doubts. Faith, hope, and love are called Theological Virtues as their object is God and can only be infused in us alone (Aquinas, 1948).

Faith. Faith has been considered a powerful element in positive psychology, where the individual believes that they are worthy of being loved by God and that they are cared for by Him. In relationships, faith is expressed through a commitment to each other, even when the journey becomes difficult. Faith is based not only on each other and the sacramental structures of the Church but also on God, who guides every faithful community member. Faith is the acceptance of and response to a greater power (Selvam, 2010). Faith also gives a perspective to understand what underlies conflicts and divisions and to divert them so one can advance in God's service. It is the courage to persevere, keeping our minds, hearts, and will always focused on and open to God.

The Bible states that love is more significant than both faith and hope. We couldn't live our lives without faith or hope: without faith, we cannot know the God of love; without hope, we would not endure in our faith until we meet him face to face. But love is even more crucial despite the importance of faith and hope. Because without love, the Bible teaches there can be no redemption. In Scripture, we learn that God is love (1 John 4:8) and that he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us — a supreme act of sacrificial love. Love is what motivated God the Father to send His only Son to die for us. Thus, love is the virtue upon which all Christian faith and hope now stand.

Paul states that we can only hope for what is uncertain (Romans 8:24), Augustine, *City of God*, book (1960: 139). Nevertheless, such hope can be the product of the experience of suffering if this experience is seen through the lens of faith (Romans 5:3–5) and if the desire to be saved from this suffering is supported by confidence in not being disappointed. Instead of backward-looking law-conformity

(associated by Paul with the Jewish faith), such forward-looking hope characterizes the appropriate relation to God. As an illustration, Paul describes Abraham as “hoping against hope” (Romans 4:18), emphasizing the way in which hope goes beyond the evidence. Therefore, St. Augustine said, “Love is not without hope, hope is not without love, and neither hope nor love are without faith.”

Hope. Hope is the core of our existence. Hope is one of the great gifts of the Holy Spirit, which fills us with creativity and opens new possibilities. Hope is not afraid of failure but is always open to the future, which is God’s gift. It also has the power to learn from failure and to grow in understanding.

Discussions of hope can be found throughout the history of philosophy and across all philosophical traditions, even though philosophy has traditionally not paid the same attention to hope as it has to attitudes like belief and desire. However, hope has historically only rarely been discussed systematically—with important exceptions, such as Aquinas, Bloch, and Marcel—almost all significant philosophers acknowledge that hope plays a vital role regarding human motivation, religious belief, or politics. Hope keeps us moving forward. No individual can imagine life without hope. Hope fuels us to face impossible challenges. Hope is the expectation that we will obtain what we desire. God gives hope a special gift through his grace to combat the day-to-day monotony and the most difficult circumstances. Hope is the invisible hand that holds up the head of a desperate prisoner of war so that he can see the light of day.

Hopeful thoughts rest on the belief that one can find the pathways to desired goals and become motivated to use measures to reach those goals. In positive psychology, the subjective experience of hope includes well-being and satisfaction, joy, flow, and happiness (Snyder, Rand, & Sigmon, 2002). At the group level, hope brings out the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenships like responsibility, nurturance, altruism, tolerance, and work ethics.

Love. Love is the greatest of the Spirit’s gifts because God is Love (1 Cor 13). God’s action and sacrifice in incarnation is an affirmation of and a depth of love for humanity and the ‘good’ that was proclaimed

in Genesis 1. It is a motivating force for all kinds of positive behaviors. Love is a sufficient encouragement to achieve self-relevant goals (Cramer, 2013). There is an element of doing good to others, refusing to accept anything else, overcoming hatred, offering strong, generous humility, and commitment to the truth. It is a commitment and understanding.

Implications for Formation

The ingredients of synodality should be identified as part of the training and guiding seminarians and religious curriculum. Formees need to be trained to share their narratives and understand the narratives of the common people. “To the question, ‘who is my neighbor?’ Jesus had no answer but the parable of the Good Samaritan” (Illathuparampil, 2023). Such narratives have a way of reaching the faithful more effectively.

Think Good, and it Will be Good: Literally, the act of believing in the blessing is the vessel for the blessing. Getting your mind, body, and spirit into the mode of preparing for and accepting the blessing, and living with complete faith in its success, is the means by which you can gain that blessing. Faith and blessing are two sides of the same coin and can have a healing effect through the faith (decrease in anxiety, increase in hope, and other therapeutic benefits) and the subsequent blessing. Seminary formation can focus on a healthy balance of spirituality and psychology. One area within the field of positive psychology is the study of religious faith as a human strength that has the potential to enhance individuals’ optimal existence and well-being. Healthy spirituality often provides a sense of security and social structure; those beliefs can be a vital coping mechanism through trying times. Being an active member of a close-knit religious community can provide design, support and sense of acceptance, all of which are beneficial to spiritual and mental health.

Synodality invites us to a paradigm shift in religious and seminary formation. Trained religious and seminarians need to translate emotional contagion into active empathy. Pope Francis teaches to “walk together” with the faithful to enable them to interpret the world with the wisdom of God. The Good Samaritan (Luke 10) is an excellent example of this translation of a good attitude to effective action. In the

relationship with Christ, with others, and with the community, faith is handed on (Becquart, 2023), and the Church is called to adopt a relational manner that places importance on listening, welcoming, and dialogue. The quality and authenticity of these relationships matter more than the structures.

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