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Article

The Challenge of Synodality

Joe Inguanez [1,†] and Bryan Froehle [2,*]

[1] Department of Sociology, University of Malta, MSD 2080 Msida, Malta
[2] School of Ministry, Palm Beach Atlantic University, West Palm Beach, FL 33401, USA
* Correspondence: froehleb@gmail.com
† Deceased author.

Abstract: While the Synod on Synodality (2023–2024) called by Pope Francis is meant to develop deeper unity within the Catholic Church, it has nonetheless provided an occasion to deepen tensions between the Church. While synodality has deep theological roots, its practical implications involve more than theology. Though the self-understanding of the Catholic Church and the meaning of synodality are naturally theological, they are expressed in historically embedded, socially constructed ways. The tensions experienced in the preparation and reception of the Synod on Synodality stem from implied structural changes. Conflict is normal when social change is involved, particularly when questions of power and meaning-making are involved, and all the more so when there is no certainty as to the outcome. Practical theology offers a means of understanding the Synod and the ways in which synodality may or may not be expressed within the contemporary Catholic Church. Such an approach brings theology and social science into dialogue for deeper ecclesiological understanding.

Keywords: global catholicism; synodality; Synod

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1. Synodality and Sociology

As Cardinal Mario Grech, the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, observed, "this synodal process is not sociological analysis of the Church, but it is a discernment process. And when we say discernment, that means that we are trying to listen to the Holy Spirit" (Brockhaus 2022). Insofar as discernment implies reading the signs of the times, some sociological analysis is nonetheless involved. This is all the more the case because discernment aims not at an elaboration of a particular concept or area of theology or spirituality but rather leads to action, i.e., praxis. As such, its end result is not only theological, pastoral, and spiritual but also sociological. However, the point is well taken: ecclesiology is not sociology, though it is in dialogue with social science, history, and other disciples.

Understanding the synodal process, including the long-term flourishing of synodality as a way of proceeding within the Catholic Church, thus requires a practical theological approach that brings theology and sociology in dialogue. Sociological approaches after all, are critical for a lived ecclesiology. When Jesus observed that "You will know them by their fruits" (Mt 7:16), he named an empirical basis of discernment, namely fruits. Similarly, the results of the Synod on Synodality may be examined using social indicators. This reflects the Gospel: "Let your light so shine before all, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:16). "Seeing your good works" is thus a reference to an empirical approach rather than a solely speculative one. Practical theology as such is grounded in the Scriptures.

2. Synodality and Global Catholicism

In his Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio* (15 September 2018), Pope Francis proposed a revitalization of the Church that reflects that of Pope John XXIII's "aggiornamento" and Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975). This

builds on legacies of previous papacies while proposing new directions, reflecting the reality that the Church has shifted from being globally extensive to becoming truly global over the past half century.

New knowledge develops with a clear definition or description of concepts. The risk of tautology increases if the concepts are taken for granted or assumed. This is a challenge for synodality. Etymologically, synodality is easy to define: it is a composite of the Greek συν ("together") and ὁδός ("way"or "journey"). While an ancient term, there is a clear novelty in its contemporary praxis. This is suggested in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's International Theological Commission (2018), "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church". Though the concept of synodality has deep theological and ecclesiological roots, its explicit engagement in Church life is considerably less deep. To fully instantiate the practice of synodality in a way that supplants the monarchical exercise of power within defining structures of diocese and parishes will require both social science and theological insight.

Synodality is the new model of Church: "a synodal Church is a Church that listens . . . in which everyone has something to learn" (Francis 2015). This listening is a new paradigm, a sociolinguistic process of interaction meant to engage all members of the Church in a common conversation. Further, a synodal Church must realize that listening "is more than simply hearing" (Francis 2013, n. 171). He continues: "It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of truth" (John 14:17) to understand what He "says to the Churches" (Revelation 2:7).

Synodality is thus simultaneously the first step of the operational logic and the end-result of the Synod on Synodality. The use of Comte's sociological distinction between social statics and social dynamics may be a useful starting point. Social statics refers to social structures and their effect on society. Social dynamics deal with the logic and processes of social change. In a related way, contemporary social theory suggests another distinction: structure and agency. There is a constant dance, theoretically and practically, between structure and agency in shaping social behavior. Structures exist to influence, enhance, or reform individual behavior patterns and provide social opportunities for action but human agents themselves shape social structures and no one else.

Theologically, Irenaeus, writing in *Against Heresies* in perhaps the year 180, offers insight. After speaking of the things that are in the law, he notes: "All these things happened to them as symbols: they were written to instruct us, on whom the end of the ages has come. . . The law was therefore a school of instruction for them, and a prophecy of what was to come". This theological insight reflects the social scientific theorizing regarding the distinction between structure and agency above.

The implications of synodality for the life of the Church are far reaching. As Rafael Luciani puts it, synodality requires "an integral, organic transformation of the whole church" (Luciani 2022, p. 74). Relationships in the Church must be transformed and reconstructed in line with the priority theologically attributed to baptism. This will not happen automatically. Without reformed ecclesiastical structures, both formal and informal, the practice of power in the Church will continue to be marked by what Francis so strenuously call out as clericalism. "Whether fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons, [clericalism] leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today. To say "no" to abuse is to say an emphatic "no" to all forms of clericalism" (Francis 2018).

Clericalism in this sense is that monarchical exercise of power without shared decision-making. The challenge is to engage the entire People of God, the whole church. As Karl Rahner observed long ago, "The layman must do all he can to make his own personal contribution to the development of a public opinion within the Church" (Rahner 1959, p. 29). During Vatican II, Cardinal Suenens maintained that charisms should be brought to their proper place in the Church, especially charisms of "laymen and women . . . who we might say are in a way called by the Lord and endowed with various charisms of the spirit.

Whether in catechetical work, in spreading the Gospel, in every area of Catholic activity, in social and charitable work, it is the duty of pastors to listen carefully and with open heart to laymen, and repeatedly to engage in a living dialogue with them. For each and every layman has been given his own gifts and charisms, and more often than not has greater experience than the clergy in daily life in the world" (Verhaegen 1965, pp. 23–33).

Theology and canon law are critical for the life of the Church, but these are ultimately human constructs that depend on Divine Revelation as their basis. In other words, theology and canon law rightly understood are built on a foundation of listening deeply to Divine Revelation, meaning Scripture and the full deposit of faith in the person of Jesus Christ as definitively experienced in history during the Apostolic Age.

In a 2016 letter to Cardinal Ouellet, Pope Francis described synodality as the new model of the Church, writing that "a synodal Church is a Church that listens . . . in which everyone has something to learn" (Francis 2015). These reciprocal and horizontal dynamics of listening among all the baptized will reconstruct a process of communicative interaction emanating from the theology of the People of God (Theobald 2023). This, however, should then find proper ecclesial channels and structures that Pope Francis describes as "concrete mediations".

The practice of synodality, then, is the practice of communicative action. While the latter is a sociological notion that resonates with the work of Habermas, the theological understanding of communication surely rests with pneumatology, the theology of the Holy Spirit, described in the letters of Paul and throughout church tradition as giving the gift of *communio* or fellowship. In short, synodality can be understood and effectively implemented precisely through the dialogue of sociology and theology, the intradisciplinary space occupied by practical theology.

3. Synodality and Structures

Without denying the strong effect of structures on the Church, one cannot ignore the fact that agency endows social actors with the capacity to avoid structural determinism. Despite the power of social structures (Elder-Vass 2011), humans have the freedom to make their own choices and act independently of structural paradigm (Barker 2005, p. 448), even if this is sometimes done at a non-negligible cost. Contemporary social theorists have offered ways to theorize about the power of social structure. Margaret Archer's morphogenetic approach (Archer 1982) takes one position, Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus (Bourdieu 1998) another, and Giddens's structuration theory (Giddens 2004) still another. Archer may be most helpful here. She argues that the reciprocal constitution of structure and agency obstructs analysis of their relationship. It therefore remains a moot point whether structure or agency has a greater weight in explaining social action.

Although the terms "synod" and "synodality" are etymologically correlated, they are not identical in the contemporary praxis of the Catholic Church. From 1967 until the present Synod of Bishops, this type of synod was a deliberation among bishops called by the Pope that concluded with a papal document. All too often these synods had a limited effect at the grassroots level. A case in point is the 1971 Synod of Catholic Bishops, which ended with the document "Justice in the World". This led to Justice and Peace Commissions being established in various dioceses, but the document did not result in the envisioned thorough-going change in the life of the Church. The power of ecclesial structures and practices of power is not to be underestimated.

The vision of councils and synods, whether at the diocesan, universal, or some other level, is surely meant to lead to something besides beautiful documents, doctrinal statements, and pastoral exhortations. Nonetheless, this is what has often happened: the actual life of the Church in sociological terms has been quite distinct from the flurry of meetings and statements emanating from Rome. Put another way, the connection between the ongoing meetings and conferences taking place in and around the Holy See and its related institutions does not always appear to be strongly connected to the vast network that is Catholic life around the world.

Part of the problem seems to be that, when faced with pastoral or structural challenges, Church leaders tend to look for general solutions rooted in common consensus rather than delving deeper in the Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, Vatican II, and other central theological sources. This leads to a certain reliance on the general, universalizing legal language as found in the Code of Canon Law. The results are structuring structures more than the gift of *parrhesia* as implied by pneumatology. An ecclesiology of *societas perfecta* continues implicitly, over and above that of the Pilgrim People of God (*Lumen Gentium*, p. 48). This theology of the Church as *societas perfecta* was superseded in 1943 by Pope Pius XII. *Mystici Corporis Christi* and its twentieth century biblical theology in turn was reaffirmed by Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*.

Sociologically, it is easy to see that a gathering of co-equal monarchs—that is, bishops in their dioceses—would naturally lead to a search for a lowest common denominator consensus that would be non-threatening. The theology of *societas perfecta*—a notion of the Church as over and above everyday life, looking aside from the very real messiness of everyday life and the exercise of power—lends itself as a kind of rationalization of these practices of power. This is also the ecclesiology that, for the very same reason, was put aside at the Second Vatican Council in favor of an understanding of the Church as the Pilgrim People of God, as a community of disciples.

Synodality must go beyond the "Synod-event", whether the Synod on Synodality or a diocesan synod, to become a catalyst of constant change through dialogue and discernment. This is why Pope Francis says that "it is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium" (Francis 2015). Put another way, the International Theological Commission describes synodality as the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God. Synodality reveals and gives substance to the Church's very being as communion, referring to "when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission" (International Theological Commission 2018, p. 6). Such a journey is similar to that which God ordered Abraham, our father in faith, to undertake: "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). That is why the Synod on Synodality (2023–2024) built from a different *modus operandi* from those that preceded it.

The praxis of synodality promises to extend and deepen the ongoing reception and implementation of the Second Vatican Council. As the International Theological Commission noted, critical areas of attention include "the concentration of responsibility for mission in the ministry of pastors; insufficient appreciation of the consecrated life and charismatic gifts; rarely making use of the specific and qualified contribution of the lay faithful, including women, in their areas of expertise" (p. 105). According to the Spanish theologian Eloy Bueno, "synodality is a category that in the ecclesial sphere had already assumed the right of citizenship, but within an undeniable conceptual and terminological ambiguity. Francis has given it criteria for discernment and traced a way forward". (Bueno 2018, p. 203). As *Evangelii Gaudium* (pp. 20–23) makes clear, "the Church goes forth". This is a fundamental aspect of the synodal vocation of the baptized. It is in the "dynamic of exodus and gift, of going out of oneself, of walking and sowing always anew, always beyond" (*Evangelii Gaudium* p. 21; Madrigal 2021).

The Pope felt sure that the Spirit would guide the Church and "give us the grace to move forward together, to listen to one another and to embark on a discernment of the times in which we are living". He emphasized the participation of all because participation is a requirement of the faith received in baptism. In line with Newman's thought on the necessity of consulting the faithful in matters of doctrine, Pope Francis said that "enabling everyone to participate is an essential ecclesial duty" (Thornton n.d.). This reflects the ancient principle that Yves Congar invoked: *Quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus tractari et approbari debet*, "What affects everyone must be considered and approved by everyone" (Congar 1958; Condorelli 2013).

4. Limited Consultation and the Limits of Consultation

While the Synod on Synodality opened one of the most extensive processes of global consultation that has ever taken place, local churches have all too often been conspicuous in their absence. A survey carried out via email among theologians and philosophers at the University of Malta confirmed this. Respondents were asked the following three questions: (1) Have you been consulted specifically on the Synod? (2) Do you feel comfortable by the way the clergy has been consulted on the Synod? (3) Do you feel comfortable by the way the laity has been consulted on the Synod?

All the respondents are committed and active members of the Catholic Church in Malta and in good standing with the Church authorities. Their reply to each question was a distinct "No", with some expressing greater disappointment in detail. The greatest difficulties seem to have come from the bishops themselves. When he met with editors of the European Jesuit journals on 19 May 2022, Pope Francis affirmed that "There are some dioceses where the synodal way is being developed with the faithful, with the people, slowly" (Spadaro 2022).

The development of synodality is about changing structures, yet synodality depends on structures changing. The Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* revised the basic governmental structure of the Holy See and entered into force on 5 June 2022. Around the same time, a new investment policy, designed to create a unitary policy for the financial investments of the Holy See and the Vatican City State, was published on 19 July 2022 and entered into effect on 1 September 2022. It removed the financial autonomy that various agencies within the Holy See had enjoyed for ages.

In a reflection of the "zero-tolerance" policy for sexual abuse, the same appeared to be forthcoming for financial mismanagement. Success over the long term, however, depends on whether the right people will be appointed to the right posts without fear or favor. This is a particular concern given the continuing practice of *promoveatur ut amoveatur*, promoting to remove, which has often meant appointing those who are incompetent or otherwise problematic toloftier positions so as to remove them from a lower position where poor performance was having negative impacts. Ideally, in the future, posts will be filled after an international call for applications is issued, specifying the competence and experience required. Appointments and promotions at the Roman Curia have typically been handled through a *spintarella* (push) and *raccomandata* (recommendation), at times going well beyond "whom they know" toward "what they know about whom you know". In this latter situation, of course, the possibility of lobbying for certain ecclesial positions becomes very clear—and very problematic. In any case, the process of recruitment for church positions has never been an expression of "rational-legal" authority.

When Pope Francis started to promote this much-needed paradigmatic change in the pyramidal, monolithic structure of Church governance, he acknowledged the need of a "new mode of being" and saw the alternative in the synodal process. The reaction to this stance ranged from skeptical silence to outright opposition. It also echoed certain experiences of Pope John XXIII.

When Pope John XXIII launched the Second Vatican Council, many in the Holy See tried their best to control and minimize the process. Analogous efforts can be observed today with regard to the Synod on Synodality. Numerous books and articles, websites, bloggers, and more appeared to hamper changing the mindset of the Church from one dominated by various traditional means of exercising power in the Church, generally opposed to a more synodal approach (Inguanez 2022). Other continuing challenges include the cautiousness—as seen, for example, within much of the Church in the United States—and demands for overnight legal and structural changes—as in the case of the German synodal path.

5. The Church That Can and Cannot Change

Notwithstanding that Christian communities were described in the apostolic age as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter

2:9), there has always been tensions within the Church. The Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* stressed the apostolic tradition and aimed to "bring the light of Christ to all, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church" (*Lumen Gentium*, p. 1). Yet the Vincentian canon implies a certain unchangeability: the true faith can only be that which is held everywhere, always, and by all (Guarino 2013; Noonan 2005). In short, the Church is called to constant change and to not change at all. It is within this paradox that doctrine develops and practical theology works.

The synodal process envisions the Church as something other than a Barbiconi or Gammarelli—Roman purveyors of clerical and liturgical attire. The Church is not about dispensing offices liturgical and administrative. Instead, the Church is a "field hospital" on the move, an Easter people moving forward with the joy and freedom of God's children. Like the disciples of Emmaus who "got up and returned at once to Jerusalem" (Luke 24:33), the People of God are expected to embrace and live into the original enthusiasm of the Gospel. Pope Francis does not want the synod to merely renew past practices. He wants there to be a new Pentecost in the Church.

This is an opportunity to hear afresh Jesus' words to Nicodemus repeated to the People of God in the third millennium: "You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:7–9). Like Nicodemus, Christians may ask, "How can this be?" Pope Francis has already suggested the way this ought to take place by asking for God's grace of discernment. "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20). This account of change sounds complete and costly, yet that is precisely the reality.

6. The Religious Sociology of Change

Change is resisted in every sphere of life, whether personal or social. The law of inertia, though in a manner different from that of physics, exists in all structures and certainly within ecclesial ones. Yet the pressures for change continue and come in every form, size, and shape. They can take the form of adaptation, incrementalism, reform, or revolution. The difference depends on agency and structure as well as the type and rate of change.

The taxonomy of the reaction to change is not binary; however, for heuristic purposes, and in the absence of more precise concepts, one may place "traditionalists" on one end of the spectrum when referring to that category of social agents who tend to favor the status quo in opposition to dynamic development. The term "progressives" will be used to refer to the category of people that at least supports dynamic development, thus potentially promoting vitality, flexibility, and integration.

Every organization or institution, including global and complex ones, exist within a social environment that conditions their mode of being.; hence, their reaction to both change and resistance to change differs. Certain organizations and their actors resist change out of fear that any change in the existing state of affairs will threaten their legitimacy and hence power or authority and thus render them irrelevant. They perceive, manifestly or latently, that their survival depends on the defense of the status quo. Frequently, this will-to-survive creates a tension both with the environment and with other agents. However, those social systems which have culturally or/and structurally dug their heels in have ended up on the rocks of history.

Hence, those opposed to change start by engaging defense mechanisms at their disposal. The applies as much to those who exercise power within the Catholic Church no less than it applies to any political movement, business organization, bureaucracy, or system of governance. In a nutshell, we already have this in the Apostolic Age. The dispute in Antioch between Paul and Peter is attested by Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians 2:11–14.

The effect of resistance to change can be detrimental to both the social actors themselves and the social organization they try to salvage. It is not rare that in such circumstances the organization being defended will implode with the result of either an outright split or in the

formation of splinter groups or sects within it. Within the Catholic Church, this implosion has historically taken different forms during different periods of its history. Doctrinal and structural breakaway and fragmentation can happen and has. More common is the formation of internal splinter groups, which keep the received doctrine as a vindication of orthodoxy while creating internal substructures or hang onto past cultural values and norms, independently of how well their model incarnates the Gospel in a specific age or fits the Church as a whole. From a sociological point of view, both results are similar: sectarianism inside or outside the Church.

The opposition to the conversion from a "monarchic-bureaucratic" mode of governance to a more participatory form of governance is the block to the practice of synodality. This happens when those in authority become detached from both the people and the changing realities of life, remaining more attached to power than a moral compass. Understanding the basis on which resistance to change stands helps synodal practices to be in a better position to face its challenges.

The *modus vivendi* of both the institution and its members have been brought to light by several scandals, such as the abuse of authority which has transmuted itself into power when it has acted or has been perceived to act not as "a light on a mountain" but as a power structure. This has led to sexual abuse, financial abuse (Hambrick and Mason 1984), and more. Such practices are about power built into the organizational culture. They must be fully and totally excised.

The negative symbolic or silent reaction to his appeals is a clear indicator of the existing resistance to change under the veil of customs, which de Lubac distinguished as culturally relative traditions with a small "t" that pretend to be the "Tradition" that must be handed on for the integrity of faith (De Lubac 2001).

7. Overcoming Opposition, Building Intentionality, and the Wallerstein Paradigm

There is much insight in the sociological paradigm proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein in his four volume *Modern World-System* (Wallerstein 1997). Wallerstein argued that the world economy is not governed by an "invisible hand" or independent decisions, but rather constructed by a system in which there are three types of economies: namely, the core, the semi-periphery, and the periphery. Nations at the core have a dominant economic relationship with both the semi-periphery and periphery. The periphery, on the other hand, consists of totally dominated nations. The semi-periphery exists between these two as both an exploiter and an exploited. As such, the semi-periphery allies sometimes with the core and sometimes with the periphery. Wallerstein's paradigm suggests how authority—which like the economy should aim to promote common good—has on several occasions been transformed into power at the service of powerful individuals or institutions.

In the Catholic context, the core is the Roman Curia, and on the semi-periphery there are bishops and their dioceses, while the periphery consists of most of the clergy and especially the laity—baptized Catholics, including those who have lapsed from religious practice or lost their faith. Pope Francis sees the latter as the periphery, *gli emarginati*, i.e., those on the margins of the Church or/and of society.

Consider the core in this sense. The International Theological Commission of the CDF has written: "In the theological, canonical and pastoral literature of recent decades, a neologism has appeared, the noun "synodality," a correlate of the adjective "synodal", with both of these deriving from the word "synod" (International Theological Commission 2018, p. 5). Thus, people speak of synodality as a "constitutive dimension" of the Church or of the "synodal Church". This linguistic novelty, which needs careful theological clarification, is a sign of something new that has been maturing in the ecclesial consciousness (Stewart 2013) starting from Vatican II and the lived experience of local churches.

A variety of official Church documents argue that the semi-periphery consists of the diocesan bishop, diocesan leaders, the parish priests and the faithful. However, in practice, who is listened to? How serious is the process of decision-making taken at the point of

decision-taking? Discernment, so often stressed by Pope Francis, does not have deep roots in this model.

The Code of Canon Law (1983) gave the diocesan bishop considerable authority with relatively little accountability. Each diocesan bishop may organize the diocesan curia according to the pastoral needs. Thus, unless bishops decide to take their Presbyteral Council seriously, and to have and engage a Diocesan Pastoral Council, synodality will not succeed. Some bishops treat the College of Consultors—whose members are chosen by the bishops themselves—as a substitute to the presbyteral council, to which Vatican II refers as "a body or senate of priests representing all the priests. This representative body by its advice will be able to give the bishop effective assistance in the administration of the diocese" (Canon 519).

The Code of Canon Law likewise assigns wide-ranging power given to parish priests. "The pastor (*parochus*) is the proper pastor of the parish entrusted to him, exercising the pastoral care of the community committed to him under the authority of the diocesan bishop in whose ministry of Christ he has been called to share, so that for that same community he carries out the functions of teaching, sanctifying, and governing, also with the cooperation of other presbyters or deacons and with the assistance of lay members of the Christian faithful, according to the norm of law". The mode of cooperation depends on the way a parish priest perceives the parish's needs, and the choice of his collaborators is absolutely in his hands.

An important function of semi-peripheral institutions should be to deal with internal conflicts—manifest or latent—in the local church. Synodality requires structures to help the bishops in the analysis and resolution of such conflict. Yet the structures prescribed by canon law about the financial administration are weak. As Juvenal asked in *The Satires*, VI: "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?" or "Who guards the guardians themselves?" (Juvenal n.d., pp. 347–48).

The Code of Canon Law (1983) does not reflect the *Documento di Base* (Basic Document) for the Reform of the Administration of the Maltese Ecclesiastical Province (7 March 1973), approved during the papacy of Paul VI fifty years ago. After half a century, this is still a very good model in its principles and statutes for synodal practice. It set up two structures. One of them, the Diocesan Representative Council, has the right and duty to establish policies. The *ex officio* members are the diocesan bishop, his auxiliary bishop and/or vicar general, the administrative secretary, and the pastoral secretary, except if any of these posts are vacant. In addition, there is an elected member from each of the following institutions: the cathedral chapter, the collegiate chapters, the Council of Parish Priests, the College of Deputy Parish Priests, the College of Male Religious Orders, the Female Religious Orders, a Member of the Presbyteral Council, not represented by the above institutions, a layperson representing the Pastoral Council, and a layperson representing the Commission for Lay Apostolate. Decisions taken by this council are binding and not simply consultative.

The other structure is the Diocesan Finance Committee. This has as a first duty the elaboration of the general policy to be followed for movable and real estate investments of the diocese, formulating annual or multi-year programs. These are to be submitted to the approval of the Diocesan Representative Council. The following members are *ex officio*: the diocesan bishop, the vicar general, the administrative secretary, the pastoral secretary, the property manager, and the financial controller, except for the posts that are vacant. Beyond these, three to five members are nominated by the ordinary on the proposal of the Diocesan Representative Council and are to include professional laity, including an architect, a banker, a lawyer and so on. Such structures help bring synodality into practice.

Further, the periphery consists of what Francis calls those on the margins of church, society or both, be they priests, religious, laypeople, young or old, male or female. The fact that Canon 519 quoted above does not assign any specific role to the presbyters is a clear indication that even priests are quite often at the periphery in this sense.

This notwithstanding, changes that have been executed in the Roman Curia during the Francis papacy have born witness to courageous steps in the right direction. Yet the Curia

needs a cultural change. Without such a change, several cogs in the wheel will be working against the rest. The Pope found a situation when the Curia was still patterned on the medieval monarchic courts—in power and attire—a pattern that fosters in-breeding and creating courtiers, sycophants, and "yes-men" rather than brothers and sisters. Without substantive sociological-ecclesiological changes from *Praedicate Evangelium* and practices of synodality, the Roman Curia will lose credibility in inverse proportion to expectations created by that Apostolic Constitution. It could increase the impression that the Church is good at talking but bad at walking, or as the Italian expression goes: "parole si, fatti no"! ("words, but no facts!").

Many argue that the drop in diocesan and religious vocations, together with a widespread lack of commitment of the laity, is in inverse proportion to the increase of pomp and ceremonies during the last half a century (Inguanez 2022). Child sex abuse by clergy at all levels of the hierarchy and its cover up, together with other sexual abuses, are blatant scandals. While the Roman Curia has taken relatively strong action, many leaders around the world remain sin a state of denial and do not want to listen to the Pope's call for collective discernment, an intrinsic part of any "synodal process".

Other issues in the Church, such as the discipline of clerical celibacy in the Latin Rite, give the impression that the Church is inconsistent. The Code of Canon Law makes celibacy compulsory for priestly ordination in the Latin Rite but that of the Eastern Chuches does not make this a necessary requirement. This raises the question for some of changing from one rite to another to be able to get married before becoming a priest. Also, married Anglican priests are ordained in the Catholic Church while married Catholic men are ordained only if they are widowed. These await a serious synodal discernment.

Pope Francis avoids the mistake of swapping from the positive level of "what is", to the normative level of language ("what ought to be"), bypassing such language by using the concept "dream". "As a Church which 'journeys together' with men and women sharing the travails of history, the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the role of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations" (Francis 2022).

Further, he notes that problems come about "when the synodal path comes only from the intellectual, theological elites, and is much influenced by external pressures" (Spadaro 2022). Every baptized person ought to resist such hegemony. Ignorance of the clergy was already seen by Rosmini as one of the wounds of the Church. As Pope Francis once said: "the Council that some pastors remember best is that of Trent. What I am saying is not nonsense" (Spadaro 2022).

Charitable work is a must. However, that does only mean giving alms, opening shelters for the homeless, taking care of people suffering from any addiction or any form of exploitation. It means taking political action. Democracies die when citizens are turned into "subjects". Christians should all be prophets in the public sphere. Romero was not murdered because he opened a hospital, a home for the elderly or drug addicts, but because he publicly denounced evil structures and immoral policies created by elites oppressed the poor. Too many politically uncommitted laity exclude themselves from the synodal path, from the call of participation to transform the world in light of the Gospel. As Dante wrote, they have become "Dio spiacenti e a' nemici sui"(*Divina Commedia, Inferno Canto III*).

A synodal process is both a spiritual journey and a sociological strategy that, through strength and patience, can bring about an ecclesiology appropriate for the third millennium of the Church, that of a true global Catholicism.

8. Synodality and Renewal of the Church: The Sociological Role of Hope

What is the role of hope in dealing with this sort of dilemma? Eagleton begins to answer this questions by observing that "The hopes of a man void of understanding are vain and false: and dreams lift up fools" (Ecclesiasticus 34:1). He distinguishes between hope and optimism by describing the latter as naïveté, exuberance, or aspiration. Hope

requires both deliberation and responsible action. Hope is not something in thin air but a rational mode of action which takes into consideration both failure and disfunction (Eagleton 2015).

This is very relevant to a discussion of synodality. Initially, the concept of synodality raised an adrenaline-based optimism that quickly begins to subside when powerful members of the Church resist. As first, many might have been expecting a miracle rather than a journey enlightened by hope. What synodality offers is the possibility of a transformative change in terms of hope advocated by Eagleton.

Hope entails elements that can be heartbreaking. Yet as Eagleton maintains, hope also has radical elements, "a species of permanent revolution, whose enemy is as much political complacency as metaphysical despair". It looks at the future but is anchored in the present and not oblivious of the past. We must respectfully bow to history but not be bound by it. Hope creates dreams that can become "a source for agency, except when they cannot picture a future" (Stewart 2013, p. 28).

Two great dreamers and changemakers of the mid-twentieth century were Martin Luther King, Jr and Pope John XXIII. Both stressed the importance of dreams. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech became a defining moment in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, revealing his dream of a reconciled nation by dropping distinctions of color and race. The same can be said of Pope John XXIII's speech at the beginning of Vatican II.

In this century, Pope Francis has also spoken of a dream for the world. He also expanded this in a book-length interview with Austen Ivereigh (Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future, Ivereigh 2020). In his acceptance speech for the Charlemagne Prize, Pope Francis called for the European continent to have a "memory transfusion" so as to avoid mistakes of the past and work for a future based on "economic justice, openness to newcomers, respect for life in all its stages, and dialogue with everyone". This reflects his encyclicals *Fratelli Tutti* and *Laudato Si* and more. These are all important steps in the synodal path.

Logistically, a Vatican Council III is hard to imagine in terms of the sheer numbers of bishops that would be required. It is also not the time ecclesiologically. So much remains to be received from Vatican Council II. Sociologically, there is good reason to see that the paradigm shift developed in the synodal process might potentially allow the Synod on Synodality to become an opportunity for the Church to truly implement and expand the work of the Second Vatican Council. Helping this to come about will require a practical theological approach that appreciates both theological and sociological wisdom.

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