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The FURROW

A JOURNAL FOR THE
CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

SYNODALITY IN A THEOLOGICAL KEY

Brian Grogan

Synodal Spirituality: Poised
Expectancy

Anne M. Codd

Becoming a Synodal
Church in Local Context:
Conversation, Consultation
and Dialogue

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Synodality, the *sensus fidei*
and Doctrine

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The Synodal Pathway
in Tallaght

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The Furrow

A pastoral monthly founded 1950.

The motif on the cover of *The Furrow* is from Jeremiah 4:3, which reads in the Vulgate:

Novate vobis novale
Et nolite serere super spinas.
Yours to drive a new furrow,
Nor sow any longer among the briers.

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Editor's Note

The articles in this issue of *The Furrow* engage with the call to be a Synodal Church – the roots, challenges and hopes of re shaping our understanding of being Church. They are the fruit of a symposium organized by the Pontifical Faculty of Theology, Maynooth in May of this year. The symposium – ‘*Synodality in a Theological Key*’ – attracted theologians and scholars from across Ireland who reflected and shared their insights in an atmosphere of prayerfully journeying together. The papers published in this issue represent most, but not all, of the contributions to that May symposium. It is hoped they will contribute positively to the ongoing prayerful discussion in the local and universal Church on the opportunities and challenges of becoming a synodal people.

Pádraig Corkery
Editor.

Synodal Spirituality: Poised Expectancy

Brian Grogan

INTRODUCTION

What goes on in a formal synodal meeting, where important decisions are made, I do not know: but the *Vademecum* Document for the October 2023 Roman Synod offers rich possibilities; many of these are drawn from the Ignatian process of decision-making – not surprising since pope Francis is a Jesuit. Since we are all called to become synodal people, an outline of these possibilities may be helpful, so that we can have a sense of how to go about this major change in our manner of being Christian.

What is offered here reflects what I have learnt over the years in parallel decision-making meetings of religious and lay persons of the Ignatian tradition. Their dynamic is thus based in the history of the Jesuit Order, which emerged from an extended discernment in 1539, the issue being whether or not a very diverse group of men, all committed to the service of the Church, should form a religious order. In turn the dynamic of that discernment originates in the *Spiritual Exercises* which Ignatius of Loyola composed from 1522 onward as the fruit of his personal efforts to find God's will in his life.

In *Making Good Decisions* (Veritas, Dublin, 2015, 209-212) I include the details of the discernment process used by the first Jesuits almost five centuries ago, together with examples of corporate decisions in which I had a facilitating role. One was with a parish whose members wanted, as they put it, 'to let the Holy Spirit take charge' in the forming of a new parish pastoral council. Another was where a congregation was discerning whether or not to set up a community among the poor. A third was with a parish which was divided on the best use of their finances, and a fourth was with a congregation which wished to trim its sails in view of declining numbers.

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FOCUS

The focus of *Part One* of this current article is on the spirituality underpinning corporate or communal discernment, and within that dynamic the emphasis is on *inner freedom*. *Part Two* provides a tool-kit for situations in which a group wants to find God's will. It may also help a secular group which wants to make its best possible choice: think of an ethically-minded firm which is made aware that it has been acting unjustly and wishes to make amends. What Christian discernment adds to the voice of conscience is the divine viewpoint which is emphasised here. Our ultimate question as Christians must be: 'Which choice pleases God?'

Discerning operates on various levels: synodal preparations began with posters outside churches urging people to come in and have their say: the culmination of the process will be the October 2023 Roman Synod, which, I hope, will use all available strategies to help the participants grow in inner freedom as they address their agenda. In between are the myriad encounters, casual or arranged, out of which our human decisions are made, with more or less reference to God. These could include a neighbourhood, parish, school or local synodal gathering, a Parish Pastoral Council, a protest against some perceived injustice, an ageing parent's effort to do what would be best in making a will, or the call to adapt to a simpler life-style. The list is endless. It takes only two persons to make a mini-synod, as occurred on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35) and Jesus makes clear that he wishes to be included even in small gatherings: 'Where two or three are gathered, I am there among them' (Mt 18:20).

Here I address what might help a formal synod to proceed well, but since we are all called to synodality, you might spend a few moments reflecting on your own decision-making processes to see what you might learn in order to contribute better as the synodal pathway unfolds in the years ahead. The scriptural texts offered can help you to base your efforts on the solid foundation of the Word of God.

PART ONE: CREATING POISED EXPECTANCY

A welcoming address by the Convenor of a synodal group might include some of the following points, with the convenor eliciting contributions from the assembly, thus mirroring the synodality which is sought for.

- 'We are gathered together to work with God for the good of the Church. But we hope that the outcomes of our labours will also be for the good of the world. Pope Francis believes that through

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synodality we can reveal to secular gatherings how diversity can bring us forward together rather than fragment us, as it so often does.

- Let us begin with a profile of the group: how we see ourselves; how God sees us; how others see us.
- We next note the global and national context of our meeting, and how other groups are addressing the challenges of our time. What is distinctive about us?
- Our initial ideas re the meaning of ‘synod’ will vary widely, but expansions of horizons will occur if we are open. Ours is a learning process: we bring what we can to God and pray that God may teach us and guide our choices. Jesus sums up his life in the sentence: ‘I always do what is pleasing to my Father’ (see Jn 8:29). That is to be our desire too.
- We are a diverse group with conflicting and principled views on many things, including God, Church, theology, world, Kingdom of God, and of course on the issue before us now; but we trust that God will lead us to consensus.
- As C G Jung says: ‘Bidden or unbidden, God is present’. While we can easily lose our focus on God, we will be facilitated to meet God directly. Our central dialogue partner is divine!
- The primary image for a Synod is Trinitarian. The three divine Persons act in harmony in forming and implementing decisions for the good of the world. They will help us to form right relationships with one another, and will attend all our meetings and encounters, because we shape the world they love by the decisions we make now. Their endless request to us is: ‘Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches!’ (Rev 2:11).
- So [perhaps using the Roublev icon] we can sit at their table, listening to them and their plans for the world’s good; listening also to one another, and to the scriptures, the Church, the signs of the times, the poor, the cry of creation, and to our own hearts. Like Mary we are to ponder what we hear and bring forth fruit in patience. By searching together for the truth in love, we become synodal, as God is. Perhaps we will come to see our way forward only ‘in a mirror, dimly’ (1Co 13:12) but that will be enough.

FACILITATION

The *first* role of the facilitator is to be an enabler of the Spirit: s/he tries to keep God always before the eyes of the participants. Brief inputs, creative liturgies and rituals, ongoing times for reflection will help to develop the poised expectancy of a group intent on finding God. The *second* role is to weld cautious and perhaps divided individuals into a cohesive team by using best social skills

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and conflict management. With large groups it can help to have two facilitators collaborating, while liaising also with the Organising Team.

SPIRITUALITY

A synod is not a parliament, nor a business meeting, nor does it decide simply by majority vote. God walks with us, makes our steps firm, holds us by the hand (see Ps 37:23-24 etc) and shows us the route we should take (Dt 1:33). The themes that follow – gratitude, joy, prayer, inner freedom, bias, conversion – highlight this action of God, and refocus the group when it gets diverted. The themes offered here can be used singly as short ‘refreshers’ or ‘re-orientations’ especially when group energy is waning and signs of restlessness appear. There are no boring meetings when a group is intent on finding God, but corporate discernment, as it deepens, is not a straight line but a *spiral* with highs and lows; ongoing adjustment is needed for the group to move forward through phases of confusion and discouragement.

GRATITUDE

It is good to begin with gratitude to God for the good done by the group up to this point: this generates hope and enthusiasm and an initial sense of common purpose. A history line can help: it notes instances of when the group was at its best, and includes the date when each person joined in. The expression of gratitude by each for being a member of the group, despite all its demands, leads to mutual acceptance and fellowship.

How God sees the group is central, and inspires gratitude. ‘I have loved you...’ (Jer 31:3); ‘My plans for you are peace... when you seek me you shall find me...’ (Jer29:11). Promises are the language of love, and God is faithful.

JOY

Joy is not often mentioned in corporate discernment; but since as St Thomas Aquinas affirms, God is sheer joy, the presence of joy is a sign of the Spirit’s closeness. Joy is emphasised especially by Luke: so in regard to Mary and Elizabeth, the shepherds and the angels, the Prodigal Father, etc. The disciples return to Jerusalem after the Ascension with great joy (see Lk 24:52).

The joy of common purpose should become evident over the days. ‘How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity’ (Ps 133, but avoid the sexist language!). Humour helps.

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However, negative attitudes and feelings need to be acknowledged, at least generically, with sensitive honesty. There may be abiding hurts between members which call for mutual forgiveness. 'Be reconciled first...' (Mt 5:23-24). A simple ritual of reconciliation can bring the joyful awareness that each is a beloved sinner, inadequate but forgiven and invited to table fellowship with Jesus and the others present: this ritual might take the form of an imaginative contemplation of Lk 15:1-2.

PRAYER

There is always more to be said at meetings, but synodal spirituality goes the further step by asking: 'What is *GOD* trying to get across to us?' This requires that personal prayer, silence and reflection be built into the daily schedule. It helps if early on the group agrees on the balance between discussion, private reflection, prayer and liturgy.

Prayer is an I-Thou encounter, a face to face affair, an attentive listening for 'the sound of sheer silence' (1Kg 19:12). We need to become comfortable in sitting at the table of the Trinity or Jesus' table for extended periods. There our conversion goes on silently, so that as the three divine Persons make their wise and loving choices – as in deciding on the Incarnation, we too may make wise and loving choices on the issues at hand: 'the love that shapes our choices must descend from above' (see Ignatius: *Spiritual Exercises* 184).

We can ask: 'What is the most beautiful thing we can do?' In creating the tabernacle in the desert, only the best would do! (See Ex 25-28).

A contemplative quality begins to emerge as the group, in W Burghardt's phrase, takes 'a long loving look at the real'. Having discussed the topic from every angle we come to waiting mode. We wait with Elijah (1 Kg 19:11-13). 'I have waited for the Lord' (Psalm 40).

We pray for the Spirit's inspiration. *Veni, sancte Spiritus!* 'The Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words' (Rm 8:26), but we are to become ever more alert to the Spirit's promptings, and respond with 'Thy will be done!'

We allow God to be the God of Surprises. 'My thoughts are not yours...' (Is 55:8-10); 'I am doing a new thing'... (Is 43:19). We learn to think outside the box, as we grapple with divine imagination. 'How inscrutable are God's ways!' (Rm 11:33).

Inner confusion may come to light. 'I want this, but also its opposite!' Discernment may be needed to discover whether the Spirit of God or the spirit of desolation is leading us

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We ask for discerning hearts as the young Solomon did (1Kg 3:9ff). As persons truly in love we want to be led by the desires of the beloved, who is divine. ‘The Lord was not in the wind or the earthquake but in the sound of sheer silence’ (see 1 Kg 19:12). In the silence of the heart God will be found: ‘Shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and who will reward you’ (Mt 6:6). To do this is an act of pure faith, over-riding human willpower and determination.

Intercession for the group is a primary task of the facilitator(s): outsiders can also be engaged for this mode of prayer. As W Wink observes: ‘History belongs to the intercessors ... It is God’s power, not ours, that answers to the world’s needs’.

INNER FREEDOM

It is around inner freedom that synodality stands or falls, and so it requires more explicit attention than is often given to it. There will be a spectrum of freedom in the group: each can ask: ‘How free am I?’ The group can then be asked corporately: ‘When were you at your freest?’ It is good to celebrate such events: some will have been noted in the history line above.

Now ask: ‘What does inner freedom feel like for you? Do you try to live by the Spirit?’ (see Gal 5:16) ‘The wind blows where it chooses ... So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit’ (Jn 3:8). But since the wind has no fixed position, let’s imagine each member of the group becoming as free as the wind! What feeling does that image generate?

We need to search our hearts for *blocks* to inner freedom:

- ‘What stifles my/our freedom to do what God wants? What elephants lurk in my/our kitchen?’ ‘Does the Spirit find me hard going?’
- Acknowledge that ‘the heart is devious above all else: it is perverse – who can understand it?’ (Jer 17:9). ‘Out of the heart come evil intentions ...’ (Mt 15:18-19). Am I immune from this?
- ‘Quarry the granite rock with razors, or moor the vessel with a thread of silk; then may you hope with such keen and delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against those giants, the passion and the pride of man.’
- Individual, group and general bias are operative in every group: they emerge as blind spots, non-negotiables, defences, filters against vulnerability, unwanted and ignored insights, the infection caused by the prevailing secular and religious culture. The list is endless. Where am I?

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- What is the capacity of the group for self-displacement? Can we go beyond personal preferences and private agendas?
- Are decisions often made from fear – of loss of control, for example, rather than from divine prompting? What of K Rahner’s theology of risk?
- Misuse of power: ruling by threat, by inequality; by domination. Hungry sheep are not fed (see Ez 33; Jn 21). Does fear of making mistakes prevent us from choosing the good? ‘To the extent that the Churches attempted to dominate and control, they undermined the Christian faith’.
- Structural Clericalism: Unless this is demolished there cannot be full synodality.
- Where in the Church are the important decisions made? ‘Nothing about us without us’ – does this level of inclusion operate? Servant leadership? How deeply do we believe that the Spirit is working within the People of God and wants to be heard? Who controls the process of discernment: God, the Spirit, the group – or myself?

CONVERSIONS OF HEART

A self-correcting process of learning develops as the group works along: dogmatic positions are abandoned, and this brings a softening of hearts. The group can share these experiences of grace at work, whether they be Damascus-style or in more subtle ‘Aha!’ moments.

Conversion to Others: Respect and openness towards the other participants grows. The command to love one another deepens: ‘Love one another as I have loved you’ (Jn 15:12).

Conversion to the Father: God becomes the important One. Trust in God emerges: ‘I know the plans’ (Jer 29:11); ‘I have loved you ...’ (Jer 31:3); ‘Do not fear: I will help you’ (Is 41:14); ‘What are human beings ...?’ (Ps 8:4); ‘My thoughts are higher ...’ (Is 55:8-10).

Conversion to the Son: ‘Do you love me?’ (Jn 21:15-17). Openness to kenosis if decisions entail suffering? (see Ph 2:5-11). ‘Do as I Have done to you’ (Jn 13:15). ‘I came, not to be served, but to serve’ (Mk 10:45).

Conversion to the Spirit: What is the Spirit saying to the churches and to the group? (see Rv 2:29 etc); ‘No Holy Spirit, no Synod!’ (Pope Francis). Could the Spirit wish to speak through *you*?

As these conversions inch forward, inner growth and a deeper sense of community occur, even if no great decisions are made. A communal discernment is like a retreat, in that the central intention is to meet God.

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PART TWO: THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT

PRELIMINARIES

Group Formation: If choice is allowed, choose only those who can imagine alternatives to the *status quo*: discernment means openness to change if God so desires. Balanced representation and inclusion.

Gelling: the group shifts from individual to communal with the help of ice-breakers, social events, informal dress-code, seating arrangements etc..

Location and duration of the gathering must allow for hearing difficulties and stamina.

Topic(s) for discernment: Issues must be clear and unambiguous so far as possible: this requires preliminary work, assembling of data etc.

Guidelines for engagement: Members should speak from conviction and experience, and contribute tentatively, not dogmatically. Each must try to put a good interpretation on what others say, and hope for the same in return.

In-depth listening: Brief listening exercises help. Cardiac listening shows respect. ‘The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing’ (Pascal). Not listening to others means not listening to God. Only through listening attitudes does the assembly mellow as a safe and creative forum, in which members humbly share what seems to be coming from the good Spirit. Oratory, persuasion, negative silences and threats have no place.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Commitment: Agree on full participation – this means parking private agendas, business and golf: empty the diary!

Consensus: Agree on what constitutes consensus and whether decisions have to be ratified by a higher authority.

PRESENTATION OF THE ISSUE FOR DISCERNMENT

All relevant data must be to hand: nothing hidden, no undisclosed agenda. Questions can be raised for clarification.

DISCUSSION AND PRAYER

- Initial airing of views. ‘Let your words give grace’ (Ep 4:29) – *Parrhesia* – courageous speech.
- Who will speak for those affected but not represented? ‘The

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Lord hears the cry of the poor' (Ps 34). But who else in the group does? What effect will the proposals have on the poor and on the earth?

- Private prayer follows on the initial airing of the topic.
- Next, in small groups the fruits of this prayer are shared, ideally from the heart rather than from the head. (See *Vademecum* Appendix B 8 on Spiritual Conversation). Round *One* asks: What came to each in personal prayer. Round *Two* asks: what struck each member in the contributions of the others. No interventions; instead, silent pauses between speakers. This may be called 'spiritual conversation': the emphasis is on what emerges from one's dialogue with God, not from one's homespun thoughts and convictions. Silent pauses gradually become richer.
- Small group summaries are presented to the plenary group.
- Further silent reflection.
- Pro & Con: Moving beyond acknowledged personal preferences, all participants combine to collate the arguments 'FOR' and then 'AGAINST' the proposal. This is a liberating exercise which helps to bond the group and develop unity of purpose in the search for God's will.
- Consolation: The group is asked to search for personal experience of some of the gifts of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (see Gal 5:22). Consolation brings conviction, energy, freedom of spirit, a sense that the decision is consonant with gospel values. Comments are made such as the following: 'I was against this at the start, but now I feel we are being truly authentic: this seems the wisest and most loving choice'. 'I am willing to go this way, even if it brings suffering'.

Graced Conflict: Conflict is to be expected. See Jesus in conflict with Pharisees, disciples, etc. '... Not peace but the sword' (Mt 10:34-36).

The following nugget of wisdom was forged in the conflicts of Reformation times, and its distinctions can carry a group a long way: In necessary matters, unity; in doubtful/disputed matters, freedom; in all matters, charity. (*In necessariis unitas; in dubiis libertas; in omnibus caritas*).

EMERGENCE OF THE DECISION

The Uncertainty Principle: Members are asked to maintain openness to the movements of the Spirit until the last moment. 'Don't worry what to say' (Mt 10:19).

Secret voting, to preserve inner freedom.

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Consensus: Reminder of agreement on what constitutes consensus. Consensus is not certitude: the decision is an act of trust that God wants to lead the group in one direction rather than another.

Unanimity? Recognition of the minority's difficulties may allow an agreed modification of the decision to be made: thus unanimity emerges.

Celebration: The group can say, 'We have met God!' 'It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us' (Ac 15:28). Alleluia!

Confirmation by higher authority may be required.

Implementation: Who, what, how, and when.

Note: A final session to harvest the fruits of the experience will reveal growth in the sense of community and deepening respect for the others. The sense of growth in relationship with God also emerges: 'We are in tune, at least for now, with the divine ordering of the world. Our self-profile is enriched: we *are* as of now a synodal Church!'

Institution and Charism. Underlying the widespread friction of the post-Vatican II years was the challenge to combine fidelity to the deposit of revelation with respect for change and development. Herein lies the tension between institution and charism. If that tension is to be life giving, then respect for tradition must be combined with openness to new experiences. Leadership must interpret well the calls of God as proposed by prophetic voices. The impetus to change comes from the Holy Spirit, who is working constantly to renew the face of the earth and gives to particular persons gifts or charisms, which are to be integrated into the life of the Church for its continued growth. Diversity must not bring division, and uniformity must not quench the Spirit.

– BRIAN GROGAN, S.J., *Pedro Arrupe: A Heart Larger than the World*, (Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2022) p. 89.

Becoming a Synodal Church in Local Context: Conversation, Consultation and Dialogue

Anne M. Codd

1. CONVERSATION, CONSULTATION AND DIALOGUE

In this short reflection I will keep faith with the context assigned to me by the organisers of the symposium: the local church, by which, here, I mean the pastoral reality of life in the parish and diocese. I will begin by exploring what I mean by conversation. I will then say how I see consultation as different from conversation. Finally, in this section, I will propose an understanding of dialogue in terms of both of these. Please note, in holding unapologetically that honest conversation is integral to a synodal way of being church, I am not in any way proposing that our church be organized on a congregational model.¹

Against the background of the Tridentine reforms, Roman Catholic catechesis and pastoral practice inevitably became, and have remained for centuries, highly regulated. As we know, the centrality of the sacramental and liturgical life of the church to the consolidation of Catholic identity gave rise in the popular mind to a perception of the ordained as holding the keys of the kingdom to a degree determined by their rank. Apart from the hard facts of governance structures, there was and still is the subtlety of spiritual power, even if only as projected on to those in Holy Orders. Communication between clergy and laity is often, consciously or unconsciously, coloured by the reality of this situation.

Webster's dictionary defines *conversation* in general as 'oral exchange of sentiments, observations, opinions, or ideas', and a

1 This is a form of Church governance in which final human authority rests with the local or particular congregation when it gathers for decision-making.

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conversation as ‘an instance of such an exchange’. Accordingly, in contemporary terms, ‘conversation’ can be used to describe practices of sharing experiences, information, views, or even hopes and dreams. The term conveys a sense of mutual, trusting, open-ended exploration. There is no suggestion here of a specific, ultimate purpose, planning or decision-making. Nevertheless, as we know, real conversations in which parties are present to one another on some kind of common ground can be highly generative.

Great conversations can happen spontaneously. In the absence of formal agreements, players learn to hold personal boundaries and to indicate the levels of confidentiality they need and expect from their companions. They will generally know where the conversation has, so to speak, taken the participants.

Then there are the conversations that are sought out deliberately. While still exploratory in nature, these may have a focus and boundaries that are mutually agreed.

Pastoral ministry is replete with conversations. For the reflective practitioner these can be truly ‘windows of wonder’. If, as we believe, it is in God that we live and move and have our being; if, as Christians living between Pentecost and Parousia, we bear in the world the creating, healing and sustaining presence of the Divine Three, then each encounter within our faith communities is potentially a sign and instrument of the kingdom, and equally so for all parties.

I realise that quality pastoral conversations require maturity in our understanding of person and role within the ordered communion of our church. However, I propose that mutually honest conversations which honour our basic equality as human beings, as well as our radical equality within the community of the baptised, are foundational to the Synodal Pathway. Without such conversation, including the mutual vulnerability which it implies, much experience of the joys as well as the challenges and struggles of life - and much of God’s action in people’s lives – will remain unspoken and unrecognised. I wonder if this is what Eamonn Conway is thinking about when he describes synodality as ‘trying to eavesdrop on God’s conversation with God’s people’.²

Here I want to instance what I have experienced time and again in pastoral conversation: the gap between the sense of God with which faithful members can be gifted and what church teaching tells them. Why did mothers – and fathers too – have to suffer for so long the pain of thinking that their unbaptised babies would be forever deprived of the joys of heaven, would never ‘see the face of God’, through absolutely no fault of their own? Why, indeed until they met a wise pastor, whose authority they trusted, who

2 Interview with Wendy Grace, www.iCatholic.ie, accessed 16/05/2022

confirmed what they knew in their bones? Why did it take until the middle of the 20th century for limbo to be ‘abolished’? I don’t need to elaborate on the practice of churching, but recall vividly several pastoral conversations in programmed house groups where mothers and grandmothers shared memories with horrified daughters. There is no rhetoric (or theology) which could meet that reality. And what pain is still being caused by doctrinaire positions which remain closed to the experience of intuitive faith, and the evidence of reason and science?

Brian Devlin, whistle-blower and author in the former Cardinal Keith O’Brien case has observed “We don’t have a healthy culture in the Catholic Church ... there is nowhere to have [honest, perhaps difficult] conversations. We have got an awful lot of growing up to do as an organisation, and as a Church.”³

Turning now to *consultation* in the pastoral context. Those of us who have worked with pastoral councils at parish and diocesan level down the years will know how poorly received the consultative status of councils can be. Canon Law calls for consultation that is more than a formality. Authentic consultation does not take place in a vacuum. It presupposes appropriate communication of available information, in two-way exchange. Thoroughly conducted, the process gives those consulted input and influence in decisions. Nevertheless, the ‘consultative status’ is easily perceived as keeping the laity in their place.

In this context, to present the synodal pathway always and only in terms of consultation would, I suggest, leave in place the assumed differentials of knowledge, wisdom, and insight as well as the actual decision-making authority and attendant responsibility which the term generally communicates. The insight and care which is needed to work through this block to participation is a pointer, I suggest, to the serious challenge we face in becoming a synodal church.

I now want to suggest that it is in the concept and practice of *dialogue* that we can find the nexus between consultation and conversation. By this I mean that true dialogue partakes of both the openness and generativity of conversation, and the clear and purposeful nature of consultation. Critical to true dialogue in all its rich possibility is, of course, transparency, whereby the intentions and understanding of all are made known at each stage of the process.

My espousal of dialogue as ‘the primary language of the faith community’ is based on Walter Kasper’s long-established

3 Sarah McDonald, “laity harbour ‘deep-rooted clericalism’” in *The Tablet*, 3 March 2022 <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/15086/many-laity-harbour-deep-rooted-clericalism-accessed-16/05/2022>

understanding of the three publics of the Church: the sense of the faithful, the ministry of theology, and the service of the magisterial authority which articulates in a compelling manner the fruits of dialogue between the three. I am wedded to Kasper's principle that no public may with legitimacy claim a monopoly of the Spirit. It is in dialogue that we work together towards ever greater uncovering of truth. It is through authentic dialogue that we can participate appropriately in discerning what the Spirit is saying to the Church in our time and place. And through dialogue we enable the transformative action of that Spirit.

Speaking in April of this year with participants in an International Conference on Moral Theology, Pope Francis said "The dialogical method invites us to overcome an abstract idea of truth, one removed from the lived experience of people, cultures, and religions."⁴ This point is made clearly by Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia*.⁵

On a field trip in the diocese of Talca, Chile, in 2001 I encountered first hand a diocese in the roll-out phase of a synodal process. Legendary Bishop Don Carlos Gonzales, imbued with the spirit of Vatican II, had by then drawn together the fruit of a four-year synodal process, distilled through the theological reflection of the planning Council of the diocese. I met that council and interrogated the members until they finally understood my burning question and provided an answer that matched what I was experiencing – the fruits of dialogue. Don Carlos had published a document entitled *The Call of the Spirit in the Voice of the Synod*. Everywhere I went on that field trip, at every level of the diocesan community from remote Christian Community, to parish, zone, and diocese, every officer, group, team and commission was working to the vision contained in that document. I remember remarking to my sister-guide; 'they can't all be making it up'! Sadly, as so often happens, sustainability has also been a challenge in Talca.

4 <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-05/pope-francis-moral-theology-conference-amoris-laetitia.html> Accessed 16/05/2022

5 Since "time is greater than space", I would make it clear that not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium. Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it. This will always be the case as the Spirit guides us towards the entire truth (cf. Jn 16:13), until he leads us fully into the mystery of Christ and enables us to see all things as he does. Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs. For "cultures are in fact quite diverse and every general principle ... needs to be inculturated, if it is to be respected and applied". *Amoris Laetitia* n.3, https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf Accessed 16/05/2022

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There is one further aspect of dialogue in the local church which I must bring up here. That is the possibility that even in the local church context there may well be sources of new knowledge, for example in the fields of science, with which theologians, pastors and church personnel must engage in theological reflection if we are not to ghettoise ourselves in a perceived perfect past.

2. EXPERIENCES IN PASTORAL SETTINGS

I now want to share from experience what can happen when a genuine culture of dialogue is established. When priest(s) and other pastoral leaders sit down with people, even in formal settings, and enter with interest and openness into honest conversation and consultation, that is into dialogue, everyone can be surprised. I will recount briefly *two* examples.

Many years ago, I was a member of a pastoral leadership team in a newly-constituted parish. The area had expanded on the periphery of a large and well-established parish community. In response to ‘how do you dream about this parish now coming into being, as your parish?’ the primary concern was not: bring back the youth, welcome married priests, ordain women. No, the desire that was uppermost in open gatherings of hundreds of parishioners was ‘please, please, can this be a parish in which we are valued for who we are in ourselves, a community that is not based on a ‘Who’s Who’.

More recently, as already recounted in the recent publication *Maynooth College Reflects on Covid-19*,⁶ a deliberately-assembled pastoral focus group of diverse members from three church area communities in Dublin were also invited to dream dreams for the future of church life. Once again, the recurring desire reflected an immediate and pressing need: space, time and companions for conversation, opportunity to talk, to explore the questions of life, to air questions and diverse accounts of origin, meaning and purpose.

In a synodal church we will be valued for who we are in ourselves, and there will be a culture of conversation which nourishes real communion.

There is a religious sensibility that is evident in the abiding presence in people’s lives of what Thomas Luckmann calls ‘shrinking transcendence’ – wonder and awe at the mystery of new life, memorials for the dear departed, celebrations to mark milestones on life-journeys, outreach to others in need, concern for the planet and welcome for the stranger, desire for peace and

6 Anne Codd PBVM and Michael Hurley, ‘Becoming Church, a Parish Journey into, through and beyond the Pandemic’, in *Maynooth College Reflects on Covid-19: New Realities in Uncertain Times*, Jeremy Corley, Neil Xavier O’Donoghue and Salvador Ryan (Eds.), Dublin, Messenger Publications, 2021, Pp. 31-44

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generosity for the refugee. I think also of the appreciation that many have of our (very Christian) artistic heritage. In a synodal church this innate capacity for the spiritual will meet with welcome and understanding in wide-awake pastoral settings, and find expression and nurture in the church's liturgy.

This is the kind of church in which issues of equality and inclusion, ministries and governance, and ultimately mission can be raised, the truth be spoken in love, and the heart of the good news be the guiding light for a church that walks the way as one.

3. A REASON TO BE HOPEFUL

When Pope Francis decided to phase the Synod on Marriage and the Family into two sessions in order to engage the faithful in the gathering of experience and views, the *instrumentum laboris*, basically a questionnaire, was severely criticised. It was found to be inaccessible and heavily laden with 'church' thinking, Take-up of the invitation to participate was uneven to say the least.

The proceedings of the synodal sessions in Rome were tense, and at times intransigent. And yet, we got *Amoris Laetitia*, grounded and ground-breaking, inspiring as well as challenging.

In the view of Father Miguel Yáñez professor of moral theology at the Gregorian University '*Amoris Laetitia* is the first fruit of the synodal church both because it was the result of the consultation that took place with lay people before the synod and because every one of its proposals is rooted in what the synod voted by a two-thirds majority in 2015 ... With it, the Second Vatican Council came back to life.'⁷

In the service of the good news of the Gospel of love, *Amoris Laetitia* calls local church— as in church of a country or region - to take up its authority and responsibility. It is no wonder that it is still contentious, but like Vatican II it cannot be unwritten.

Interest and contribution to the Synod on Synodality is likewise varied. But the direction is set, and we each make our choice and take our attendant responsibility.

7 <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2022/05/06/pope-francis-amoris-laetitia-242942> Accessed 26/05/2022

Synodality, the *sensus fidei*, and doctrine

Gerry O' Hanlon

As synodality gains traction within the Catholic Church, globally and in Ireland, we may anticipate tensions and questions around its connection with doctrine, in particular concerning contested, so-called 'hot button' issues. With regard to the latter, it is clear that several teachings to do with gender (for example, the ordination of women) and sex (for example, *Humanae Vitae* and contraception) have not been 'received' by the faithful, while others (for example on homosexuality and *in vitro* fertilization) are seemingly headed in the same direction. It can be said, then, that in general – while *Amoris Laetitia* stands out as a welcome exception in its pastoral tone – ecclesial discourse on sexuality and gender is unpersuasive. Does synodality offer an opportunity to revisit this situation and, in particular, to allow a closer relationship between the doctrinal and pastoral?

I have already indicated in a previous article here why this may not be so straight forward and yet still be possible.¹ Given the importance of the topic I want to offer some further reflections in the hope of providing some clarity on what is possible.

REPRISE OF MAIN ARGUMENT

Let me begin with a reprise of the argument in my January 2022 article. For Pope Francis – as his classic formulation of synodality in his 50th Anniversary Address of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17, October, 2015) makes clear – the supernatural sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people of God (*fideliium*) is at

1 O'Hanlon, 'Bishop, can Church teaching change'? – doctrinal change and the synodal pathway, *The Furrow*, 73, January 2022, 3-9. See also O'Hanlon, 'The Sense of Faith' and Some Contested Issues, in Eamonn Conway, Eugene Duffy and Mary McDaid, editors, *The Synodal Pathway, When Rhetoric Meets Reality*, Dublin: Columba, 2022, 101-111

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the heart of synodality. This *sensus fidei fidelium* was the subject of a study (SF) by the International Theological Commission published in 2014 (ITC). Here the authors make it clear that, while biblically based and well rooted in the patristic and scholastic tradition, the ‘sense of faith of the faithful’ came into its own as a theological trope with the rise of historical consciousness in the 19th century. Defined as a kind of spontaneous spiritual instinct or intuition of what is true, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation, the Spirit who will lead us into ‘all the truth’ (Jn. 16: 13), allowing us to penetrate faith more fully ‘with right judgement’ and apply it ‘more fully in daily life’ (SF, 44). It is not, in the first instance, a reflective, conceptual expression. It is associated in particular with the name of John Henry Newman, and with the theme of doctrinal development. Newman could say of tradition that it ‘... manifests itself variously at various times: sometimes by the mouth of the episcopacy, sometimes by the doctors, sometimes by the people, sometimes by liturgies, rites, ceremonies, and customs, by events, *disputes*, movements, and all those other phenomena which are comprised under the name of history’ (SF, 39-my emphasis). He taught that we could discern genuine tradition through the ‘*pastorum et fidelium conspiratio*’ (the consensus of pastors and faithful).

Where there is not this consensus, where there is disharmony between a teaching or practice and the authentic Christian faith by which they live, individual believers ‘... react as a music lover does to false notes in the performance of a piece of music’ and ‘... may deny assent even to the teaching of legitimate pastors if they do not recognize in that teaching the voice of Christ, the Good Shepherd’ (SF, 62-3). While great patience is needed to discern this ‘sense of the faith’ for the whole church, it is important that the magisterium in particular takes the means to listen adequately to what is being expressed and try different ways to consult the faithful (synods are explicitly mentioned- SF, 74-77; 120-125). In cases ‘where the reception of magisterial teaching by the faithful is met with difficulty and resistance’ the magisterium should reflect on the teaching ‘that has been given and consider whether it needs clarification or reformulation’ (SF, 80). Later, the authors note that ‘...Problems arise when the majority of the faithful remain indifferent to doctrinal or moral decisions taken by the magisterium or when they positively reject them. This lack of reception may indicate a weakness or lack of faith on the part of the people of God, caused by an insufficiently critical embrace of contemporary culture. *But in some cases it may indicate that certain decisions have been taken by those in authority without due consideration of the experience and the sensus fidei of the faithful, or without*

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sufficient consultation of the faithful by the magisterium' (SF, 123-my emphasis).

I note here that while 'clarification' (SF, 80) may simply refer to a more idiomatic or culturally appropriate and compassionate translation of teaching (and so correspond to the pledge of the Irish Bishops, after their consultation for the Synod on the Family revealed widespread resistance to teaching on sexuality and gender among the Irish faithful, to communicate the same teaching better), the term 'reformulation' is open to a stronger interpretation. Indeed this latter meaning is suggested when, going on to examine the role of theologians and the *sensus fidelium*, the study goes on to stress the role of theology in helping the faithful to know with greater clarity and precision the authentic meaning of Scripture, the proper contents of Tradition, and '...in which areas a *revision of previous positions* is needed' (SF, 84 -my emphasis). The study, incidentally, makes it clear that all this pertains not just to matters of faith but also to the development of moral teaching (SF, 73).

Given this mainline presentation of orthodox church teaching on synodality, the 'sense of faith of the faithful' and doctrinal development, and given that we now have widespread indifference and also resistance to several areas of teaching on sexuality and gender, it seems clear that this lack of reception is problematic, not least because it can manifest itself for some as an obstacle to mission. How do we go about addressing it? Epistemologically, from what I have outlined above, and indeed historically (from the many examples given in SF and in my previous article, including issues like slavery, the headship of the male in marriage, access to communion for the divorced and remarried, and indeed, in Scripture itself, the ruling of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 about the Gentiles) it seems clear that synodality, with its focus on the 'sense of faith of the faithful', may lead directly or indirectly to doctrinal change. Furthermore it is clear that the debate leading to this change may arise out of disputes, and that the change in question may not easily be explained in terms of linear development, but may well have aspects of correction or revision. So, in principle, it seems to me that it is mistaken to categorically rule out any connection between synodality and doctrinal change.

However, not everything that is permissible ought to be pursued. This leads us to the question of practical judgement and wisdom in human affairs: are we not at risk of conflict and disunity if we dare to tackle issues which are so divisive?

WHEN IS IT RIGHT TO CONFRONT CONTESTED ISSUES DIRECTLY?

The two-session Synod on the Family offers us two interesting and contrasting examples of the issue at hand. *First*, in an earlier draft

on homosexuality, it is reported that there was a significant change in tone and content from the traditional stance, as the authors seemed intent on listening carefully to the ‘sense of the faith’ in some parts of the world, and following the compassionate lead of Pope Francis. In the event there was a significant negative reaction to this draft from bishops in other parts of the world, so that the final text of the Synod offered little that was new. A practical, prudential judgement had been made – this topic was not yet ripe for the kind of discernment that would involve significant change and yet preserve ecclesial unity.

Secondly, by way of contrast, on the topic of the access to Eucharist of the divorced and remarried, there was sufficient movement to allow the Pope to judge that (in his famous footnote 351 in *Amoris Laetitia*) in certain circumstances, carefully discerned, Eucharistic participation may be appropriate. I note that this was a hotly contested issue both before and during the Synod, not least among German-speaking bishops who disagreed vehemently, in private and in public, about what should be done. In the event it seems to have been a theological conversation among these bishops (who included the likes of Cardinals Kasper, Muller and Schonborn), recalling the teaching of Thomas Aquinas, which resulted in their breakthrough to agreement, which was then signalled to the rest of the Assembly.

Reflecting on these two *contrasting* examples I think we can learn a great deal. While it is always correct to speak openly ‘in the Lord’ (*parrhesia*), it still may be premature in some cases to arrive at a conclusive judgement on certain contested issues. After all, the issue around the Gentiles had been brewing for a long time before it came to a head at the Council of Jerusalem: problems take time to mature sufficiently for resolution. However, as Irish-American sociologist of religion Michele Dillon has pointed out,² once one has opted for a synodal model of church with open dialogue at its core, then ‘... the cat is out of the bag’, the dialogue continues, and ‘any lost opportunities, such as the silencing of women’s ordination, is not lost forever; it can be recovered’.

HOW TO MOVE FORWARD?

The ‘sense of faith of the faithful’ is pointing to a feeling that there is something fundamentally awry with the Church’s current ‘take’ on sexuality and gender. On sexuality, one way of putting this theologically is described by Lawler and Salzman: ‘... The majority of Catholic ethicists are now agreed that decisions

2 Michele Dillon, *Postsecular Catholicism, Relevance and Renewal*, Oxford University Press, 2018, 164

of morality or immorality in sexual ethics should be based on *interpersonal relationship* and circumstances, not on *physical acts* like masturbation, kissing, premarital, marital, and extra-marital sexual intercourse, both heterosexual and homosexual'.³

Similarly while there are streams of feminist discourse (mainly emanating from Continental Europe) which are quite comfortable with the notion of male and female equality within diversity – and thus open to some version of a complementarity theory- Mary Ann Hinsdale, in company with many others, criticizes the dominant official Catholic version of this which, while allowing women leadership roles in secular life, posits their 'receptive' role within a theology of complementarity as rendering them unsuitable for the leadership required in ordained ministry.⁴ And it is surely ironic that in this debate around the ordination of women the objections to women being understood as '*in persona Christi*' are maintained in the face of growing feminist study of the Eucharistic symbolism of the female body – God nourishes us through the body of his Son just as a mother feeds her child, aptly illustrating the 'Take and eat. This is my body ... This is my blood ... Given up for you' of Matthew 26, 26.⁵ There are some – including not a few feminists- who maintain that what is required is a reformed clergy and not women priests – but why make this an 'either/or' choice, why not embrace the more Catholic 'both/and'. After all, unless there is very good reason, what feisty 12 year old girl in today's world is going to find attractive an institution that forbids women to occupy positions of ordained leadership?

The reliance of the magisterium on one strand of theological thinking on matters sexual and gender, in the midst of a rich pluralism and a majority of opinion which differs from this particular strand, is problematic, not least because it clashes with the 'sense of faith of the faithful'. It does suggest – as is happening in the matter of the female diaconate- that one approach for an often beleaguered magisterium – at both local and universal levels- is to commission a theological study (perhaps, at the universal level, by

- 3 Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman, Pope Francis, Civil Unions, and Same-Sex Marriage: Theological Reflections, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 87, February 2022, 3-21 at 18. See a somewhat similar shift being advocated by Julio Martinez (from a deductive, universal to an inductive, historically conscious methodology in sexual and bio-medical ethics) in Suzanne Mulligan, Receiving *Amoris Laetitia*: Learning and Listening as a Global Church, *The Furrow*, 73, July/August, 2022, 387-394 at 389-390
- 4 Mary Ann Hinsdale, IHM, A Feminist Reflection on Postconciliar Catholic Ecclesiology, in Richard R. Gaillardetz and Edward P. Hennenberg, editors, *A Church with Open Doors, Catholic Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium*, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2015, 112-137
- 5 Maria Clara Luccchetti Bingemer, *Transforming the Church and Society from a Feminist Perspective*, Barcelona: Christianisme I Justícia, 2020, 21-24

the ITC) to examine the other possibilities opened up by the rich pluralism of theological thinking that is available. This move can only be authentic, however, if it is seen as a step towards a fresh discernment, and not as a tactic of avoidance and delay.

A NOTE ON DISCERNMENT

The examples above, in particular the one involving the German bishops, raises some interesting points around our current understanding of discernment. First, I think we are correct to focus just now in our synodal process on discernment as spiritual conversation. This allows us to be attentive to what others are saying and on what the Holy Spirit is saying, cultivating that interior freedom which contrasts with a more common spirit of debate and discussion which harbours a bias towards insisting that ‘I win’, that my argument prevails.

However, sometimes this is interpreted in an anti-intellectual way as meaning that we must leave aside our own deepest thoughts and convictions, that all debate and dispute, and especially all advocacy, is to be avoided, so that, in the much quoted phrase, we avoid a ‘parliamentary way’ of proceeding. Remember, Francis also said that what went on at the Amazon Synod on hot-button issues was like a ‘rich and necessary parliament’, that Thomas Aquinas did theology through the method of *Disputatio* and *Quaestio*: we need the *intellectual search for truth* as part of the discernment process, involving as it will conflict and practices of resistance and protest.

And so, as we go, we need to look out for how to integrate various elements: Gaillardetz speaks of Councils as involving debate, discussion, gossip, lobbying, saints and sinners, hopes and fears, optimists and pessimists – and all of this is part of discernment! Brian Grogan coined the phrase ‘noisy discernment’: yes, we need all the techniques of ‘spiritual conversation’, respectful listening, but we also need fora where we can debate with vigour and rigour, and not become too po- faced and pious around what we are about. This more incarnational mode of discernment was practised at Vatican II by meetings of the bishops with theologians at evening times or times of the year when the Council was in recess: we can do something similar in Ireland and globally this time around – discernment must include that search for truth in discussion and debate, as indeed the German speaking bishops showed at the Synod on the Family when their theological conflicts and debates yielded to a shared discernment which was, as I noted above, instrumental in providing the papal solution to the issue of the divorced and remarried. So, there are many phases to discernment

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and sometimes they become intertwined. Our current focus on the neglected skill of ‘spiritual conversation’ may blind us to the need for well-researched facts, arguments, even disputes, as we prepare ourselves for the ‘felt knowledge’ that is characteristic of the Spirit’s gift in discernment.

A CAPITULATION TO THE FASHION OF THE DAY?

On the contested issues that I have mentioned one sometimes hears them being dismissed as ‘middle-class concerns of liberals in the First World’, part of N. America’s ‘culture wars’ which are better avoided. Besides, other Christian churches which have addressed such issues, it is said, have not proved notably more attractive to adherents.

Yes, we must resist a too facile compliance with and assimilation to the spirit of the age – not least in socio-economic matters! And our cultural discernment will be aware of this and seek to focus on what is true, and on how much truth matters to so many people caught up on the wrong side of this debate in their intimate lives – be they rich, poor or in-between. However, if it is possible to change and be faithful to our gospel mandate, it is difficult to deny that for so many ‘ordinary’ people the Church would then appear more attractive and less as a ‘culturally irrelevant minority’. This means a facilitation of mission, always a primary concern for a Church which is convinced that it bears good news to the nations, is called to be a ‘light for the world’.

It is of course a significant and very welcome step forward for someone like Pope Francis to come out with an attitude of ‘who am I to judge’: this has had enormous positive effects on various minority groups and individuals within them, it can be transformative. But compassion in the longer term, while always necessary and always preferable to judgementalism, is *not* sufficient: are we really saying that while we want to be compassionate towards people who practise ‘artificial’ birth control, are gay, experience a call to priesthood but can’t follow up because they are female, that, nonetheless, they are still ‘wrong’? This is where the pastoral and the doctrinal collide: as they did at the Council of Jerusalem, which did not shirk making a decision.

CONFLICT

Pope Francis has been clear that conflict is not to be avoided.⁶ It has to be confronted, endured, with tensions held open (but not suppressed) until some kind of insight comes. This insight is often

6 Pope Francis/Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream*, London: Simon & Schuster, 2020, 74-94

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not a simple resolution of the matter in question, an ‘either/or’ answer, but may come as a surprise, an ‘overflow’, a signature of God’s working in our lives and in our world. But it may also come as a more mundane fruit of years of debate and discussion, leading to a subtle change in society and ecclesial sensibility – see the issue around the headship of the male in marriage- like the gentle and timely falling of an apple from the tree.

CONCLUSION

I have been offering some reflections on the connection between synodality, the ‘sense of faith’ and doctrine. At a time when secularization bites deeply, when the poor and excluded remain on the peripheries, when immigrants are often unwelcome, when war rages, when our earth groans, when victim and survivors of clerical and institutional abuse continue to suffer, it may seem that the ‘hot button’ issues of sexuality and gender are trivial by comparison. However, I have argued that they too are part of our ‘signs of the times’, they matter deeply to the persons concerned, and that as our church transforms to this new ‘social imaginary’ of synodality, the systematic inclusion of the ‘sense of faith of the faithful’ in our search for truth and life-giving teaching offers a wonderful opportunity which, despite the risks involved, we need to take. We need to do so not least because by avoiding these issues we alienate those who would otherwise engage with us on the more important questions just mentioned, and we further the image of a church as institution which lacks credibility.

Grace. At every moment of the Church’s history, therefore, decisions and choices within the ecclesial community affect, for good or ill, the church’s health. The thriving of the church’s communal life and the community’s faithfulness to its mission both depend on responses to grace rather than evolution.

– RICHARD LENNAN, *Tilling the Church: Theology for an Unfinished Agenda*, (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2022) xvii.

New Ecclesial Movements, Synodality and Co-Responsibility

Tony Hanna

When the New Ecclesial Movements (NEMs) burst on to the church landscape in the immediate aftermath of the Second Vatican Council they were a totally unexpected, unforeseen phenomenon. In the last fifty plus years of their existence, not only have they had a huge impact on the church's missionary outreach but their *modus operandi* has impacted, albeit unintentionally, on the very structure and organisation of the church itself. Their arrival coincided more or less with the dismantling of the then dominant notion of church as a perfect society and the rediscovery of the pilgrim people of God motif in the Second Vatican Council. This led to what Richard Rohr calls the 'destabilising of the imperial ego'¹ and what Paul Lakeland, the American ecclesialologist, calls 'the grace of self doubt'²

The church that many of us grew up in had a very pompous view of itself, not given to any semblance of self doubt. Not only had we little or nothing to learn from other traditions but inside our own bubble we had those who taught and those who learned (Docens &

1 Richard Rohr, *A Spring Within Us: A Book of Daily Meditations* (CAC Publishing: 2016), 121-122.

2 Paul Lakeland, "Reflections on the 'Grace of Self-Doubt,'" in *Ecclesiology and Exclusion. Boundaries of Being and Belonging in Postmodern Times*, ed. Dennis M. Doyle, Timothy J. Furry, and Pascal D. Bazzell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 2012), 13-17.

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Discens) – the pecking order of the pyramid was crystal clear and set in stone. Each one knew his/her place and the responsibility for the church was hugely dependent on where you sat in the pyramidal hierarchy. My mother spoke of the ‘higher calling’ that priests/nuns/brothers had received. It exemplified perfectly not only her view of the church and her place within it but also the way most laity would have looked at it. Although meant as an accolade, it did a huge disservice because if some have received a higher calling it follows logically that others have received a lower calling. Inevitably, this created a certain obsequiousness and subsequent powerlessness among laity. Church was the business of the experts, the clergy and religious; laity knew their place. Ordination and Profession conferred holiness, leadership and responsibility. Church had a clear structure of pope/bishops/religious/lay; it had the diocese and the parish, solid unchanging edifices that had stood the test of time.

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

And then these new ecclesial movements (NEMs) arrive in tandem with the newly rediscovered pilgrim people of God motif and start to upset the applecart. The new kids on the block did not deliberately set out to disturb or upset the church’s structure or organisation – they were simply following the impulse of the Spirit and preaching the gospel with enthusiasm and fervour. However, although it was not their primary intention, these movements certainly played a part in de-stabilising the rigidity of church structure especially the pyramidal model. They exercised a pivotal role in reorienting the focus of ministry away from ordination and back to the centrality of baptism. They began to embody co-responsibility for the life of the church and became evangelisers in a host of diverse ministries and cultures. They modelled a new way of being church, one that was much more horizontal and equal than the pyramidal model espoused by the perfect society image. Having reclaimed the essential dignity of baptism that empowered the recipient to be priest, prophet and king, they implicitly recognised that God had called them to exercise these charisms and responsibilities in the church and in the world. Although the terminology of Synodality had not yet been birthed, the new ecclesial movements intuited that being church meant we must be synodal and, synodality, if it meant anything, meant taking baptism seriously – very seriously!

SNAPSHOT

According to the Dicastery of Laity, Family and Life, 123 diverse international NEMs and associations have currently been

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recognized. They have millions of adherents. To give some brief examples as an indication of scale, Focolare, founded in 1943 at Trent has more than 5,000,000 adherents spread over 182 nations; the Neocatechumenal Way which had its beginnings in Madrid in 1967 has now more than a million followers around the world while the Catholic Charismatic Renewal has a global reach that exceeds 200 million, with some millions in covenant Communities.

PAPAL SUPPORT

Regarded with suspicion by many bishops, initially, they very much depended on the support of the papacy to secure validation and to help them navigate a route towards acceptance within the fabric of the institutional church. Pope Paul VI was the first to welcome them, albeit cautiously. It was his successor Saint Pope John Paul II who embraced them, saw their potential and recognised them as ‘a providential gift of the Spirit’.³ Pope Benedict XVI largely held a benign and positive view similar to his predecessor so they continued to enjoy papal approval and popularity during his tenure. As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger he had written, ‘what are these new movements if not the fruit of the action of the Holy Spirit, concentrated at the right time, at certain crossroads in history.’⁴

And then we come to Pope Francis. If John Paul II could be seen as the pope for the movements, giving them almost total freedom as long as they were theologically orthodox and obedient to the papacy, then Francis instead is a pope coming from the movements – or at any rate from a movement-like idea of the church. This is clear not only from his speeches to popular movements in Latin America, but also from his ecclesiology. Just like the new ecclesial movements, Francis is more interested in spiritual renewal of the church than in the reform of ecclesiastical structures, although the latter is needed to enable the former.⁵

His endorsement and support has been somewhat more nuanced and challenging for the new movements. In many of his addresses to them he reminds them that they have a responsibility to the local church, that they must avoid elitism, that they need to have more robust and transparent governance structures, that individual freedom particularly in the internal forum needs to be respected, that they must not operate as a parallel church. No carte blanche or rose coloured spectacles here!

3 Speech of St. Pope John Paul II on May 30th 1998 at World Meeting of Ecclesial Movement

4 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, ‘The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements’, Proceedings of the World Congress of the Ecclesial Movements, Rome, 27-29 May 1998

5 Massimo Faggioli, ‘Francis & the New Ecclesial Movements, A complicated story for a complex papacy’, *Commonweal*, December 20, 2021

Yet even these criticisms are couched against a tacit acceptance that the new movements have become key players in the evolution of the church's missionary strategy. Francis is keenly aware that the real challenge for the church's mission in Europe is to bring the Gospel back into everyday social life and particularly into new forms of the socio-cultural *Areopagus*. It implies re-launching the process of inculturation that brings the Gospel into the depth of people's lives as well as of society. The church needs the NEMs and Francis knows that that they will play a critical, indispensable role in the synodal process that he has just inaugurated. He has likened them to gymnasiums where the key elements in synodality have already been practiced – dialogue, listening, participation, walking alongside people, accompaniment. They are uniquely equipped to deal with the prevailing culture of 'a liquid modern world' a term coined by Zygmunt Bauman.⁶

Francis believes they have the requisite skill set to play an important role in his missionary ecclesiology. One concrete indication of Francis' appreciation of the NEMs is his appointment of the Brazilian, Fr. Alexandre Awi Mello as the new secretary of the recently created Dicastery for the Laity, Family, and Life. This is a hugely important Dicastery and the fact that Fr Mello is the Brazilian Director of the new ecclesial movement, Schönstatt, is a highly significant endorsement.

His introduction of synodality challenges the current model of church which is still hugely dependent on clerics and religious to animate its structures and *modus operandi*. That way of being church is simply unsustainable and will not be a viable option for the third millennium. This is where the new ecclesial movements will play a pivotal role.

Massimo Faggioli contends that as this new ecclesiology takes root, the relationship between the institutional church and the movements will no longer be understood in terms of "the pope handling the movements," but rather as movements shaping the culture of church leaders, including the pope.⁷

SYNODALITY AND PNEUMATOLOGY

All of the NEMs would see their existence emanating from a special charism given to their founders by the Holy Spirit. They are very comfortable in the language of pneumatology and celebrate readily the fruits of that Spirit. Francis too comes from this space. He is much more visibly attentive to the Holy Spirit and his ecclesiology

6 Cf. Z. Bauman, *Modernità liquida*, Lateranza, Roma-Bari, 2008; Z. Bauman, *Vita liquida*, Lateranza, Roma-Bari, 2009; Z. Bauman, *Dentro la globalizzazione. Le conseguenze sulle persone*, Lateranza, Roma-Bari, 2012.

7 Cf. Massimo Faggioli, *Commonweal*, December 2021.

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is clearly shaped by this disposition. He intuits that synodality cannot be just a feature of the church's life, it needs to become the way in which we are church. Synod for him is just another name for church.

It could be said that Francis' championing of synodality comes out of his pneumatology; it is from this perspective that he declares boldly (*parrhesia*) that synodality is what God expects of the church in the third millennium. The new thing that God is doing does not disturb him because he is more attuned to the prophetic gift. This approach resonates easily with that of the NEMs who interpret their existence as emerging from the dynamism of the Holy Spirit and see themselves in many ways as heirs to the prophetic tradition.

Francis speaks of the Holy Spirit forty-eight times in *Evangelii gaudium*, noteworthy when one considers that his immediate predecessor, Benedict, only mentioned the Holy Spirit on three occasions in his three encyclicals.

In the book authored by Dr Austen Ivereigh, Francis states: "What characterizes a synodal path is the role of the Holy Spirit. We listen, we discuss in groups, but above all we pay attention to what the Spirit has to say to us ... we cannot speak of synodality unless we accept and live the presence of the Holy Spirit."⁸ This kind of language, somewhat novel in official church discourse, is very familiar territory to members of NEMs who would often speak of praying and discerning not just for their own personal journey but for the journey of their movement and God's plan for that.

SYNODAL LIFE

Many NEM members will speak of 'a life before and a life after' their engagement with a movement that they have joined. Invariably, it means they have been immersed in some kind of conversion where they have had a direct experience of God's love for them. Referring to this in the encyclical *Deus Caritas est*, Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes: "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a Person who gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction ... it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us."⁹

They will speak about the experience of community, mutual support, ongoing formation, a sense of purpose and mission, a

8 Austen Ivereigh, *Let us Dream: The Path to a Better Future. Pope Francis in Conversation with Austen Ivereigh* (London: Simon Schuster, 2020) p.85.

9 Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est* – (25. 12. 2005).

calling from God himself to live a life resonant with the gospel and a desire to share their story with others by way of testimony. This kind of witness brings the Christian message into the fabric of society at all levels – schools, hospitals, economics, politics, the arts etc. It is no longer heard only from the pulpit or the catholic school but it permeates potentially every avenue of life. The protagonists are mostly but not exclusively lay and they have been imbued with the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfil their baptismal mission to be priest, prophet and king.

Moreover, they have received a formation that gives them confidence to speak out with *parrhesia*, that holy boldness which Francis speaks of so often. There is a huge army who can bring the gospel message to the masses. To date, they have largely worked outside the official structure of the institutional church and at local level would often have vied and collided with parish and diocese and their pastoral agendas. Their impact on church was only really noted in the preparations for John Paul II's papal trip to Spain in 1982 when it was discovered that 45% of all Spanish Catholic related to the church through a movement rather than a parish. This caused a considerable degree of angst in some church quarters.

“Reversing the relationship between the territorial or geographical dimension of church aggregations (parish, diocese) to the personal dimension (membership in a group not defined by geographical location) threatens the overturn of a system that dates from the early centuries of Christianity (dioceses were the successors of the provinces of the Roman Empire) and that was solidified in the second millennium, especially by the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The NEMs with their flexibility and extended reach also pose a challenge to the ecclesial concept of the local church that is in dialogue and tension with the universal church.”¹⁰

However, such tensions are not new to the Church. She has been here before. One could cite the arrival of the mendicant orders such as the Dominicans and Franciscans as a threat to the regular diocesan clergy in the 12th/13th century. After initial tension and struggle, the church found a way to integrate the new with the old. Synodality could bring radical change to venerable church structures but perhaps that too is the wind of the Spirit issuing forth new church paradigms for the new millennium

LEADERSHIP

One of the most interesting aspects of these new movements is the way they see leadership exercised. Critically, anyone from any state of life can be elected to leadership by the membership. If we

10 Ibid. Fagigoli

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assume that the idea of governance is connected to leadership, and not just to management, then this brings up the second question: the relationship between governance and ordination at the local church level. With the launch of *Praedicate evangelium* and the subsequent opening up of governance roles in Vatican dicasteries to all the baptised we could be witnessing a harbinger of significant changes at diocesan and parish level. But the more governance at the parochial level is held in lay hands, the more restricted becomes the role of the clergy. We may not yet be ready for the full implications of this line of thought, though seventy years or so ago Yves Congar offered the prescient observation that “now we have to ask not what is the role of the laity in relationship to the clergy, but rather what is the role of the clergy in relationship to the laity.”

¹¹ The Jesuit Fr. Gianfranco Ghirlando made this striking change even clearer at a March 21 press conference, saying that “the power of governance in the church does not come from orders, but from one’s mission.” Governance becomes linked to canonical mission, which one is eligible for through baptism – not from the power of orders, as John Paul II had said in the previous curial reform. Now, in principle, all levels of church governance are open to any Catholic, male or female.

A constant feature of the NEMs has been a deep awareness that all are equal within the charism that has called them to this way of life. Moreover, leadership rotates with terms of office being the norm rather than permanent posts. This changes the dynamic of relationships; all see themselves called to live their charism as equal members, albeit in different states of life. Democratic features are much more in evidence than one would see in the hierarchical structure of the local church. Although there have been notorious exceptions, (Legionaries of Christ, L’Arche, Schoenstatt) in general, genuine co-responsibility is central to the life of these new movements and this certainly can speak to the unfolding vision of synodality espoused by Pope Francis. Moreover, the integral place of clergy and consecrated men and women within the movements also presents a much more cohesive way of being church with all the various states of life working together to realise the fulfilment of their charism in the church and in the world.

OBSERVATIONS

Many of the movements emerged from a fusion of the male and female genius in harmony. The governance of Focolare at all levels, precisely because it is based on the presence of Jesus in our midst,

¹¹ *Fifty Years of Catholic Theology: Conversations with Yves Congar* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

is entrusted to a man and a woman who are co-responsible. One can think of Pierre Goursat, an elderly lay celibate and Martine Catta, a young married woman who became founders of Emmanuel, a large and vibrant charismatic community with branches spread across the world. It has become one of the main providers to priesthood in France and elsewhere. The Neo Catechumenate was born out of a deep prayer symbiosis between Kiko Arguello, a travelling musician and evangelist, and Carmen Hernandez who spent some time considering a religious vocation. The Lion of Judah Community (renamed Community of the Beatitudes) was founded by a married couple, Josette and Ephraim Croissant who were both converts to Catholicism. One should also remember some of the inspirational figures whose insight and advocacy helped shape these new movements. Think of Von Balthasar and Adrienne von Speyr whose mutual support enabled a vast wealth of fresh thinking about the Marian and Petrine dimensions of the church. Likewise Cardinal Suenens, one of the architects of the Second Vatican Council, was inspired by the lifelong witness of his confidant and spiritual director, Veronica O'Brien, an Irish legionary, who encouraged him in his ministry and helped shape his thinking and attention to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. These relationships teach us that we cannot have true synodality unless the male and female genius is working in harmony and in equality.

CONCLUSION

When the movements emerged in the mid 60s onwards they prompted a debate about the charismatic and hierarchical elements in the church. At first they were seen in opposition to each other but mature reflection led to a recognition that they are co-essential for the life of the church. The tension between them was healthy and necessary. They also brought into question something that Balthasar raised many decades ago when he spoke of the Marian and Petrine model of the church. The Petrine is meant to serve the Marian not the other way around. We grew up in a church where the Petrine had become so strong that it dominated the Marian, at times almost suffocating it, when it was meant to allow the Marian give birth to Christ and protect those charismatic flowerings that are the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. Organisation must follow life – not the other way round. The NEMs are part of the Marian- charismatic dimension of church and they have become a very visible part of the church landscape and are rebalancing that relationship between the Petrine and the Marian. Just as the arrival of Monasticism in the 3rd/ 4th century and the mendicant orders

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in the 12th century challenged the then established way of being church, so too do the NEMs. They don't fit into existing structures – they embody a new way of being church.

They haven't asked for co-responsibility – they have assumed it and claimed it from their baptismal anointing and have sallied forth into the church and the world exercising their charisms with boldness. They are pathfinders for the synodality which Francis speaks of and their lived experience of conversion, dialogue, communication, community, mission, and accompaniment will inform this universal process as it unfolds – they have already changed the structure of the church and there may be more to come. The more democratic elements in their governance and their freedom to act and to respond outside a hierarchical framework is both exciting and potentially dangerous. If they move beyond parish or diocesan boundaries they have the capacity to be mobilised in a cohesive way; they have a 'can do' approach and are much more focused on the mission rather than the maintenance – they are not as dependent on the institutional structures and in many ways have already moved beyond them. In their rationale it is not so much that the church has a mission more that the mission has a church. They are more at home in 'liquid modernity.'

Finally, Donal Harrington in his book about the parish of tomorrow¹² speaks of those in our church who would like to *ignore* the mire we find ourselves in. Others *deplore* the state of the church and give vent to their anger and chagrin. Still others want to *restore* the church to a time of its former glory and ascendancy. All of these are *cul de sacs* with no future- a waste of energy and focus – there is no going backwards. The only worthwhile way is to *explore*, to search for new beginnings, new ways of being church. The NEMs are doing that and in their ownership of co-responsibility as their baptismal heritage they are a true pathway to synodality. No charism ever comes into existence in total purity – it is mediated through sinful people and the NEMs have their share of such sinners as exemplified by the many scandals that have rocked them. Pope Francis is all too aware of their flaws but he sees them as schools of synodality with real potential to en flesh synodality in the universal church. They have been called into existence through the agency of the Holy Spirit and they are providential for the church. They are the harbingers of synodality, providential gifts of the Spirit who is leading the church to find a new pathway in the third millennium.

12 Donal Harrington, *Tomorrow's Parish*, Columba Press, 2020.

The Synodal Pathway in Tallaght

Michael Shortall

INTRODUCTION

In all, we were sixteen readers, one for each deanery of the Archdiocese of Dublin. It was a beautiful spring afternoon when we met for the first time. Although unsure of what we were to do exactly, we were all keen to play our part. We were to be given the reports of parishes and other groups gathered during the synodal process to read and synthesize. Or so I thought. In fact, we were invited into something far deeper: to listen prayerfully and discern the common threads across many heartfelt conversations.

Let me share a little of my experience and that of the Deanery of Tallaght.

THE SYNODAL PATHWAY IN DUBLIN

The phrase “we are all in the one boat” inspired the prayer, symbols and logo of the synodal pathway in Dublin, which launched on Sunday 17th October 2021. The saying is used by Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* (2020). In his almost conversational manner, he uses the phrase twice in quick succession: firstly, to counter the illusion that we don’t really need each other, an attitude that will inevitably lead to cynicism (*FT*, para 30); secondly to acknowledge that challenges like the Covid-19 pandemic do bring to the fore again the sense that ‘one person’s problems are the problems of all’ (*FT*, para 32).

The animators who volunteered to lead local synodal gatherings were provided training in two stages, which were initially held online and supported by a range of digital resources. As observed in the final Diocesan Report, the November session was characterised by confusion, lack of clarity, and worry about how to manage the process and strong emotions. But by the second session they grew in the understanding that the Synodal Pathway was less about moderating a debate than helping everyone to listen in order to

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understand. It is, according to the Preparatory Document for the Synod, “the first step, but it requires having an open mind and heart, without prejudices” (para 30).

The final Diocesan Report records that 173 parishes hosted gatherings (199 individual parishes in the Archdiocese of Dublin), coordinated by 325 animators. About 10,500 people participated in all. While the average gathering was between 35 to 40, the largest was made of 280 participants. Approximately, 2,200 took part in other ways, such as questionnaires or focus groups. Further synodal conversations were held with other interest groups. 18 focus groups were held with religious congregations, health care chaplains and providers, universities, teenagers, secondary schools, young adults, LGBT community, ecumenical groups and prison chaplains. The full report is available on the diocesan website.

Four questions were asked at two sessions. The questions were inspired by the opening lines of *Gaudium et Spes*, which goes: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.” (GS, para 1) The first session asked: ‘When you think about your experience of Church what brings joy?’ And then similarly, for sorrows. The second session turned to hopes and fears. The purpose was to provide a process and space for listening to the experiences of each other, the first and indeed informing step of the synodal way. The animators were asked to note responses as they listened. A final request was asked of participants: from listening to each other, ‘what the Spirit is saying to the churches?’ (Rev. 3:22)

Each parish was asked to complete a report, which was designed with these questions in mind. Listening attentively to the conversations, the animators identified points of convergence, that is, areas of general agreement. They also recorded points of divergence, or contributions that had a smaller voice but considered to be important.

A CASE STUDY: TALLAGHT

Tallaght is south west of Dublin city centre. Originally the site of a monastic settlement in the 8th century, Tallaght was a small village of about 2,500 in the 1960s. Suburban development took hold in the 1970s with expansion of Dublin city, creating the largest satellite town of Dublin. In the 2016 census, recorded a population of over 76,000 people. To put this in context: the population of Tallaght is slightly greater than that of Galway city, and the fourth largest area by population in the state.

THE SYNODAL PATHWAY IN TALLAGHT

I live in Tallaght in a rather typical suburban semi-detached house built across the commuter belts during the so-called Celtic Tiger. During the period of the synodal pathway, I was providing weekend and holiday support in two parishes, Bohernabreena and St Martin de Porres, Tallaght. The former is a long-standing rural parish of over 150 years, that sweeps up into the Dublin Mountains. The second was founded from the suburbs of the 1970s until today. It is at the periphery of the city, at the boundary with the countryside. Since the synod gatherings, I transferred to support the parish team in west Tallaght: the parishes of Springfield, Brookfield and Jobstown. It is at a different kind of periphery, with areas that face very significant socio-economic challenges and subsequent difficulties. Knowing the great efforts being put in locally, I wanted to help when asked by the steering committee.

The Deanery of Tallaght is comprised of ten parishes in all.¹ Seven reports were returned, which covered the whole deanery, as some parishes are clustered. One of the reports was very exhaustive, while another provided scant information. However, most reports were well drafted, giving a good sense of what was shared. At least, 269 participants took part on the first evening (average, 45); and 199 on the second (average, 31). The largest gatherings had 63 participants (one report left out the head-count). The fall-off in numbers for the second session occurred across the diocese. For the most part, the meetings took place in community and GAA halls, to provide a setting different from church property.

LISTENING

We were requested to approach our task prayerfully, respecting what was actually said. Due to my commitments, I turned to the task in the evening. The sun continued to shine during those weeks. Rather than at the office desk, I read and drafted at the kitchen table. It is better to say that I tried to listen and discern. The reports and task became a real focus of my prayer during those days, in which I experienced gratitude for the animators, steering committee and participants, and asked for the grace to hear faithfully.

A method was shared with us for reading, compromised of four stages, which also structured the feedback document we had to provide to the drafting group of the diocesan steering committee. *Firstly*, we were to read the report to get an initial impression and then re-read the answers looking out for what is interesting,

1 The Deanery of Tallaght is comprised of ten parishes: Bohernabreena, Brookfield, Jobstown, Killinarden, Kilnamanagh-Castleview, Springfield, Tallaght (St. Aengus's), Tallaght (St. Dominic), Tallaght (St. Martin de Porres), Tallaght (St. Mary's).

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innovative or enlightening and what concerns, difficulties or challenges are raised? *Secondly*, we were to make a note of the recurring themes within each report. *Thirdly*, we were to note how the themes may come together to form a common trend or consensus. *Finally*, we were to identify some key quotes which could encapsulate these trends.

Over those days, I identified *seven* broad themes that I believe captured what was shared.

SEVEN THEMES

1. The primary and most striking trend was the experience of community and the centrality of the Eucharist and the Sacraments. Consistently in all the inputs, participants highlighted the sense of belonging, the communal support of faith and ritual in the experiences of life – especially the difficult times – and the beauty and space of the local church in the area for prayer. For some this is becoming a multi-cultural experience, giving further sense that ‘we are all people of God’. While, it would be possible to tease apart the themes of community as a social reality from the Sacraments, my sense is that they were interlinked for people. It is a type of community they were pointing to, one that is supportive, prayerful and belonging to them.
2. The reports all recorded a real desire for passing on the faith – as a personal faith and as practices of our tradition – and an evident distress at the lack of the participation of younger generations. On one hand, it is giving rise to fear about the sustainability of the local faith-community, as a parish and/or a church building. On the other, it is consistently named that a recommitment to faith formation, including creative new modes, is urgent. The reports identify sacramental preparation, youth ministry, adult faith-formation, and evangelisation. Although not regularly, some inputs suggest or accept the inevitability of sacramental preparation not being in schools.
3. The shadow of scandal covers many of the gatherings. Many name clearly the pain of the historic child sex abuse, and the need for it to be acknowledged honestly. They reported the significant impact of reputational damage, and its effect on the credibility of the church, particularly in contemporary society. Other forms of scandal were also named: clericalism, materialism, detachment of clergy, hurtful experiences of exclusion. Some of those experiences were recounted in the reports.
4. Leadership, and especially the role and voice of women, was a reoccurring topic. There was a broad position in favour of some creative and real mode of inclusion, particularly of women, in

THE SYNODAL PATHWAY IN TALLAGHT

the structures of the church. There was regular proposals in favour of women priests, or at least, women deacons. At the same time, some inputs did disagree on the issue of ordination. A number of inputs named the current difficulties in identifying and empowering people to take up roles and responsibilities. Related to this was the concern that any future structures of lay leadership that may be created may not get the required support to succeed.

5. There was a consistent recognition of individuals and groups who feel/are excluded due to church teaching and practices. Divorcees and the LGBT+ persons are particularly named. This issue is often presented as an obstacle to the credibility of church teaching and especially the claims of church or parish to being a true community. At the same time, it is important to note that there were other voices very concerned about the dilution of church teaching.

The last two trends were identifiable across many of the inputs, but we might say were in a ‘minor cord.’

6. Change. Pope Francis was consistently named, primarily because of his witness. Similarly, the synodal pathway itself was named as an important initiative. Both were inevitably named in the context of change. While mostly the change was hopeful, there was often a note of fear. For many, the fear was that change won’t happen or be stifled; for others the fear was too much change.
7. Culture. Some parishes mentioned contemporary culture, either as a challenge or an opportunity. Challenges included secularisation and media hostility and opportunities included technology.

CONCLUSION

The readers gathered together for a second time as the diocesan report was being drafted. Again the sun shone. All spoke of their positive experience, if at times, it was a challenging process to capture fairly what they heard. After my brief experience, I feel for those who had the even more difficult responsibility to draft and write the final diocesan and national reports, and I have a great sense of appreciation for the hard work involved in putting together the parish reports by the animators.

I tried to put aside my own perspective, in so far as I could. There were aspects that niggled me. In any exercise like this, questions inevitably point the respondent in a specific direction.

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In this case the questions turned on church rather than personal faith. Consequently, people may focus on the church as a social and structural reality rather than their experience of encounter with the divine within a community. To be fair the questions did not preclude people from sharing personal faith stories, some of which did come through in the reports. More interestingly, some issues did not feature as much as I expected. For instance, social justice – in the sense of jobless, homeless, foreigner – was hardly mentioned.

In this article, I simply share my experience. It is not a theological reflection, which may be for another day. It will be interesting to see how the points raised in Tallaght are reflected in the national report and the proceedings of the universal synod. The steering committee were asked to identify some quotes. I'd like to share some from the Deanery of Tallaght: "People found their sense of belonging in their Faith Community. Great hope now that our faith communities are more multi-cultural." "That the listening experience, although new and difficult, is a worthwhile exercise. It focussed our attention on the giftedness of each person made in the image and likeness of God. Everybody's story mattered. Everybody has something to contribute." And my favourite, "Listen, engage, involve, be open and repeat."

Prayer. *Sacred Space* helps us to pray. But what is prayer? It is a cry of the heart and oxygen for the soul; it is a loving encounter with God. Fundamentally, prayer is our response to somebody who has always desired us with an infinite love. *Sacred Space* opens up something of the beauty of this God of infinite love.

– THE IRISH JESUITS, *Sacred Space: the Prayerbook 2023*, (Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2022) p. 7.

Synodality – A Theological Glossary (Part 2)

Kevin O’Gorman

APOSTOLATE

‘Apostolate’ offers the opportunity to ask, address and articulate the vision for mission which the church is called to adopt and act upon. *Apostolate* is an assurance that the church does not become absorbed in its own issues and even interests, only looking at its life *ad intra*. This involves the danger described by Henri Nouwen as “‘spiritualising” spirituality’, available to all those ‘who have the luxury of the time and space needed to develop inner harmony and quietude’, adding that the awareness of ‘living as Christians in our contemporary world, with an open eye and an open heart for the real problems of people, challenges us to break out of our individualism and elitism and start listening to the Bible with new ears’.¹ Thus popes have regularly highlighted the church’s mission in and for the world, as evidenced most recently in Pope Francis’ emphasis on evangelisation as encounter and engagement with people everywhere. Apostolate is not an option for the church but an opening to the world, offering it ‘the word of life’ (1 Jn 1:1), which originating in Jesus’ mission from the Father, is offered through his paschal mystery and outsourced through the Holy Spirit. Indeed, *apostolate* as articulating and actualising the church’s mission in and for the world is one arm of accountability of Synodality itself.²

The church has always had an apostolate, arising from the mission/ministry of Jesus, and is arrayed across a broad range of

1 ‘Foreword’, in Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells – The Spiritual Journey of a People*, (London: SCM Press, 1984), xiii-xxi, here xvi-xvii.

2 For an analysis along these lines see Vincent J. Miller, ‘Synodality and the Sacramental Mission of the Church: The Struggle for Communion in a World Divided by Colonialism and Neoliberal Globalization’, *Theological Studies*, 83(1): 8-24.

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activities, from communications to clinics, education to ecology, development to dialogue. The fiftieth anniversary of the Second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (1971) occurred in the first year of preparation for the forthcoming XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. Its declaration – *Justice in the World* – is an invaluable resource for both reflection and renewal in the road leading to 2023 and beyond. Probably best known for its proclamation that ‘action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel’, it called for a coherence between the life of the church *ad intra* and *ad extra*, emphasising the primacy of witness which Pope Saint Paul VI was to speak so passionately of after the subsequent Synod of Bishops (1974) in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. With powerful statements, such as ‘our awareness of the Church’s vocation to be present in the heart of the world by proclaiming the Good News to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, and joy to the afflicted’ and the church ‘has a proper and specific responsibility which is identified with her mission of giving witness before the world of the need for love and justice contained in the Gospel message, a witness to be carried out in Church institutions themselves and in the lives of Christians’³, *Justice* reasserts the teaching of the Old Testament prophets and personified by Jesus (particularly in the Gospel of Luke) that, in the succinct statement of Seán Freyne, the church now sees ‘a concern for issues of social justice as part of Christian faith itself’.⁴ Of particular relevance is the ‘principle of participation and profession’: ‘The Church recognizes everyone’s right to suitable freedom of expression and thought. This includes the right of everyone to be heard in a spirit of dialogue which preserves a legitimate diversity within the Church’.⁵

In continuity with the tenor and teaching of *Justice in the World* Jenny Sinclair suggests that ‘by reading the political and cultural signs of the times we can understand the fundamental purpose of this Synod. It is nothing less that God’s way of preparing the Church to save the world’.⁶ This soteriological emphasis adds an extra gear to the ecclesial engine that is driving the synodal journey. Reference to the ‘signs of the times’ need not be dismissed as a talking shop where lip service is paid in the preamble to another Vatican document which will be filed away and fulfilled

3 *Justice in the World*, in Joseph Gremillion (ed.), *The Gospel of Peace and Justice – Catholic Social Teaching Since Pope John* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976), pars. 5, 36

4 ‘The Quest for the Historical Jesus – Some Theological Reflections’ in *Texts, Contexts and Cultures*, (Dublin: Veritas, 2002), 106-121, here 118.

5 *Justice in the World*, par. 44.

6 ‘A Synod for the World’, *The Tablet*, 1st January 2022, 6-7, here 6.

only in footnotes for other documents. Referring to the inspiration of the Gospel and information from ecclesial experience across the world and drawing on ‘centuries of tradition and natural law’, Sinclair states that Catholic Social Teaching, ‘sometimes called the theology of the Holy Spirit in practice’, is able to help us discern our way through the Synod process’.⁷ While agreement on the ambit of the church’s apostolate might be difficult to achieve, its axiological accent will assure a basis for dialogue at least and allow a space for the Holy Spirit to act. After setting out the social and spiritual, service and salvific terms of the synodal process Sinclair states starkly that ‘if we can’t walk together on this road, the Church will continue to decline and fail to live out its vocation’.⁸ The Church can only hope to avoid this end by accepting that the agenda for its apostolate is God’s way for the church to act and advance towards the goal of the Kingdom of God.

LOVE

‘L’ could be listed as law or liturgy. ‘Synod’ in the *Index* of the *Code of Canon Law* (prepared by the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland) is sub-divided into sections respectively headed ‘Bishops’ and ‘Diocesan’. Under the first, c. 334 covers the ‘cooperative assistance’ bishops can give to the Pope, ‘among which is the synod of bishops’. The previous canon states that the Pope, ‘in fulfilling the office of supreme pastor of the Church has the right, according to the needs of the Church, to determine the manner of exercising this office’.⁹ Obviously, the decision to call the present synod into existence is a pre-eminent pastoral exercise of the Pope’s care for the universal church. Reference to ‘right’ dovetails with the earlier declaration that the Christian faithful ‘according to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the integrity of faith and morals, with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons’.¹⁰ A commentary on this cautions against any abuse of this right ‘which violates the virtue of charity’.¹¹ *Mutatis mutandis*, this caveat covers the

7 Ibid., 5.

8 Ibid., 6.

9 *Code of Canon Law*, Latin-English edition, The Canon Law Society of America, (Washington, D.C.:1998), c. 333.2

10 Ibid., 212.3

11 *The Canon Law – Letter & Spirit*, The Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), p.121.

complete church. Reference to ‘the virtue of charity’ raises the relation between love and law which will be looked at below.

Liturgy obviously permeates the synodal journey, formally and informally, personally and communally. It plays into the synodal process, connecting its first two pillars, *communion* and *participation*. In its *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* the Second Vatican Council stated that ‘it is very much the wish of the church that all the faithful should be led to take that full, conscious, and active part in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy’ and that ‘in the restoration and development of all the sacred liturgy the full and active participation by all the people is the paramount concern, for it is the primary, indeed the indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit’.¹² Carrying over these terms and conditions—*full, active, conscious*—of *participation* to the synodal journey is a call and challenge to the complete church. Helpfully (and hopefully) this harks back to the sacramental identity of the church (opening ‘S’ of synodality) and heralds a longer, lasting linkage between liturgy and life.

The selection of ‘love’ signifies a moral-theological rather than canonical or liturgical stance. This is brought out in the decree of the Second Vatican Council that ‘the improvement of moral theology ... drawing more fully on the teaching of holy scripture, should highlight the lofty vocation of the Christian faithful and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world’.¹³ This image of bearing fruit is transposed into the intimacy of interpersonal relations in the Gospel of John where the ‘indicative – imperative’ of Christian morality is issued. Richard A. McCormick interprets the spiritual and moral implications of this call/commandment:

Christ said, ‘I am giving you a new commandment: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you too must love one another’. I want to concentrate on the ‘as I have loved you’. Raymond Brown points out that this phrase emphasises that Jesus is the source of Christians’ love for one another. In this sense it is effective; it brings about their salvation. Only secondarily does it refer to Jesus as the standard of Christian love.¹⁴

12 *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 14, in Austin Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II, The Basic Sixteen Documents*, (Dublin: Dominican publications, 2007).

13 *Optatam totius – Decree on the Training of Priests*, 16, in Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II, The Basic Sixteen Documents*.

14 *Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition*, (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1985), 37.

Jesus' commandment to his disciples is not a condition for continuing to live in the love of God but a call to celebrate and communicate it with others. Pheme Perkins captures this premise perfectly: 'Love among Christians is the "proof" that they possess the divine life which they claim'.¹⁵ If, as Philip Larkin confesses at the conclusion of his poem *An Arundel Tomb* 'what will survive of us is love'¹⁶, then Christian love, because of its divine component, will continue without end.

Saint Anselm of Canterbury is well known both for his philosophical theology and atonement theory of redemption. The following, favouring 'ground hurling', is found in one of his letters, '*Take care of each other in love on the journey*'. Anselm's appeal is not only affective but apostolic, a reminder of the Gospel announcement that, 'after this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go' (Lk 10:1). In tune with the Irish proverb, '*Giorraíonn beirt bóthar*' (two shorten the road), this evangelical support and strategy is echoed in the expression of Dietrich Bonhoeffer that 'No one remains on his [her] own as a disciple'.¹⁷

If *synodos* – walking together – is to become *synoptikos* – seeing together – there is a need for all making the journey to commit themselves to an ongoing conversion that considers the challenges and changes that concern the common good. Moreover, charity as the hallmark of the church does not confer any preferential option for office holders among the people of God. This horizontal and not hierarchical stance holds true to the end as hailed by Ulrich Luz in his commentary on the eschatological judgement scene in the 'Gospel of the Church': 'Matthew was concerned to show that the Christian church has no special privilege in the final judgement, but rather will be asked by her Lord, the Son of Man, only about her deeds of love, no different from all other humans'.¹⁸

INCULTURATION

If 'liberation' has been linked particularly with the church in Latin America in the past few decades 'inculturation' has been identified

15 'Johannine Literature: From Text to Community', in John J. Collins and John Dominic Crossan (eds.), *The Biblical Heritage in Modern Catholic Scholarship*, (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1986): 184-201, here 200.

16 *Collected Poems*, (London: faber and faber, 1990): 110-111, here 111.

17 Quoted in Eamonn Bredin, *Rediscovering Jesus – Challenge of Discipleship*, (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1986), 131.

18 'The Final Judgment (Matt 25:31-46): An Exercise in "History of Influence" Exegesis', in David R. Bauer and Mark Allan Powell (eds.), *Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 271-310, here 309.

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as the primary issue in Africa and Asia. (These are complementary aspects of the church's apostolate in these continents, with inculturation itself interpreted as a form of liberation.) Inculturation is the assertion and articulation of ecclesial identity among people(s) who have accepted and actualised the Gospel message. Asking nearly forty years ago what will a 'world church be like', Thomas P. Rausch answered:

First, it will be pluralistic. A church which will be inculturated in Africa and Asia, in South America and in Islamic regions will of necessity develop different expressions of its worship and theology, even of its proclamation ... Second, the church of tomorrow will have to be truly universal, catholic in the original sense. It will have to represent a true community of peoples in a deeply divided world.¹⁹

Balancing and bridging the local and global, the relation(s) between the particular and universal church (and between particular churches themselves) are not political but prophetic actions, proclaiming a common faith, practising a compassionate charity and possessing a shared hope. Rausch's ultimate challenge to an inculturated church, 'to represent a true community of peoples in a deeply divided world' is an even greater and more urgent an undertaking today (and tomorrow) than it was forty years ago, despite – or perhaps due to – globalisation in its many dimensions. Only ecclesial communities who are secure enough in their own identity can enter into and enable a unity that is, in the words of Vatican Two 'a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race'.²⁰ This unity does not come about through either a cosy comfort or crafty compromise of a 'live and let live' climate but through a consensus created by living out Christian love. The Western Church needs the wisdom of Asia, the witness of Latin America and the wholesomeness of Africa if what Karl Rahner called 'a world-Church which is present to a varying extent in all parts of the world and everywhere becoming a genuine element of all cultures and nations' is to come into being.²¹ In this regard there are many roads to the Father's house and a universal synodal worth its salt will welcome this ecclesial map. Moreover, identifying inculturation as 'more than

19 'The Church Tomorrow', Chapter 11 in Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., *The Roots of the Christian Tradition*, (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1986), 206-218, here 207.

20 *Lumen gentium – Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, 1, in Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II, The Basic Sixteen Documents*.

21 'The Future of the Church and the Church of the future' in *Concern for the Church* (Theological Investigations XX, (New York: Crossroad, 1986);103-114, here 105.

a matter for missionary churches’, Bernard Häring insisted that while ‘every part of the Church bears, consciously or otherwise, an enormous burden of more or less successful inculturations, of used and unused opportunities for inculturation in the past, still more, the whole texture and every dimension of the Church as it actually exists calls for fundamental revision in keeping with the extent and nature of cultural and other changes’.²²

THEOLOGY

In recent years I have taught a module to both clerical and lay students at Maynooth entitled *What is Theology?* Based and built on selected readings that cover mainstream subject areas, it is intended to familiarise students with the spectrum of theological topics and themes, touching on history, terminology and methodology. An element of assessment has asked the students to answer the title question in their own words through a twitter type text. My own effort is along the following lines: *seeking to express its understanding of God’s self-communication in the Christ-event (esteeming scripture as the Word of God and tradition as the wisdom of its elders): its undertaking of a mission to the world as herald, steward and witness of the Reign of God; its undergoing transformation through the grace of the Holy Spirit.* Mindful that not everything can be said (here) about the tasks of theology, *understanding*, *undertaking* and *undergoing* underline the three legs of systematic, moral theology and theological anthropology which support an ecclesiology envisioned in terms of the models of proclamation/herald, servant/steward and sacrament/witness. These three ‘legs’ of theology are underpinned by the theological virtues: *understanding* minded by faith, *undertaking* measured by love and *undergoing* maintained by hope. Theology in a synodal church will take these not only as points of departure but as constant points of reference. Reference to scripture in relation to theology is self-evident and the role of tradition is well captured in the remark of Brendan McManus that ‘Being part of tradition means that there are checks and balances. There is a sense of accumulated wisdom and learning from the past, especially when it comes to what have proven to be dead ends’.²³

With the church as the subject (and not simply the subject matter) of such a theology, there is need for a self-critical, even self-corrective element within it. This element is exactly the exercise of synodality which saves the energy of the church for evangelisation. Synodality does not aim at being a substitute for subsidiarity which

22 *My Hope for the Church – Critical Encouragement for the Twenty-First Century*, (Chawton, Hampshire: Redemptorist Publications, 1999), 58.

23 ‘Endnote’, *The Furrow*, 73(March 2022), 142.

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‘means that decisions, policies and their implementation ought to be handled at the lowest practical level since this level would more likely be better informed about the concrete needs and realities of the situation and able to deal with them more effectively than at a much higher level’.²⁴ Furthermore, the respective role of and relation between *magisterium* and *sensus fidelium* is a fundamental question calling for deep(er) study.²⁵ Identification of issues involving governance and ministry in and for the church needs to be integrated into this inquiry in an imaginative and inclusive manner. In this regard Richard A. McCormick’s proposal for persistence in dialogue is both positive and pressing: ‘If stay we ought and must, then it may be of help to propose a set of “rules for conversation”, the observance of which could nudge us towards more communicative conversation’.²⁶

A number of marine metaphors might help to make clear the options that the present synodal pathway is opening up and offering. *Firstly*, is this, in Brutus’ words, ‘a tide which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune’ or ‘omitted’, offers only a life ‘bound in shallows, and in miseries’?²⁷ *Secondly*, would a ‘flood’ be ecclesiological equivalent to a theological tsunami that tears away moorings? *Thirdly*, are there ideological currents already involved and identifiable in the synodal process? *Fourthly*, is there a mid-way between riptide and a ripple? *Fifthly*, how can synodality serve mission, the sending out of disciples ‘into the deep water’ (Lk 5:4)? This imaginative inquiry is intended, changing to a sporting metaphor, to avoid ending in either a free-for-all or a collapsed scrum.

YES

- to Walter Brueggemann’s exhortation that ‘what we are about is serious conversation leading to blessed communion’²⁸;
- to the prophecy of Isaiah, ‘I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert’ (43:19);

24 James T. Bretzke, *Handbook of Roman Catholic Moral Terms*, (Georgetown University Press: Washington DC, 2013), 227.

25 See Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, S.J., *The Magisterium and Morality – Readings in Moral Theology No. 3*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1982) and Charles E. Curran and Lisa A. Fullam, *The Sensus Fidelium and Moral Theology – Readings in Moral Theology No. 18*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2017).

26 ‘Rules for Abortion Debate’, in *How Brave A New World?*, (London: SPCM, 1981), 176-188, here 177.

27 William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act 4, Scene 2, 270-274, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, second edition, (London: W.W.Norton, 2008), 1602.

28 Quoted in Donald Cozzens, *Notes from the Underground – The Spiritual Journal of a Secular Priest*, 12

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- to a Church that is the Pauline Body of Christ and not a political bureaucracy that promotes and pursues a business model as its mission;
- to the vision of Pope Saint John Paul II that ‘the most valuable gift the Church can offer to the bewildered and restless world of our time is to form within it Christians who are confirmed in what is essential and who are humbly joyful in their faith’;²⁹
- to the wisdom of Meister Eckhart: ‘There is no stopping place in this life. No, nor was there ever one for anyone – no matter how far along the way they’ve come. This then, above all things: be ready for the gifts of God and always for new ones’;³⁰
- to Jesus, Son of God and Saviour ‘in whom is always ‘Yes’. For in him every one of God’s promises is a ‘Yes’ (2 Cor 1:19-20).

CONCLUSION

The *ten* signposts suggested in the characters constituting *Synodality* can be subsumed under the terms of the Official Logo for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: *Communion* covers Sacramental and Yearning, Love and Yes; *Participation* plays to Newness, Openness and Theology; *Mission* mediates Doctrine, Apostolate and Inculturation. While there may be a question of the location of these three ‘legs,’ i.e. placing *Participation* before *Communion*, it is the outcome(s) of the overall journey that is obviously important. While this may be outlined to some degree it cannot be wholly observed *ab initio* or *in via* because its course can only be charted, in the words of Vatican II, ‘in the light of the Gospel and of human experience’.³¹ The goal of *Synodality* is not to generate groupthink but to gather and be guided by the Holy Spirit in discerning to go a definite, perhaps a different, way.

This *Glossary* began with ‘S’ standing for *Sacramental*, signifying the identity of the church *ab initio* as people of God in the course of their journey towards the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew). Writing almost forty years ago as *Editor* of a series entitled *The Message of the Sacraments*, Monica K. Hellwig’s insistence on the vitality of this identity is even more important, both ecclesologically and experientially, in the contemporary context and course of *Synodality*:

29 *Catechesi Tradendae – Catechesis in our Time*, (Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979), par. 61.

30 Quoted in Adrian Hastings, *Robert Runcie*, (London: Mowbray, 1991), 31.

31 ‘*Gaudium et spes – Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*’, 46, in Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II, The Basic Sixteen Documents*.

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The Church seems to be poised today at a critical juncture in its history. Vatican II reopened long-standing questions about collegiality and participation in the life of the Church, including its sacramental actions, its doctrinal formulations and its government. The Council fostered a new critical awareness and raised hopes which the Church as a vast and complicated institution cannot satisfy without much confusion, conflict and delay. This makes ours a particularly trying and trusting time for those most seriously interested in the life of the Church and most deeply committed to it. It seems vitally important for constructive and authentically creative community participation in the shaping of the Church's future life, that a fuller understanding of the sacraments be widely disseminated in the Catholic community.³²

32 'Editor's Preface' in Thomas A. Marsh, *Gift of Community – Baptism and Confirmation*, (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1984), 9-10, here 9.

The Spiritual Life. In spiritual life one of the big traps is assuming that things will happen miraculously in a spectacular fashion, and that it will all happen in one dramatic, unrepeatable moment. Many of us think of St Paul being struck blind, falling off his horse and making a dramatic shift from Pharisee to believer in one moment. The problem with this approach is that it seems to limit God's action to special people, in special places and times, and makes faith inaccessible for the majority of people whose lives don't reflect this magic and drama. It often comes as a surprise to people to learn that there was a ten-year gap between Paul's fall and his becoming an apostle; it appears that he still had to go through the slow human process of learning and making sense of his experience with the help of other believers.

– BRENDAN MCMANUS AND JIM DEEDS, *Discover God Daily*, (Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2022) p. 5.

Homilies for October (C)

Chris Hayden

Twenty Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 2

Hab 1:2-3, 2:2-4. Ps 94:1-2, 6-9. Tm 1:6-8, 13-14. Lk 17:5-10.

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks about the kind of faith that can work wonders. He goes on to talk about an attitude that, for most of us, needs just that kind of faith. 'When you've done all you have to do,' the Lord tells us, 'say, "we are merely servants: we've done no more than our duty".' That attitude cuts across our usual way of looking at things; it asks us to let the deeply rooted tree of our pride and our desire for recognition be uprooted and planted in the sea.

We may be too sophisticated to want overt flattery, yet we like to have our goodness and our efforts recognized, and we're liable to be put out when people don't recognize and acknowledge our goodness, our efforts, our talents. Of course, it's not that people's goodness shouldn't be recognized and praised; but Jesus invites us to consider our motivation for the good we do and the efforts we make.

The deep truth of Jesus' words is that we are made for serving; our human nature is designed for *self-giving*. That's a deep truth of our faith and of our humanity: I'm made for giving, not for taking. If I haven't found my way of self-giving, then I haven't yet found myself as a human being. We find ourselves by giving ourselves away to others.

This is not a pious notion: it's utterly practical. When was the last time you met a happy, selfish person? Or indeed a miserable, generous person? If our lives don't include a way for us to give of ourselves, to serve others, we're less complete, not more.

When Jesus invites us to say: 'We are only servants,' he's not asking us to belittle ourselves. Rather, he is reminding us that the deepest truth of our human nature is that we are designed for others, for giving ourselves. And that, not grasping at all we can get, is the way to happiness.

Nowhere is it written that this is an easy way to live our lives; self-giving calls for self-sacrifice. In the long term, whether we're

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building a house, a career or a marriage, the pursuit of the easy way too often leads to hardship and suffering down the line. Archbishop Fulton Sheen famously remarked: ‘On their way to the sea, rivers follow the path of least resistance; and that is why they are crooked.’

Our faith offers us wisdom, and that wisdom makes demands of us. Our faith in turn accompanies those demands with the promise of God’s help in our efforts and his pardon in our failures. May the Lord help us be what we are called to be, and to find our deepest peace and joy in serving others, in the concrete circumstances of our lives.

‘We are merely servants.’ Those words are not intended to clip our wings, but to help us see that giving ourselves to and for others is something very great indeed. It is the very best way to live.

Twenty Eight Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 9

2 Kg 5:14-17. Ps 97:1-4. 2 Tm 2:8-13. Lk 17:11-19.

What a miracle! Jesus doesn’t just heal: he heals *en masse*, curing ten lepers at once, restoring them to health and to community. We are not told that this miracle is witnessed by anyone other than by the lepers themselves. Could it be that most miracles are anonymous? We’re used to the notion that we never know what sufferings are unfolding behind other people’s doors. But equally, we don’t know the full extent to which other people have been blessed. Goodness is largely anonymous, rather like this miracle worked by Jesus.

In the Gospel, only one cured leper comes back. Jesus is saddened at the failure to give thanks to God. It’s not that God needs our thanks, but when we thank him, we are simply being *real*. We are not the authors of ourselves; we are creatures, who receive everything, including life itself, from God. And because Jesus knows that fully, because he knows the freedom of absolute dependence on God, He is saddened to see people imprisoned in ingratitude.

It is a foreigner, an outsider, a despised person, an outcast, who comes back to thank Jesus. This, like many observations in the Gospels, cautions us against being quick to judge others. Unlike the Lord, we do not know what is in a person’s heart. If those who appear to be the best can sometimes disappoint us, it follows that we should be open to allowing those who do not appear all that promising to surprise us for the good.

Let’s ponder a little more deeply the theme of gratitude to God, which is at the heart of this Gospel reading. What do the words

‘thank you’ say? They say something about the other person (‘you have been kind’), but they also say something about us (‘I have noticed’; ‘I know that I have been treated kindly, blessed, cared for ...’). Failure to thank is not so much a sign of independence, as a sign of blindness: the refusal of gratitude is a sadly eloquent statement, to the effect that I do *not* feel blessed, that I have *not* noticed any kindness being shown towards me.

If, irrespective of immediate circumstances, we cultivate the habit of thanking God, then we are doing a couple of very wise things: we’re looking beyond our immediate circumstances, to God and his providence. This can give us hope. Also, we’re sensitizing ourselves, growing in our ability to spot God’s blessings. This can strengthen our faith.

The attitude of gratitude is particularly important in this ailing culture of ours, a culture neurotically focused on what is wrong. When we give thanks to God – at least for that moment – we are not swallowed up by indignation, or engaged in virtue-signaling, or consumed by anxiety. More than ever, thanksgiving is an antidote to the emotional, psychological and spiritual toxins that are being spewed into our atmosphere. ‘Thanks’ is not just a word – it is a whole philosophy. And when it’s spoken to God, ‘thanks’ is a whole spirituality.

Twenty Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 16

Ex 17:8-13. Ps 120. 2 Tm 3:14-4:2. Lk 18:1-8.

Today’s Gospel shows the great importance Jesus attaches to the human and spiritual virtue of *perseverance*. Perseverance has been defined as ‘the everyday form of courage.’ We may rarely, if ever, have to act in a dramatically heroic way, or draw upon deep reserves of physical courage; but we routinely have to make an effort to stick with what is good, to stand by our principles, to honour our commitments, to witness to what is true and wholesome, to work hard rather than slacken off. Perseverance is the kind of unspectacular courage that generally goes unnoticed.

In 1968, a man named John Akhwari represented Tanzania at the Mexico Olympics, where he competed in the marathon. Less than half-way into the race, he fell, injuring his shoulder and knee; but he got up and ran on, in great pain. An hour after the winner had crossed the line, Akhwari hobbled into the stadium, with a white bandage flapping from his injured knee. Those who were still in the stadium looked on in amazement, wondering what had possessed him to keep going.

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Afterwards, asked why he hadn't stopped on account of his injury, Akhwari gave a wonderful reply that got him a place in Olympic history: 'My country,' he said, 'did not send me 5,000 miles to start the race; they sent me 5,000 miles to finish the race.' He finished last, but there's no way an athlete with that attitude could be said to have lost.

That's a wonderful image for perseverance, for keeping going even when it hurts, even when we haven't got the support or the understanding of those around us, even when people imagine that we must be daft.

When it comes to faith and prayer, the temptation to quit remains very real for many believers. Some people quit on account of scandal – a sad but understandable response. Others may feel oppressed by the sheer silence of God, especially in the face of suffering or confusion. Still others simply drift away, with no crisis, no questions, no agonized decision.

Jesus is aware of the challenges to faith, and so, in today's Gospel, he urges us to keep praying and never lose heart. And our Lord is realistic: he knows that despite his encouragement, many people will turn away. This is why he asks a plaintive question at the end of the Gospel reading: 'When the Son of Man comes, will he find any faith on earth.' That question is directed to each and every believer. We should never take perseverance in faith for granted: it is a vulnerable gift, one that needs to be nurtured.

In another place in the Gospel, Jesus says to his closest followers: 'What about you, will you turn away too?' (Jn 6:67). That, along with the question in today's Gospel, is a powerful invitation to perseverance. The most authentic answer we can give to such questions is a heartfelt plea: 'May you find faith in us, Lord; may you find faith in me.'

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Mission Sunday)

October 23

Eccles 35:12-14, 16-19. Ps 32:2-3, 17-19, 23. 2

Tm 4: 6-8, 16-18. Lk 18: 9-14.

On this *Mission Sunday*, we're asked to pray for those working as missionaries, and to reflect on what it means to be a missionary – on what it might mean to us. Let's ponder what it might be like to 'go on mission,' knowing that we wouldn't be coming back for a few years. What would you pack? Whatever you might bring along, by way of clothes and personal items, you'd have to leave an awful lot behind. There's only so much baggage a missionary can take! And of course, there's the most obvious thing, and perhaps

the most difficult: as missionaries, we'd have to leave home. If we don't leave, we don't qualify!

In addition, we'll need faith, lots of it. At a purely human level, missionaries do wonderful work, but in the end of the day, all that they do is about showing people the face of Christ, so faith needs to be behind all they do. As missionaries, we'll also need great hope. The problems and challenges are immense; we can't fix everything; we aren't going to set the world ablaze; we may not see the results of our labours. We'll need to have the kind of solid common-sense that allows us to do our best while leaving the results in God's hands, with hope and trust.

These are a couple of the mindsets we'd need if we were going to be a missionaries. But wait! It's not a matter of 'if': we need those attitudes now, today, right away. Pope John Paul II once said that every generation is a new continent to be evangelised for Christ. The missionary's task is precisely to evangelise, to tell the good news of Jesus. *Every* generation needs missionaries, not just to go abroad, but to stay at home and evangelise the new continent, the new generation, growing up in our midst.

Who are the most influential missionaries in our society at this moment? Could it be that they are the ones who bring us the news that society is better without faith, without religion? That life is better when God is kept safely cordoned away, with no influence on life or culture? But if we believe that our Christian faith is good and wholesome, that it can bless young lives, that it gives meaning and hope, that it educates in things like fairness, compassion, integrity, self-control – if we believe this about faith in Christ, then it falls to us not to hand over the entire missionary territory to those who believe the opposite. And that's another thing we need to remember about being a missionary: from Jesus onwards, missionaries have always had to compete for people's minds and hearts.

May the Lord help us to be true missionaries; may he give us a desire to pass on the faith in our time. And – because the competition is fierce, the challenges are many, and the road is often uphill – may he give us hope, the hope that our missionary efforts are not in vain.

Thirty First Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 30

Wis 11:22-12:2. Ps 144:1-2, 8-11, 13-14. 2 Th 1:11-2:2.

Lk 19:1-10.

In writing his Gospel, Luke the Evangelist took special care to underline how Jesus is saving people *today*. In the passage we've

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just heard, Jesus tells Zacchaeus that he wants to stay at his house today, and that salvation has come to that house today. Jesus is for today. Our faith in him is for today. But *what* does that actually mean?

For many people, religion is about something in the past; faith is a yesterday business. A ‘*yesterday*’ believer might say: I was baptized; my parents brought me up a Catholic; I made my first Holy Communion; I was confirmed – married – ordained. Notice all the past tenses! The ‘*yesterday*’ believer often likes to maintain some contact with religion. It mightn’t mean very much, but they’d be sad to give it up entirely. Nostalgia is a powerful thing!

Let’s not, of course, be too quick to judge. There may be a ‘*yesterday*’ element in even the most devout! But there is also a kind of faith that is more about tomorrow. The ‘*tomorrow*’ believer might reason something like: ‘Life doesn’t last forever. It will come to an end; and when I die, I want to be sure I’m well in with the Man Above. So, I come along regularly, I play my part and pay my dues. To be perfectly honest, I’m not sure how much it all means to me. But then, we have to hedge our bets, haven’t we?’

Again, it’s not so matter of judging, as trying to name where people can find themselves in their experience of faith. But what does a ‘*today*’ faith look like? It is about more than something given to me in the past, and more than something I fear or hope for in the future. Here are *three* fundamental features of a ‘*today*’ faith:

First of all, faith that is real today makes my life an ongoing journey, a pilgrimage with the Lord. That means that, for all life’s questions and unfinished business, I believe the Lord is – today! – with me and guiding me.

Second, a today faith means I look to Jesus for guidance and light in my life, here and now, not just to some uncertain future.

Third, a today faith helps to give meaning to all I do, from the smallest things to the most important. It will call me to give a friendly greeting to someone I meet, because Christ is in that person; and it will call me to consider well the overall direction and purpose of my life, because my life is God’s gift.

Let us pray that the Lord might grant us a today faith, a faith that is alive and active here and now, rather than a dusty treasure in the attic of our minds, that we wouldn’t dream of getting rid of but that we’d hardly miss if we did; or a just-in-case insurance policy, a kind of eternal fire cover. May we have the good sense to ponder this, because our faith offers us more than we realize.

New Books

The Church in Pluralist Society: Social and Political Roles. Cornelius J. Casey, Fáinche Ryan (editors). Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press. 2019. Pp.165. ISBN: 978-0-268-10642-3

As this review was being written, news emerged that the US Supreme Court had overturned the 1973 Roe v Wade ruling, effectively making it possible for states to ban abortions in the first 3 months of pregnancy. Abortion will not automatically become illegal, but individual states will now be allowed to decide if, and how, to allow terminations. We have also witnessed deeply divisive debates in the US concerning the denial of Holy Communion to politicians who support abortion legislation. In Ireland in recent years, two referenda – one on same-sex marriage, the other on abortion – were passed by an overwhelming majority of Irish citizens. Catholic Church leaders had their say, but it appeared that this had little influence on the decision-making of Catholics at the ballot box. As these examples illustrate, we face serious questions about the role of the Catholic Church in the “public square”, about Church-State relations, and about the rights of conscience when voting on matters of public policy.

The Church in Pluralist Society: Social and Political Roles is the fruit of a conference, held at The Loyola Institute, Trinity College Dublin, which examined the role of the Catholic Church in pluralist societies. The editors tell us that: “This collection of essays offers a sustained reflection on the church’s identity and mission ... The focus is largely the Catholic Church in the Western World, but there are key points that cross over with relevance to other ecclesial contexts” (viii). The contributors are experts across a range of academic disciplines, including theology, philosophy, political theory, and sociology. This expertise undoubtedly adds to the richness of the volume, as well as ensuring its collaborative and collegial nature, something this reviewer would argue is critical when exploring technical socio-political and ecclesial issues.

The book contains eight chapters. Space does not permit a thorough account of each essay: what follows instead is engagement with a selection of chapters, which – it is hoped – represent the main themes and aims of the publication.

In chapter one, “Church-World and Church-State: The Journey since Vatican II”, J. Bryan Hehir begins by stating that within society there exists individuals and communities who hold varying points of view and different perspectives on the fundamental questions of life. The challenge is two-fold, he tells us: first, how to protect the right to religious freedom, and second, how to come to some form of agreement on the moral content of law and policy that shape the lives of citizens. It is an informative

chapter with helpful footnotes and references. While the earlier sections of the essay examine the impact of Vatican II, and in particular the teachings of *Gaudium et Spes* and *Dignitatis Humanae*, the final section considers the US context. Given what has been happening in his country in recent weeks, Hehir rather prophetically says: “The church-state strategy should be realistic but not committed to gain maximum advantage in every conflict. Prudence has often been lacking at the national level of response to secular engagement. Not every fight must be engaged and not every compromise rejected” (16). Pluralism, Hehir insists, is here to stay, and rather than lamenting its presence the Church ought to welcome the possibilities it brings. “Catholicism today should welcome it as a given and work with it intelligently and effectively” (17).

Terry Eagleton agrees. However, in chapter two (“Against Pluralism”) Eagleton also warns against assuming that the idea of pluralism is without its difficulties. He is concerned about the ways in which the idea is understood and used in contemporary discourse: “There is a bogus kind of pluralism that holds that a point of view is to be respected simply because it is a point of view ... It is hard to think of a more pathetically disingenuous argument (25). Eagleton helpfully distinguishes between plurality and pluralism, and critiques the idea of tolerance. And for the Christian, the Gospel remains “a relentlessly uncompromising affair”, he tells us (27). It presents a mandate to be counter-cultural, to be critical of the world and not to become part of the status quo. And he reminds us: “Difference and diversity – Jew, Gentile, man, woman, master, servant, and so on – are not as vital as our common humanity in Christ” (28).

In chapters three and five both Patrick Deneen and William Cavanaugh consider how contemporary society is in many respects becoming less pluralistic and more homogeneous. The forces of capitalism and globalisation are making diversity less of an option, in any real sense. Global economic forces and corporate consumerism have eroded choice and, arguably, independent decision-making. One only needs to consider the extent to which corporate America influences the outcomes of presidential elections, or the disproportionate influence that social media has on citizens’ decisions. Deneen believes that the Church must remain an alternative, counter-cultural presence in the world. While Cavanaugh states that: “identity is now a consumer choice; optionality and plurality would appear to be the new normal” (61). Cavanaugh echoes Pope Francis’ rejection of “the false religion of the market”, and notes how consumption in the West has become a substitute for religion and a way for people to find meaning and satisfaction. He concludes: “The church will have to appreciate the longing for transcendence in material things that consumerism evinces while simultaneously inviting such desire to find its resting place in God, who generously offers grace in sacramental form, that is, in the material world. The only true response the church can offer to consumerism is a better freedom and a better delight in God’s good creation” (77).

Fáinche Ryan considers questions of ecclesial governance and

participation. Who makes the decisions *in the church* and *for the church* is the central concern of chapter seven. She asks whether the current structures are fit for purpose in the twenty-first century. Given Pope Francis' call for us to become a more synodal church, Ryan's chapter is not only informative but also timely. She explores the *sensus fidei* and the *sensus fidelium*, theological concepts that are being examined afresh in light of the claims of synodality. Ryan insists: "Institutional reform is necessarily slow. The whole church, the *sensus fidei* of the *sensus fidelium*, needs formation at a deep and profound level. The church needs to develop and practice new modes of listening ... We need to learn afresh what it is to be church: *all are anointed with an invisible anointing*" (118).

It is perhaps fitting to end with those words from Ryan. There are many who prefer to look back to the "green grass" of yester-year, and who fear the possibilities brought by development and reform. But nothing stays the same forever. Tradition is a living, vibrant, and changing reality. And we, the People of God, all have our part to play within the living Tradition of the Church. Part of that task is to discern new ways of ecclesial governance. But as societies become more pluralistic, our task is also to deepen our understanding of the role the Church might play in the public square. *The Church in Pluralist Society: Social and Political Roles* is a compelling collection of essays that greatly assist us in those tasks.

St Patrick's College, Maynooth.

SUZANNE MULLIGAN

Becoming a Pastoral Parish Council. How to make your PPC really useful for the twenty-first century. Patricia Carroll. Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2022. Pp 64. Price €9.95 (pbk). ISBN 9781788125208.

This publication is sure to be a welcome resource to anyone involved or interested in Parish Pastoral Councils (PPCs). From the outset the author signals her intention to offer a dynamic and practice-oriented text. This she does, while also grounding the work in sound theological sources.

For each of her six remarkably succinct chapters, Carroll has selected a key theme which she considers essential for the formation of a PPC, and which in practice calls for ongoing attention during the life of every PPC that aims to fulfil its purpose as 'a faith-filled leadership group'. Having suggested a relevant biblical text, she explores the theme, elaborates on its underpinning in the Church's self-understanding, and highlights its implication for the service of the PPC to the pastoral life-in-mission of the parish. Each chapter ends with useful pointers to personal and group reflection, to a review of current practice and to well-focussed resources for further work.

A scan of the six themes may whet the appetite of struggling PPCs and invite them to 'taste and see': the parish and the role of the PPC, the five Ps of the PPC (participation, passivity, pastoral, planning, and partnership), prayer-filled reflection in the PPC, developing partnership, what makes planning pastoral, and mission and mission statements.

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The author is well aware of the pitfalls and challenges which *becoming* a *pastoral* parish council entails. She does not labour these. Rather she offers a vision to inspire, encourage and enable effective and fulfilling experience. She rightly insists that the PPC can only flourish when it ‘opens itself to be led by the Holy Spirit, and when it seeks the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all it does in its time of service’ (p.15). Carroll does well in her reiteration of the centrality and mission of the risen Christ who lives in the Church through the presence and action of this Spirit. She does, however, appear to gloss the distinction between the discerning processes in which the PPC engages and the decision-making authority and responsibility of the parish priest (e.g. p.23).

This publication does not provide a total road map for introducing, selecting and establishing a PPC. Neither does it reference the impact that the methods used in these preliminary stages will have on the membership and dynamic of the PPC, and on its reception in the context of the wider parish community. Locating the self-reflection, accountability and planning of a PPC in an annual parish assembly is portrayed, rightly in my view, as a very obvious component of the PPC’s way of working. However, there is need for an enormous amount of ground work and faith development within the parish community for such events to be truly ecclesial and discerning. And in the context of becoming a synodal church, they are essential.

One final point: while it is common-place in pastoral settings to speak of the parish’s ‘mission statement’, it is important to hold fast to the basic principle that Christian mission is a given, however we choose to express it: spread the Good News, go make disciples, build up the kingdom of justice, love and peace. What we must earnestly discern is: what kind of people are we called to be, what practices are needed and what will our parish-in-mission look like, if God’s mission is to be well served in our time and place?

Dublin

ANNE M. CODD PBVM

The 17 Irish Martyrs. Mary McAleese. Dublin: Columba Books, 2022. ISBN: 978-1-78218-378-5

Over four hundred people were martyred for their faith in Ireland during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and 17 of these were beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1992. Their lives and example are well documented and honoured in this very fine book penned by a former President of Ireland, Mary McAleese. Those beatified included one woman, several priests, Bishops and lay men. The one woman, Margaret Ball [Birmingham], died a martyr in Dublin Castle c. 1584 while one of her sons, Walter, was Lord Mayor of Dublin. He was a fervent Protestant and supporter of the Crown and approved of the persecution of his mother and others who persist in their loyalty to Catholicism. The first Bishop to be martyred [1579] was Patrick O’ Healy, O.F.M. who was Bishop of Mayo.

The selective nature of the memories cherished by society is noted by the author – most Irish people are aware of the last Bishop martyred for the faith in Ireland – St. Oliver Plunkett, Archbishop of Armagh – yet unaware of the first and subsequent Bishop[s] to suffer that fate during more than a century of violent religious repression in Ireland. Amongst those was the Archbishop of Cashel, Dermot O’Hurley, who was martyred in 1584 having just arrived back in Ireland after a distinguished academic career in Louvain, Rheims and Rome. The last Bishop to suffer a brutal death for his faith was the Bishop of Emly, Terence O’Brien in 1651.

This work is somewhat of a labour of love for Professor McAleese. She completed her original research over three decades ago but only recently had the space and time to bring it to completion. It was worth the wait! The story of each martyr is replete with interesting historical details that enable the reader to better understand the social, political and religious context of the time. The lives of those who gave the ultimate witness to their Catholic faith are sensitively sketched. An inspiring read.

Cork.

P.J. McAULIFFE

Marriage, Family and the Church: A Boat with New Nets. Pia Matthews. UK: Gracewing Publishing, 2022. ISBN 978 085244 9745

The subtitle of the book by Pia Matthews on marriage, family and the church – *A Boat with New Nets* – reminds me of the lyrics of a renowned folk song. Made famous by Christy Moore in 1989, *The Voyage* quickly became a classic, appearing regularly on the radio, at folk music sets, and at family events. The lyrics, written by John Duhan, tell of a boat tossed on the seas as an analogy for the struggles of marriage and family life.

Matthews drew her title from a similar analogy used by Pope Francis. Speaking at a general audience, during the opening of the Synod on the Family in 2015, the Pope made the point that ‘today families are one of the most important nets for the mission of Peter and of the Church’. Matthews attended that synod as a peritus (expert adviser and consultant) and this book arises out of the experience and the questions it raised.

It traces the long and ongoing story of marriage, family and the church, in what I believe is an approachable way. While historical, it is less a sociological history and more an exploration, laying out key questions, sources, and developments in the understanding of marriage and family within a church context. With clear language and well-structured content, it bears the mark of being a text book for an undergraduate course. At the same time, this book is for anyone who wanted to spend time with this important topic.

The longest chapter is dedicated to the scriptures and ancient times. It does not dodge common and thorny questions, such as ‘Was Jesus married?’, celibacy, and those difficult exhortations by St Paul to the Colossians. The following chapters move through different eras from the patristic period to the twentieth century. A significant proportion of

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the book is given over to recent reflection and debates: for instance, a chapter focuses on Pope St John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, which is a difficult and dense text. To her credit, Matthews gives a welcome and wholistic overview. The final chapter returns to her own experience of the 2015 synod and the resulting document, *Amoris Laetitia*. Consistent with the style of the whole book, she gives a clear presentation of the issues involved and how the debates unfolded.

Marriage involves more than just two people. As the chorus of the Voyage repeats:

*Life is an ocean, love is a boat;
In troubled waters it keeps us afloat;
When we started the voyage;
There was just me and you;
Now look around us;
We have our own crew.*

The crew, of course, can be the children of the couple who set out. But it is possible to see the crew as all those who support a couple, including wider family, society and, of course, the church. The motivation for this book, and the church's concern for marriage, is that marriage matters, and so needs support, because marriage says something important how we are as human beings, about us as Christians in the world, and the relationship of God and the Church.

Maynooth

MICHAEL SHORTALL

To Bring Comfort and Consolation: Bereavement Ministry. Paddy Shannon. Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2022. ISBN 978 1788 125345

Key to the grieving process is to speak of the person who is missed and the feelings it engenders. In the words of Shakespeare: 'Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak knits up the o'erwrought heart and bids it break'. *Macbeth* (Act IV, Scene iii). It's a favourite quote of Paddy Shannon and one that sums up his very useful book. It is the fruit of many years' experience of ministry to the bereaved, and his training of others in bereavement ministry. The efforts to name loss is not so straightforward. The griever needs resources, rituals and relationships from which to draw. This book, in its own small way, can help. It is a short collection, gathering together models of grief, passages of scripture and prayer, and many short reflections. While certainly it would be comforting to anyone who is currently grieving, this book would be most useful to those who regularly work with the bereaved, who can find it difficult not to fall back well-worn images and phrases. This easy to access book is to be recommended. To quote Shakespeare again: "Tears water our growth."

Maynooth

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