



LISTENING TO THE EAST

SYNODALITY IN EASTERN AND ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCH TRADITIONS

Edited by

Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Angelicum

Pro Oriente Foundation



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On the cover:

Pavement of the Baptistery of St John in Florence

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PREFACE FROM THE EDITORS

If the ecumenical journey is understood as an “exchange of gifts,” then one of the gifts other Christians can offer to Catholics is precisely their synodal experience. As Pope Francis wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, with a specific reference to the Orthodox tradition: “In the dialogue with our Orthodox brothers and sisters, we Catholics have the opportunity to learn more about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and their experience of synodality. Through an exchange of gifts, the Spirit can lead us ever more fully into truth and goodness” (n. 246).

It is with this conviction that, in July 2021, the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity proposed to the General Secretariat of the Synod the organization of conferences on synodality in the different Christian traditions. These conferences were intended to be an ecumenical contribution to the synodal process of the Catholic Church held in 2021-2024 on the topic “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission.”

Four international conferences were held in November 2022 and January 2023 at the Pontifical University St Thomas Aquinas (*Angelicum*) in Rome, focusing on the understanding and practice of synodality in the four major Christian traditions: Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Mainline Protestant, and Free Churches.

The methodology of these conferences, entitled “Listening to the East” and “Listening to the West”, was in and of itself synodal, based on listening – since, as Pope Francis frequently states: “A synodal Church is a Church which listens”. More than one hundred theologians, historians, and canonists, including bishops, clergy and laity, monks and religious, men and women, youth, from different Christian traditions and various continents, were invited to present the synodal experiences of their Churches, through keynote speeches, case studies and workshops, particularly on the three main themes of the synod: communion, participation, and mission.

The role of the invited Catholic theologians, professors from different countries and members of the General Secretariat of the Synod, was to listen. At the end of each day, designated “Catholic listeners” summarised what they had perceived and what they thought Catholics could learn.

*

This volume brings together the proceedings of the first two conferences held on 2-5 and 23-26 November at the *Angelicum*, jointly organised by the PRO ORIENTE Foundation in Vienna and the *Angelicum*’s Institute for Ecumenical Studies, under the patronage of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and the General Secretariat of the Synod. The programmes of both conferences are available at the beginning of each part of the book.

The first conference, entitled “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Eastern Orthodox Church”, is presented in its original ordering. The second conference, originally divided into two sessions entitled respectively “Synodality in the Syriac Orthodox and Church of the East Traditions,” and “Synodality in Oriental Orthodox Church Traditions”, is presented according to each ancient Oriental tradition, by alphabetical order.

*

The main conclusion is perhaps to be found in a sentence uttered precisely with regard to these conferences by Pope Francis while receiving Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, on 19 November 2022: “I know that in a few days you will deliver a talk on synodality in the Syriac tradition as part of the symposium ‘Listening to the East’, organized by the *Angelicum*, on the synodal experience of the various Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches. The journey of synodality undertaken by the Catholic Church is and must be ecumenical, just as the ecumenical journey is synodal. It is my hope that we can pursue, ever more fraternally and concretely, our own *syn-odos*, our ‘common journey’, by encountering one another, showing concern for one another, sharing our hopes and struggles and above all, as we have done this morning, our prayer and praise of the Lord.”

Indeed, on the one hand, the path of synodality is ecumenical, because synodality is a challenge that must be faced with other Christians. On the other hand, the ecumenical path is synodal, because ecumenism is first and foremost a *syn/odos*, a pilgrimage made together with other Christians. In other words, it can be said not only that the ecumenical movement contributes to the synodal process of the Catholic Church, but also that the Catholic Church's synodal process could be a contribution to the ecumenical movement. It is with these convictions that this book is published, in the hope that it will be helpful to the members of the XVI General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and, more generally, to all those interested in Christian unity.

*

The Editors of this volume would like to thank all Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox speakers who participated in the conferences, for contributing to the reflection and for rapidly finalizing their papers for publication. They are also grateful to the Catholic listeners for their valuable synthesis documents, and to all members of the Scientific Committees that were entrusted with planning the conferences, listed at the beginning of the book. This book could not have been finished without the tireless efforts of those working on the manuscript, to whom the Editors would like to express their deep gratitude, especially Prof. Dimitrios Keramidas, Dr Ana Petrache, Ms Marie-Agnès Pui and Prof. Andrew M. Steele. They are also indebted to those who by their generous support made the conferences and this publication possible, and to the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity for accepting the publication of this volume in its series *Ut unum sint* at the *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*.

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEES

(in alphabetic order)

Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Eastern Orthodox Church

Fr Dr Hyacinthe Destivelle OP (Italy)
Dr Regina Elsner (Germany)
Bernd Mussinghoff (Austria)
Dr Julija Naett Vidovic (France)
Dr Johannes Oeldemann (Germany)
Katerina Pekridou (Belgium)
Dr Viola Raheb (Austria)
Msgr Dr Juan Usma Gomez (Italy)

Synodality in the Syriac and Oriental Orthodox Church Traditions

Bishop Anba Angelos (Egypt)
Prof. Dr Pablo Argárate (Austria)
Metropolitan Mor Polycarpus Aydin (The Netherlands)
Fr Frans Bouwen MAFr (Jerusalem)
Bishop Mar Shimun Daniel (Iraq)
Fr Dr Hyacinthe Destivelle OP (Italy)
Bernd Mussinghoff (Austria)
Bishop Armash Nalbandian (Syria)
Dr Viola Raheb (Austria)
PD Dr Aho Shemunkasho (Austria)
Msgr Dr Juan Usma Gomez (Italy)
Fr Prof. Dr Baby Varghese (India)
Prof. Dr Dietmar W. Winkler (Austria)

FIRST PART

SYNODALITY IN THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

International Ecumenical Conference

“Listening to the East – Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Eastern Orthodox Church”

Pontifical University St. Thomas Aquinas, Rome, Nov. 2 – 5, 2022

PROGRAM

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2022

17.30 Vespers Prayer (Church of the Angelicum)

Opening Session: Official Opening and Introduction

Moderator: Fr. HYACINTHE DESTIVELLE OP

18.00 *Words of Welcome:*

Rector Fr. THOMAS JOSEPH WHITE OP, Angelicum
Cardinal MARIO GRECH, General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops
Cardinal KURT KOCH, President of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity
Metropolitan JOB OF PIDIA, Co-Chair of the Joint International Commission for
Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church
Ambassador ret. ALFONS M. KLOSS, President of PRO ORIENTE

Keynote speech: *The Orthodox Church is a Synodal Church* – Bishop MAXIM (VASILJEVIĆ)

19.30 Reception

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2022

Communion: Walking together in the Holy Spirit

Moderator: MYRIAM WILENS

09.00-10.30 **Keynote speech:** Synodality as a manifestation of Koinonia in the Church –
Fr. SORIN ȘELARU

Respondents: SVETOSLAV RIBOLOV / Fr. AMPHILOCHIOS MILTOS

11.00-12.45 **“Practices of Synodality”** Chair: REGINA ELSNER

I. The Council of Nicaea (and its upcoming jubilee anniversary)
Expert presentation: Metropolitan VASILIOS OF CONSTANTIA AND AMMOCHOSTOS
Listener: ANDREA RIEDL

II. The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, Crete, 2016
Expert presentation: Fr. NICOLAS KAZARIAN
Listener: JOHANNES OELEDMANN

Discussion

15.30-17.00	Parallel Workshops <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Synodality and the Consensus Patrum: Exploring the Interplay between Patristic and Conciliar Authority</i> – ANDREJ JEFTIĆ Moderator: KATERINA PEKRIDOU 2. <i>Permanent Synods – in Church History and today</i> – DIMITRIOS KERAMIDAS Moderator: JULIA NAETT VIDOVIC 3. <i>Liturgy, Communion, and Synodality</i> – Fr. ANDRIY DUDCHENKO Moderator: REGINA ELSNER 4. <i>Monastic Coenobium as an Icon of Christian Synodality and the Eucharistic Communion of Many in One</i> – Fr. SAVA JANIĆ Moderator: Fr. MILAN ŽUST SJ 5. <i>Synodality at the Regional Level: The Example of the Metropolitanate of Karlovci</i> – DRAGICA TADIĆ-PAPANIKOLAOU Moderator: Fr. THOMAS NÉMETH
17.30- 19.00	Plenary / Reports Reports from the workshops Observer's resume of the day: Fr. WILLIAM HENN OFMCap Plenary Discussion Moderator: Fr. IOAN MOGA

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2022

Participation: Walking together with the whole people of God

	Moderator: ASSAAD KATTAN
09.00-10.30	Keynote speech: Reception and Inspiration of synodal processes in Church Life – TEVA REGULE Respondents: PANTELIS KALAITZIDIS / Fr. CYRIL HOVORUN
11.00-12.45	“Practices of Synodality” Chair: JULIA NAETT VIDOVIC I. <i>The Russian Council of 1917/18</i> Expert presentation: ALEXANDER MRAMORNOW Listener: Fr. RUDOLF PROKSCHI II. <i>Orthodox Lay Movements</i> Expert presentation: GEORGES EL-HAGE Listener: KATHERINE SHIRK LUCAS Discussion

15.30-17.00	Parallel Workshops <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Canon Law Perspectives – Understanding of Representation and Delegation</i> (in cooperation with the Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches) – DAVID HEITH-STADE Moderator: ASTRID KAPTIJN 2. <i>Orthodox Youth Movements</i> – MIRA NEAIMEH / CYRILLE SOLLOGOUB Moderator: ASSAAD KATTAN 3. <i>Synodality on the Local Level</i> – Fr. IOAN MOGA Moderator: GEORGIOS VLANTIS 4. <i>The Participation of Lay People in the Election of Primates and Bishops</i> – Fr. ALEXANDER RENTEL Moderator: Fr. THOMAS NÉMETH 5. <i>Women and Synodality</i> – CARRIE FROST / ADRIAN CRĂCIUN Moderator: VIOLA RAHEB
17.30- 19.00	Plenary / Reports Reports from the workshops Observer's resume of the day: PÉTER SZABÓ Plenary Discussion Moderator: JOHANNES OELDEMANN

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2022

Mission: Walking together in the contemporary World

Moderator: DIMITRIOS KERAMIDAS	
09.00-10.30	Keynote speech: The relevance of synodality for a missionary Orthodox Church – Fr. JOHN NJOROGÉ <div style="text-align: right;">Respondents: KATERINA K. BAUER / NATHAN HOPPE</div>
11.00-12.45	“Practices of Synodality” Chair: KATERINA PEKRIDOU <i>I. For the Life of the World</i> Expert presentation: CARRIE FROST Listener: REGINA ELSNER <i>II. Orthodox participation in the World Council of Churches</i> Expert presentation: PETER BOUTENEFF Listener: ANNEMARIE MAYER Discussion

15.30-17.00	Parallel Workshops 1. <i>Orthodoxy, Solidarity and Sobornost’</i> – ANDREJ SHISHKOV Moderator: JULIA NAETT VIDOVIĆ 2. <i>Mission and Synodality in different contexts</i> – NATHAN HOPPE, Fr. CRISTIAN SONEA Moderator: KATHERINE SHIRK LUCAS 3. <i>Synodality as a model for the society?</i> – MICHEL NSEIR, KATERINA K. BAUER Moderator: VIOLA RAHEB 4. <i>Synodality and Mission in the Early Ecumenical Movement</i> – NATALLIA VASILEVICH Moderator: KATERINA PEKRIDOU
17.30- 19.00	Plenary / Reports Reports from the workshops Observer’s resume of the day: Sr. NATHALIE BECQUART Plenary Discussion Moderator: REGINA ELSNER Concluding remarks

GREETINGS

Cardinal Kurt Koch

Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, Your Graces, dear Father Rector, dear Professors, dear students,

The idea of this symposium goes back to July 2021. At that time, the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity suggested to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops to organize academic ecumenical conferences on synodality in the different Christian traditions, in order to foster the ecumenical dimension of the ongoing Synodal process on synodality. The original idea was that these conferences could serve as “pre-synodal consultations” on how the different Christian traditions understand and practice synodality.

Four conferences were foreseen by our Dicastery: with the Eastern Orthodox Churches, with the Oriental Orthodox Churches, with the mainline Western Christian Communions, and with the Free Churches. I am grateful that our proposal has been welcomed by Cardinal Mario Grech, General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, and that the two first conferences, dedicated to the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox traditions, have been jointly prepared and organized by the Pro Oriente Foundation – represented here by its President Dr Alfons Kloss – and by the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Angelicum.

These conferences are important for three reasons. Firstly, if one understands the ecumenical path as an “exchange of gifts,” one of the gifts Catholics can receive from the other Christians is precisely their understanding and experience of synodality, particularly important in the context of the synodal process of the Catholic Church. As Pope Francis states in *Evangelii Gaudium* with a particular reference to the Orthodox: “we Catholics have the opportunity to learn more about the

meaning of episcopal collegiality and their experience of synodality. Through an exchange of gifts, the Spirit can lead us ever more fully into truth and goodness” (*EG* 246).

Secondly, these conferences have a particular relevance for the current international theological orthodox-catholic dialogue, which topic is precisely the relationship between synodality and primacy in the second millennium and today. I am sure that the reflections we will hear in these days will be of interest for our dialogue. I am grateful for the presence among us tonight of His Eminence Metropolitan Job of Pisidia, Co-chair of this commission and tireless promoter of the dialogue.

Finally, this conference is important for a third reason: the preparation of the 1700th anniversary of the first ecumenical council, the Council of Nicaea. Reflecting together on synodality can help us to prepare to celebrate together, in a “synodal” way, the jubilee of this council, the very first experience of synodality on a worldwide level.

Expressing my best wishes for this symposium, I would like to express my deep appreciation to its scientific committee, to the Pro Oriente Foundation and the Institute for Ecumenical Studies.

May the Lord abundantly bless all the participants! May our reflections of these days help us to continue our “walking together” towards full communion, accomplishing the will of the Lord.

Cardinal Mario Grech

Secretary General of the Synod

“The Synod is on”. Thnoese are the opening words of the Working Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) of the current Synod, which is entitled “For a Synodal Church: Communion – Participation – Mission”. Last October, pope Francis opened the synod for the *entire* Church and a week later the diocesan bishops opened the synod in their respective local Churches. With this synod pope Francis invites the *entire* Church to reflect on being and becoming a more synodal Church, a theme that is decisive for its life and mission.

One year after the opening of the synod we can indeed enthusiastically affirm: “The synod is on”. Millions of people around the globe have engaged in the consultative phase already. They engaged with the basic question that guides this process: How does synodality, which takes place today on different levels (from the local to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with its mission entrusted to her – and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church? (Preparatory Document 2).

Just last week the Secretariat of the Synod presented the fruits of the first steps taken in this synod. It is very encouraging that 112 out of 114 episcopal conferences, all 15 Eastern Catholic Churches, 17 reports from the Roman Curia, a report by the Institutes of Consecrated Life as well as numerous other institutions submitted contributions. They all express what the first phase of a deep spiritual listening among the people of God within the local Churches has brought to light. It is rather touching, moving and encouraging to read about the gratitude and joy of meeting as brothers and sisters in Christ, of sharing what resonated within them while listening to the Word, of reflecting about the joy and hope, as well as anxieties and concerns for a Church that is to fulfill its missionary task faithfully, joyfully and effectively. The syntheses reveal that synodality is not a mere theoretical concept anymore, but it has become a lived reality and, yes, the people of God ask and long for increasing and deepening this experience.

The Working Document for the Continental Stage that was published last week, expresses around five generative nuclei several themes that reveal the voice of the Holy Spirit through the experience of the people of God. The purpose of the current document is to enable the entire Church to listen to what the Spirit is communicating to the people in the different local Churches around the world and to discern what is considered to be of relevance for the XVI. Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops which will be held in October 2023. The process of the current synod entails a circularity between the local, the regional and the universal level. It is not a one-way direction process from either the local to the universal or from the universal to the local. The circularity enables practicing catholicity, so that “the individual parts bring their own gifts to the other parts and to the whole Church, in such a way that the whole and individual parts grow greater through the mutual communication of all and their united efforts towards fullness in unity” (LG 13). The words of the Apostle are applicable: “As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Petr. 4, 10).

Key aspects in a synodal Church are listening and discerning together to what the Spirit has to say. Such a deep listening can and must be ecumenical and thus involve the totality of the baptized. The contributions that the Secretariat of the Synod received from around the world express that the people of God are longing for a Church that does not exclude but – following the example of Jesus – is a welcoming Church that practices a radical inclusion so that all feel at home. The faithful express a deep desire to grow in unity with all baptized. “Many reports emphasize that there is no complete synodality without unity among Christians” (DCS 48). Thus, the reports articulate what is at the heart of the prayer of the Lord: “That all may be one” (John 17:21). The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one baptism, has, therefore, a special place in the synodal journey (*Vademecum of the Synod* 5.3.7).

The commitment to the restoration of Christian Unity is for the Catholic Church irrevocable, as Pope John Paul II qualified it in his encyclical letter *Ut unum sint* (n. 3). The commitment is rooted in the belief that whatever the Holy Spirit has wrought in the hearts of our brothers and sisters in Christ can be for our own edification (UR 4) and

acknowledges with humility that “certain features of the Christian mystery have at times been more effectively emphasized” in other Christian communities (*UUS* 14). Hence, Pope Francis wrote in *Evangelii gaudium*: “If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us... Through an exchange of gifts, the Spirit can lead us ever more fully into truth and goodness.” (EG 246) Being ecumenical thus requires to be synodal and to be synodal postulates to be ecumenical: not only are both synodality and ecumenism processes of “walking together”, but one also cannot think and undertake the one without the other.

It is for this reason that I like to express my gratitude to my brother Kurt Cardinal Koch, prefect of the Dicastery for Christian Unity. As the synod was about to embark, he presented an excellent proposal to hold four international academic conferences in Rome on synodal institutions and practices of other Christian communions, also with the participation of Catholic experts.

I am grateful that today we inaugurate these four conferences and that there is such a large interest in engaging in this project. The wonderful proposal by Cardinal Koch needs, however, people who put it in practice and make it work. I am very grateful that the Foundation Pro Oriente, under the guidance of its President Ambassador ret. Dr Alfons M. Kloss, as well as the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Angelicum, have eagerly and enthusiastically taken on that task. A special word of thanks goes in particular to Fr Hyacinthe Destivelle OP, Mr Bernd Mussinghoff and all others who have put together a rich and promising program with excellent speakers enabling us to walk the journey together in these coming days. Let us then open our hearts and minds so that we listen attentively to what the Holy Spirit has to say to the Church of Christ.

Cardinal Christoph Schönborn

Archbishop of Vienna

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies,
Esteemed Conference Participants, Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with great pleasure, that I am addressing you today, while you are gathered for the opening session of the International Ecumenical Conference “Listening to the East” on Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Eastern Orthodox Church. I am convinced that the Catholic Church has a lot to listen to and to learn from its Orthodox Sister Church, concerning the theology, the practical expressions in church life, and also the spirituality of synodality.

At the same time, I feel sorry, because I cannot be with you all in Rome tonight, since I have been asked to attend the “Bahrain Forum for Dialogue”, that is taking place in these days, and that will also be visited by Pope Francis, who will commence his Apostolic Visit to Bahrain tomorrow.

Since its establishment by my esteemed predecessor, Cardinal Franz König, in 1964, during the Second Vatican Council, PRO ORIENTE Foundation has been committed to fostering communion between the Eastern and Western churches. It has a longstanding experience on the way to a closer rapprochement between our churches that have been separated for centuries. Until today, thanks to the grace of God, both on the unofficial level, on which PRO ORIENTE is working, and on the official level, several milestones have already been reached, walking together on this pathway, which is a way of love and of truth.

For PRO ORIENTE, the geographical and political contexts of Vienna have proven to be helpful in this regard, with its openness and closeness to the Eastern part of the oikumene. Today, PRO ORIENTE has come to Rome, to the heart of the Catholic World, where our cooperation partner, the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the

Pontifical University St Thomas Aquinas is hosting the conference, for which I am extraordinarily grateful. I am certain, that the Angelicum as well as the entire “Eternal City” are going to provide an excellent context and frame for the conference.

In these days, in Rome, the Catholic Church wants to be listening to its Orthodox brothers and sisters. May it be the attitude of being listeners, that will gather us all together, and thus contribute to a successful conference on the important matter of synodality, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit!

Metropolitan Job of Pisidia

Co-President of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue

As the Orthodox co-president of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, I would like to express my thanks to the Pontifical University Saint Thomas Aquinas, the “Angelicum”, and its Institute for Ecumenical Studies, as well as to the Pro Oriente Foundation, for organizing and inviting me to this very interesting International Academic Conference on “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Eastern Orthodox Church”.

A few weeks ago, while informing His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew about my intention to participate in this conference, he asked me what would be the theme. I responded, that it will be on synodality, since recently, Roman Catholics only speak about synodality! And he responded, that “This is very good”.

The reason why Roman Catholics manly speak about synodality is probably founded on the words of His Holiness Pope Francis, seven years ago for the 50th anniversary of the institution of the synod of bishops, when he said on 17 October 2015 that “the path of synodality is the way that God expects of the Church in the third millennium” and suggested that the Roman Catholic Church has something to learn from the Orthodox Church on this topic. I understand that is precisely the aim of the present conference: to hear and listen to the practice of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church has reflected on this issue since the resumption of the dialogue in 2005, that is to say for the last 17 years. Indeed, the document of Ravenna, issued in 2007, is entitled: “Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church. Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority”. Its attempt is to deepen the study of the sacramental

nature of the Church, as described in the previous documents of Munich (1982), Bari (1987) and Valamo (1988), and to address at the same time the thorny dividing question of primacy. The merit of the Ravenna document is to underline the inseparable bond of authority and conciliarity in the church, thus relocating the notion of primacy in the context of “conciliarity”, and to have identified a threefold actualization of conciliarity and authority (local, regional and universal).

These three levels have been received by the Chieti document, issued in 2016 and entitled “Synodality and Primacy during the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church”. One can already notice the switch from the concept of “conciliarity” to the one of “synodality” between these two documents, and one can rightly challenge if these two concepts have the exact same meaning? Could they be also considered as synonyms of the famous and trendy concept of “sobornost” developed by the Slavophile movement in Russia at the end of the 19th century, which envisioned a collective dimension of the Church, where all Christians, lay people, monastics, clergy and bishops have the same rights? Perhaps the present conference could help us in clarifying this question.

But the merit of the Chieti document is definitely to point out that the exercise of synodality is not the same at the three levels. But how can the Orthodox help the Roman Catholics on this matter?

Generally, in the Orthodox Church today, synodality on the regional level, at the level of the autocephalous Churches, is functioning regularly. And this is perhaps what most of the Orthodox understand when speaking of synodality. However, synodality ought to be also implemented at the two other levels: the local and the universal. Unfortunately, the practice of synodality at the local level, at the level of the eparchy, is almost non-existent in most Orthodox Churches where the administration of the diocese remains the exclusivity of the local bishop and his closer collaborators. On the other hand, the very long preparation of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church and the final absence of four autocephalous Churches at its meeting in Crete in 2016 testifies of the difficulties to implement synodality at the universal level in the Orthodox Church today.

For these reasons, I am personally convinced that synodality presents today many challenges to all of us, both Orthodox and Roman Catholics, and therefore, that, we have a lot not only to share, but first of all, to learn from one another. In this perspective, I wish that the present conference be fruitful and help us to build a more synodal Church in the third millennium.

KEYNOTE

The Orthodox Church is a Synodal Church. Towards a Synodical Ontology of the Church

Bishop Maxim (Vasiljevic)

I should like to begin by expressing my deep gratitude for the honor of being invited to take part in this august assembly organized under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. My object in this paper is to offer for discussion some personal remarks concerning the synodal nature of the Orthodox Church and the way it is expressed in its ecclesial life. It is a privilege to see that an Orthodox bishop, among other participants in this conference – under the Roman sky, commemorating all the faithful departed (Nov. 2) – has been asked to present and examine his own synodal tradition in the light; first, of contemporary challenges, including some positive ones, and secondly, *of the fact that he is speaking to Roman Catholic theologians*. It is a welcome opportunity offered to me by the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas to rethink this matter. I am personally glad that the PRO ORIENTE Foundation and Angelicum have at last paid attention to the importance of the synodal dimension for the unity of the Church, trying to see how Orthodox tradition and theology can be of help to the Catholic tradition in this respect. For indeed, the creative re-reception of the Tradition is no less important than the Tradition is itself.

Introduction

The topic of synodality has grown increasingly trendy in view of the approaching great Christian jubilee in 2025 – the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325). The entire Christian world is invited to re-receive this Council anew in the 21st century. But how can we recast Nicene synodality in a contemporary conceptual framework?

The Council of Nicaea remains our point of reference – it is celebrated liturgically in the Orthodox Church – but it is hard to use it as a model or example to imitate. Nicaea 325 shows how synodality is a complex and unpredictable phenomenon, sometimes creating more problems than resolutions. For instance, *post-festum*, “the Council of Nicaea resulted in more confusion than resolution,”¹ and it brought disunity to the Church instead of unity. It divided “not only the Nicenes from the non-Nicenes,” but it also caused “divisions among the Nicenes themselves.”² In the course of more than 50 years after the Council, there was an immense effort among the God-bearing Fathers to readjust, reinterpret, and re-receive Nicaea’s theological legacy. Its Creed needed to be amended, and its theology re-explained. A series of local councils³ in Eastern and Western parts of the Roman Empire sought to reaffirm the faith of Nicaea using different, often contrasting, doctrinal formulations, resulting in a “labyrinth of creeds,” as the historian Socrates testifies.⁴ Indeed, synodality – a word with many nuances – is a delicate matter. It implies a dialectic, and it requires a reception. It’s not *an end in itself*.

I have stressed that the Orthodox are asked to examine their synodality in the light of modern challenges, including some positive ones coming from the Roman Catholic tradition. This may sound too humble on the part of an Orthodox theologian: what can we learn from

1. A. Khaled, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011, p. 18.

2. J. Behr, *The Case Against Diodore and Theodore: Texts and Their Contexts*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 5. Also, “As has been recently noted, it seems that the problem after Nicaea was not with the ‘Arians,’ but with the Nicenes themselves.” (Fr John Behr, *The Nicene Faith: Formation of Christian Theology*, Parts I & II, Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004, p. 37. – Italics added.

3. Councils: Antioch (341), Sardica and Phillipoupolis (343), Milan (345), Sirmium (351), Arles (353), Milan (355), II Sirmium (357), Ancyra (358), Rimini (359), Constantinople (360), Iconium (376), Lampsac (365), Rome (377), etc.

4. Socrates describes the creeds as a labyrinth (Eccl. Hist. 2.41.17-18).

the non-Orthodox as to how to teach and practice synodality? Why take such an extroverted attitude? The answer is simply that the Orthodox *have* allowed themselves to forget some aspects of genuine synodality and/or adopt some foreign aspects, and this has taken place to such an extent that the synodal system in some autocephalous Churches throughout the Orthodox world is, on the one hand, a *closed* and self-sufficient structure and, on the other hand, a copy of the papal system that is found in the medieval Catholic Church. As the late Fr Alexander Schmemmann observed:

“Having rejected and still rejecting the universal primacy in its Roman form... the Orthodox conscience has easily accepted it in the so-called ‘autocephalies.’”⁵ Of course, one can find weaknesses in every manifestation of the life of the Church. However, the observed current *weakness* of Orthodox synodality should be attributed not to its being fundamentally feeble but to its alterations in particular contexts; considered on regular scales, before such distortion occurs, synodality is substantial.

It is, therefore, with a sense of both surprise and relief for Orthodox Christians that we come across a renowned head of the Roman Church, His Holiness Pope Francis, who, in 2013, during his meeting with the delegation from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, in Rome for the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, said that Catholics need to learn more from their Orthodox brothers and sisters about the “meaning of Episcopal collegiality, and the tradition of synodality, so typical of the

5. A. Schmemmann, “The Idea of Primacy in Orthodox Ecclesiology,” in J. Meyendorff et al., *The Primacy of Peter in the Orthodox Church*, Bedfordshire: Faith Press, 1973, p. 148. One need simply be reminded of the way some synods of some autocephalous churches act (as a bishop you are simply informed of your episcopal transfer without being asked about it—as happened recently to a prominent hierarch of an autocephalous church), not to speak of what happens in synodal practices throughout the rest of the Orthodox world.

Orthodox Churches.”⁶ In the same spirit, the Pope recently dared to raise this question and discuss it, doing thereby what all theologians ought to do, namely identify the purpose of synodality. He said:

The synod... calls us to become a Church that *gets up*, one that is *not turned in on itself*, but capable of pressing forward, leaving behind its own prisons and *setting out to meet the world*, with the *courage to open doors*.⁷

There is in this sentence food for thought for all of us gathered here. We must work toward a synodality in which, in the inspired words of Pope Francis, the Church will open doors to meet the world. One cannot practice synodality as an introvert reality.

Synodality has been the subject of extensive discussion in our time, and the interest extends across confessional borders, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and even Protestant. Many authors describe the development and the theology of synodality, and some emphasize the corresponding necessity of primacy. Much has been written, for instance, about the Council’s composition, the number of its participants, the way of signing, the issue of voting (of *shouting*), etc. I will mention only the two-volume book *Primacy in the Church: The Office of Primate and the Authority of Councils*, edited by John Chryssavgis and John Behr (2016). To that publication, I contributed some “Reflections on Authority and Synodality: A Eucharistic, Relational, and Eschatological Perspective.” My object in today’s paper is limited to an attempt to summarize the vast material related to the theology of synodality with attention fixed on two particular points. The first point is related to the spirit of the ancient 34th Apostolic Canon. This ancient Canon suggests a balance between the “one” and the “many,” proving that synodality is not simply

6. <https://www.lastampa.it/vatican-insider/en/2013/06/28/news/catholics-can-learn-about-synodality-from-their-orthodox-brothers-1.36089311>.

7. From Pope Francis’ homily for the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul 2022: <https://slmedia.org/blog/pope-francis-homily-for-the-solemnity-of-saints-peter-and-paul-2022>.

a *substitute* to primacy; “properly understood it is the *condition* of the latter.”⁸ The other point bears directly on the subject of reception (or, creative re-reception which takes place in the community). Time and space prevent me from doing full justice to the treatment of these aspects. Bearing these two points constantly in mind, I shall limit myself to examining the so-called *synodical* ontology. One cannot assess this ontology without considering specific ecclesiological ideas that established a close relationship between the Church and the Eucharist, institution and event, and history and eschatology. The most significant attempt to arrive at a healthy reconciliation of these two aspects of ecclesiology – synodality and primacy (to describe them in general terms) – is to be found in the writings of a Greek theologian, Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas.⁹

1. Synodical ontology of the Orthodox Church

What can an Orthodox speaker say to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops? How can the Orthodox synodality be relevant to a Church constructed historically and spiritually by “Western conciliarity”? Well, apart from the fact that we live in an increasingly unified world, in a world of interdependence, we are also *Christians* who share the faith and order of the first millennium. This entire period of history is justifiably characterized as “synodical.”

8. P. McPartlan, “Introduction,” in: John D. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World Today*, Los Angeles: Sebastian Press, 2010, p. xxi.

9. J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World Today*, Los Angeles: Sebastian Press, 2010, Metropolitan John Zizioulas not only corrected the Western and purified the Eastern tradition from the dangers they involved for synodality but, in a way that remained unique in contemporary theology, he recovered and synthesized the ancient Christian and early patristic approach to ecclesiology with Greek ontological insights.

Like everything else in Christian life, the ontology of the Church invites us to understand synods in terms of *process*. After all, doesn't *synodos* literally mean "being on the road together"? Being on the road implies an orientation toward the future. "We are not being yet, but on the road to being,"¹⁰ says Dionysios Skliris. In this way, our life could be called a *dromic ontology* (δρόμος means a *path*). The meaning of this *synodical* ontology is that no work in history is perfect in the beginning; rather, it is expected to be realized and completed later, after a historical trajectory.

This remark is important to understand the character of synodality in the Orthodox Church, in which there is always a certain dialectic of "already but not yet" – a dialectic that permeates the entire life of the Church. It is precisely the synod's "dialectic" that has driven out the idea of a supreme ruler of one over many. Each gathering of the synod opens with a prayer of invocation of the Holy Spirit, who unites all Christians in the body of Christ on both a local and universal level simultaneously. What the ancient 34th Apostolic Canon determines is a balance, that is, mutual respect, in relations between bishops with the first (presiding) bishop; at the same time, the synodality of all the bishops is emphasized, in their pasturing and organizing of the entire Church.

This dialectic of "already but not yet" has further implications, brilliantly formulated by Zizioulas:

The Church cannot be conceived as a *permanent* institution. She is what she is by becoming again and again what she *will be*. The Church is an event, taking place again and again, not a society structurally instituted in a permanent way. This does not mean that she has no institutional aspects to her existence. It means that not all such aspects pertain to her true identity, which is eschatological.

10. "In this sense, we are not yet 'beings.' We are 'on the road' to being, which will be achieved in the future." (Dionysios Skliris, *On the Road to Being: St Maximus the Confessor's Syn-odical Ontology*, Los Angeles: Sebastian Press, 2018, p. 7.

Only those institutional aspects – and such aspects do exist – which stem from her existence as an event relate to her true identity. Such structures and institutions are those involved in the event of the eucharistic community and whatever stems from this event.¹¹

This is an apparent weakness – that is, that an institution, such as synodality is not based on assurances deriving from history but rather is conditioned pneumatologically. However, it conceals the true power of the Church, and that power is “made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). The Orthodox Church can boast more of her *epicletic* character than of her institutional organization. Yet, to put it correctly: synodality – stemming from the Eucharist – makes the Church both an event and an institution.¹² As such, the balance between the synod and churches is not easy to maintain, and we can only thank God for making it possible. So, by being a dynamic reality, synodality is opposed to bureaucracy; it’s not static but *dialectic*. That means the synodal fathers are called to be less attached to their own views and more open to God’s will. (Even if we do all that God has demanded of us, we must allow for the possibility that we may have done nothing that will survive in the Kingdom.) That is a *risky* endeavor, but that is nonetheless the way of the Church. So, Pope Francis’ *Synod on Synodality* – which will take place in October 2023 – is rightly characterized as “the greatest gamble of this papacy.”¹³ It cannot be otherwise since it is the future (eschatology) that verifies our historical decisions.

As a Eucharistic manifestation of the catholicity of the Church, synodality preserved the early Church from being simply a “multiverse” (polycephaly) of separate churches containing an indefinite number of *autocephalies*, each with its own canon laws for functioning but finding it difficult to speak on all issues with one voice. Basically, the ancient model has worked properly in the Orthodox Church even in the second millennium. But an *advocatus diaboli* might immediately ask: “What

11. J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, p. 144. My italics.

12. It should be noted that historically in the East, the synodal institution has never been conceived purely or primarily in historical and legal terms.

13. <https://religionnews.com/2022/09/06/pope-francis-big-gamble-the-synod-on-synodality/>.

about the situation resulting from the celebrated 2016 Council in Crete?” We must admit that the current synodal situation in the Orthodox Church causes more perplexity than understanding. The Cretan synod and some recent events have bequeathed to us problems with which we are still wrestling in Orthodoxy. Yet, if the 21st century is to become “the century of the synodality,” something must be done to overcome some difficulties. Pope Francis has declared that synodality is what God expects of the Church in the 21st century.¹⁴ Is Francis “plotting a path to unity with the Orthodox Churches,” as some believe,¹⁵ or is he rediscovering the tool for a more dynamic Church, as I assume? Whichever the case, we need to use the opportunity for a renewed tradition of synodality. This can be done only if each individual Church confirms its faithfulness to the *catholicity of one Church* – the Eucharistic Body of the one Christ – a true unity in identity. Without *genuine synodality*, which implies the dialectic of the “one” (*primus*) and “many,” the Orthodox Church “will fall into the vortex of nationalisms, the boasting of the past, the introversion of self-sufficiency, and the contempt of the modern world.”¹⁶

2. Exercising primacy with synodality: the spirit of the Apostolic Canon 34

A Canon that was accepted both in the East and West expresses the relationship between the local Churches of a region. I will quote it in just a moment but let us notice first that Canon 34 belongs to the corpus known as the “Apostolic Canons,” formed in all probability in the fourth century. That is the time when the metropolitan system was taking shape,

14. Pope Francis, in an address delivered on 17 October 2015 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops by Paul VI, stressed that “It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”

15. <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/3787/francis-plotting-a-path-to-unity-with-the-orthodox-churches/>.

16. See J. Zizioulas, <https://orthodoxtimes.com/ecumenical-patriarch-ethnophyletism-is-a-permanent-thorn-in-the-relations-of-the-orthodox-churches/>.

and the Canon provides that all the bishops of a region (ἔθνος) must recognize their “first one” (πρῶτος) as their “head” (κεφαλὴ) and do nothing without him, while he should equally do nothing without them. Here is what it says:

The bishops of each province (*ethnos*) must recognize the one who is first (*protos*) amongst them, and consider him to be their head (*kephale*), and not do anything important without his consent (*gnome*); each bishop may only do what concerns his own diocese (*paroikia*) and its dependent territories. But the first (*protos*) cannot do anything without the consent of all. For in this way concord (*homonoia*) will prevail, and God will be praised through the Lord in the Holy Spirit. (Apostolic Canon 34)

Here we come to the golden rule, the algorithm, of synodality. Synodality has a *center* and a definite *structure*. The *one* and the *many* are mutually constitutive: there are no bishops without the primus, but equally, there is no primus without the many bishops. In its Eucharistic shape, this *pattern of relations* is reflected in the life of the Church and “recurs throughout the Church, which participates in God’s life,” says Paul McPartlan. So it is unsurprising that the Canon “significantly enough, ends with reference to the Holy Trinity.” According to Zizioulas, this indicates indirectly “that canonical provisions of this kind are not a matter of mere *organization* but have a *theological*, indeed a *Trinitarian*, basis.”

We know that although the term “primacy” as it relates to synodality appeared later in the Church’s history (3rd-4th century), the reality of primacy is known much earlier. Actually, the coupling of “synodality-primacy” is manifested already in the celebration of the Eucharist.¹⁷ One cannot but underscore this topic very strongly by examining this from the standpoint of the Eucharist – a perspective both Catholics and Orthodox share. As epitomized in the eucharistic *synaxis*, each bishop within his own church maintains the dialectic and – indeed,

17. “Conciliarity’s regular manifestation is the celebration of the Eucharist” in Paul McPartlan, *A Service of Love: Papal Primacy, the Eucharist, and Church Unity*, Wash. D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013, p. 3.

the very biblical paradox – of the “one” (Christ) and the “many” of the local church community.

If this observation is correct, we can understand why the term *primus* – πρῶτος – was accepted without great difficulty by the Church. Indeed, as Zizioulas points out, “the ‘one-and-the-many’ idea that runs through the entire doctrine of the Church leads directly to the ministry of primacy.”¹⁸ Indeed, a true *primacy* – which is not an absolute one, not a supremacy – is *conditioned, controlled, and moderated* by the rest of the bishops.¹⁹ In this way, for the Orthodox Church, a council is a solution (way out) of any problem. If we do not say this, we will omit the truth which is in the very hypostasis of our Church. For example, St Basil the Great in the 4th century always *scrutinized* his beliefs through the councils.

I am not in a position to suggest anything here except that this is the only type of synodality acceptable for an Orthodox thinker since this Canon underlies Orthodox ecclesiology in its totality. Is the Catholic Church ready for such a profound shift, a striking change, and re-examining of the relationship between the Petrine governing office and synodality? Can “primus” be seen as *part* of a community – not as a self-defined, but as a truly *relational* ministry?

The pattern of relations stemming from the 34th Canon of the Apostles is found at all levels of Church organization. Therefore, there is no primacy that is not exercised in a synodical context, both locally and regionally, as well as universally: the primus must always act in symphony with the rest of the bishops on matters common to other Churches, while the bishops in similar cases should always act together with their primus.

Now, Ravenna delegates ask: “Since the Eucharist, in the light of the Trinitarian mystery, constitutes the criterion of ecclesial life as a whole, how do institutional structures visibly reflect the mystery of this *koinonia*?” The answer is this. From the early Church, the composition

18. J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, p. 268.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

of the Synod is formed of the bishops precisely because of their capacity as heads of the eucharistic assemblies. “The Eucharist is thus seen to impart a certain structure to the Church in its institutional life, a structure in which primacy is complemented by collegiality or conciliarity.”²⁰

This leads me now to take the liberty of saying a few words concerning the debated issue of whether primacy exists on a universal level. The question of whether there are *three levels of ecclesial authority*, as outlined in the Ravenna statement (2007), is a very delicate one for the Orthodox. As we have seen, the logic of synodality leads to primacy; so also the logic of an ecumenical council leads to universal primacy. But, since the ecumenical council is not a permanent institution, some might conclude that the primus on a universal level is not a permanent but a *charismatic* ministry, functioning with the *consensus* of the entire Church. Again, even a universal primacy is a *relational* reality.

Related to all this is one fundamental aspect that emerges from considering the synodical dimensions of Orthodox theology: *the epicletical character of synodality*.

3. The conditional and epicletical character of synodality

Many of us remember a witty comment made by Cardinal Koch at a meeting of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church: “We, Catholics, have a Pope; you, Orthodox, have synodality. We have an *issue*, you have a *problem*.” The problem that the Orthodox have relates to the intrinsic lack of any assurance coming from such unpredictable organization. The Orthodox Church constantly stands in need of the invocation (*epiclesis*²¹) of the Spirit. What is the deeper reason for this?

If we look at the Orthodox Eucharist, we will notice that it makes the expectation of salvation depend not on the *historical* transmission of

20. McPartlan, “Introduction”, in: J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, p. xix.

21. Late Greek *epiklēsis*, from Greek, invocation, from ἐπικαλεῖσθαι to summon, invoke.

the words of institution from the past until today but on *a new action of God at each Eucharist*. History does not suffice here; a penetration from the future is needed for all new actualizations of the Christ-event. Every aspect of ecclesial life – holiness, sacramental actions, synodal event, etc., – must allow itself to be tested with regard to whether or not it reflects the meaning warranted by history and the eschatology of Christ. Historically in the East, authority in the Church was always located, lived, and practiced in the context of eucharistic worship. At the same time, it is conditioned by the eschatological outlook.

If we stick to this theological principle, we must give the Holy Spirit a constitutive role in the structure of the Church. As both Yves Congar and John Zizioulas hold,

the Spirit is not there simply to animate, to be the ‘soul’ of a Church which is conceived in the first instance Christologically. The Spirit is the *co-founder* (i.e., the *co-instituting* ‘Principle’) of the Church, together with Christ, to use Congar’s expression... or rather the one who constitutes the Church while Christ institutes it.²²

This epicletical character of ecclesiology is evident in the first place in the Eucharist.

Building this argument on Zizioulas’ insights, we can add the following thoughts. Seen from this view, if the Church ceases to be regarded as a historically given reality – an institution – it also ceases to be a hindrance to freedom. A Church that is constantly constituted, is the Church that emerges out of “the coincidence and convergence of relationships freely established by the Spirit.” There is nothing given in the Church – be it ministry or sacraments or other forms of structure – that is not to be asked for as if it had not been given at all.²³ (“*as if* is a conditional expression.”) And everything needs a consensus, an “Amen” of the people of God.

What does this mean for the relationship between primacy and synodality? First, when a bishop, a patriarch, or a pope teaches in council

22. Cf. J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, pp. 15-16.

23. *Ibid.*

or decides in the synod, he needs the *confirmation* (an “Amen”) of the “many” before acting authoritatively. He is a *primus*, not as a monarch who stands outside the community, but a “head” in *communion* with all other ministries of the Church. The primacy becomes yet another *charisma*, and as such it constantly is subject to the *epiclesis* of the community.

If we accept this pneumatologically conditioned ontology, we will realize that nothing exists by itself and in itself, but only as a result of free communion. The *epiclesis* (ἐπίκλησις) of the Spirit gives life to the Body (John 6:63).²⁴ Just as in the being of God Himself, everything stems from a free communion, so the Church, which is the “Church of God” (as St Paul calls it), must in all aspects of its life, be an event of *free* communion.

The events of salvation we understand only in retrospect. True Christians question themselves continually, instinctively, and subject their judgments and engagements to the testing scrutiny of an intervening awareness of assurance rooted in their relation to the Holy Spirit, who suddenly brings the “last things” into history. In the Orthodox tradition, even if the Synodal fathers do all that they believe God has demanded of them, they must allow for the possibility that they may have done something that will not be confirmed by God – in His Kingdom.

In this synodical ontology “Truth cannot be objectified and transmitted in isolation from the community” – either through a supreme authority²⁵ or as systems of ideas. This is closely linked to the notion of *reception* or *re-reception*.

24. There is no issue of priority between Christ and the Spirit, and the epiclesis of the early Church instructively show this.

25. J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, p. 86. “The bishop who exercises this “infallibility” is therefore subject not to the community as another objectified social structure – the Church is not a democracy – but to the community as a charismatic event of communion. Infallibility thus appears in the Spirit to be a dynamic, circular movement. It does not repose statically on any structure or

All Church councils – episcopal, local, and ecumenical – are neither above nor against but always in the Church, dependent always on the ecclesial reception of the councils’ decisions by the entire body. This simple idea captures the core insight of ecclesial synodality. The “decisions” of the Synod take place within the Church; they flow naturally into the assembly or *synaxis* of the faithful, namely the Eucharist. “In the case at any rate of the Orthodox, the reception process may take a *long* time,” said the late Metropolitan Kallistos Ware.²⁶ “Greek time,” one might add.

As elucidated during the ecumenical councils, and contrary to some other traditions, Orthodox theology – as developed by iconophiles and Church Fathers – perceives the Truth that the councils express as a “relational,” charismatic reality. (Indeed, through the Holy Spirit – a Pentecostal event – both the *primus* and the other bishops serve as ministers with a *charisma veritatis*. See Irenaeus, *Haer.*, IV, 16, 2.) A true council is one that does not seek automatic verification in any way but seeks a *reception* by the individual Churches. Synodality involves participation and communion between the Churches. Elsewhere, I argued that:

Historically, only the post-council period demonstrated whether a council measured up to and fulfilled the criterion of the true, ecumenical councils. A council is conditioned *epicletically* and cannot be communicated in seclusion from the communities, whether through individuals or systems of ideas. The Tradition

ministry, but it expresses itself through a certain ministry by a dynamic perichoresis (περιχώρησις) in and through the whole body.”

26. Kallistos Ware, “The Orthodox Church and the Primacy of the Pope”, Primacy in the Church, in: *The Office of Primate and the Authority of Councils*, Vol II, eds. John Chrysavgis and John Behr, Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2016, p. 23.

shows that the future gives meaning and hypostasis to the past. This makes the council a *relational* reality.²⁷

As the late Serbian Bishop Atanasije Jevtic used to say:

In this centuries-old Orthodox synodality, ‘independence’ or ‘autocephaly’ cannot and ought not mean separation and self-distancing, or some ‘non-interference in other people’s affairs,’ like political factions.²⁸

The Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church are committed to theological dialogue and cannot say to one another on essential matters of theology and order, “This is our enterprise; you keep out of it.” Such a mindset would profoundly oppose the ecumenical spirit lying behind the invitation that has brought me before you today. So, what my paper hopes to convey is more enrichment and less correction of the Roman practice of synodality. On this point, I am speaking bluntly and frankly to you. It is well known that the Orthodox officially resist any vision of synodality as “a mere instrument of consultation, while the final decisions are to be made by some other institution whose authority is higher and final.”²⁹ For the Orthodox Church, this sacrifices the integrity of the local Church to the Church universal and in turn makes primacy

27. M. Vasiljevic “Synodality: A Misinterpreted Vision,” in *Synodality: A Forgotten and Misapprehended Vision*, Los Angeles: Sebastian Press, 2017, p. 179.

28. M. Vasiljević, *Atanasije – jedan životopis*, Trebinje 2022, p. 177. The ancient concept of synodality was seriously challenged by later approaches, which resulted in what is known as autocephalism. The idea of the synodality, which originally stemmed from the ancient conception of Church as an unbreakable unity, was meant to promote the cooperation of various local churches so that they might converge in the one Church. However, it has ended up as the place where each autocephalous church attains its autonomy and self-sufficiency in the most negative way. To be an autocephalous church today means to be independent and self-sufficient; it means not to be interdependent (except e.g., in matters of hagiology).

29. J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, p. 340.

into something top-down and “monarchical.”³⁰ The decentralized way of church organization found in Orthodox synodality involves an organization whereby “no central authority has the power to dictate to the rest what to do, leaving the final decision to a common agreement between the local Churches, and debating the issues for as long as it is necessary in order to reach unanimity or at least common consensus.”³¹ Consensus is a result of a humble submission to the Holy Spirit.

Linking history and eschatology – remembrance and epiclesis – late Bishop Atanasije spoke about the eschatological time of God, “Who by love humbled Himself to meet us without consuming us with His majesty.”

Our open response to this love can be described as the eschatological presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. (It is difficult for us, of course, to do this.) *Many times, even as Christians, we prefer security, control over conditions and situations, we prefer safety, but these are illusions and barriers to eschatological presence.* As St John Chrysostom said: “When you are not sure, when you have nothing to hope for or to rely on, then you are, paradoxically, much safer, because you only have God to rely on and from Him you receive strength. That is the greatest security.”

For sure, both Catholics and Orthodox must benefit from this revisiting the ancient heritage. I am only concerned about the distortion already corroding our mindset. When speaking about *charismatic* primacy or bishop as a *charisma*, most Orthodox clergy today cannot conceive it as a function of the Body; they instead tend to imagine it as an individual gift offered by God to those ordained, closely associated by their worthiness. We have distanced ourselves from *epicletic* ecclesiology. In addition, perennial anxiety is triggered by not adopting a positivistic authority: who is right? By what process can we be sure we are right? A culture of security and safety has also penetrated us, enhanced by political institutions which function externally, whether

30. See more on this M. Vgenopoulos, *Primacy in the Church from Vatican I to Vatican II: An Orthodox Perspective*, DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois Press, 2013.

31. J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, p. 368.

democratic or authoritarian. In other words, we need a profound renewal of how we approach our theological sources because we read the same texts and construct different representations.

Concluding remarks

In bringing my remarks to their conclusion, let me emphasize once again that we cannot practice synodality as an introverted reality.

Here the problem is a complex one and requires clarification to avoid misunderstandings. Synodality as we know it today – that is, as an institution focusing on phenomena *ad intra* – is a fairly modern thing, and as such it is unknown to the ancient Orthodox tradition. Synodality in the ancient Church was a relational reality of local churches – which were originally connected through the eucharistic communion. And this eventually became criterion for almost all questions of the Church life. The main theme of the canons is therefore the restoration to full communion of those excommunicated (τῶν ἀκοινωνήτων).³² The fact that there were no national churches in the earliest times, as we have today, is again not a matter of mere historical accident. The main reason that the actual form of synodality we have today would not fit easily into the pattern of theology of that time is a profoundly theological one. It has to do with the fact that at that time, the Church was regarded as an all-encompassing mystery of salvation.

The liturgical experience of the Church throughout the first millennium contained such profound cosmological and sociological implications that it was inconceivable to practice synodality without reference to the problems facing other realms of human life. That synodal Church, through its ecumenical and regional councils, achieved a vision of cosmic salvation in Christ – which included such matters as the uniting the created world with the Uncreated God in Chalcedon's *Horos*, or the vision of the human iconicity in the image of the Holy Trinity (at Nicaea II). Such a Church cannot ignore the challenges coming from the social and natural sciences today. The priority here is on living and thinking forward, on “setting out to meet the world,” as Pope Francis said, facing the modern world and its questions by drawing

32. Canon 5 of the First Ecumenical Council is but one of countless examples.

renewed theological treasures – often surprising and always insightful – out of the ancient ones.

We cannot practice synodality without opening our eyes to all facets of existence. This will require, of course, fundamental changes in our entire method of doing synodality. In such a brief paper as this one, we cannot aim at a renovation plan for Orthodox or Catholic synodality. Nor do I regard myself as competent to advise the autocephalous Orthodox Churches on any matter, least of all on such a serious matter that would require serious study and cooperation among the Orthodox Churches. The only thing I can do is touch upon certain issues that remind us of the theology and practice of the first millennium, in which was found a proper balance between synodality and primacy. I hope that my modest presentation has not too much obscured these clear and invaluable aspects of the early Church. I also hope that this humble reminder can help the revitalization and reconstruction of synodality that is much needed in the 21st century – both in the East and in the West.

1.1. COMMUNION:
WALKING TOGETHER IN THE HOLY
SPIRIT

KEYNOTE

Synodality as a Manifestation of Koinonia in the Church

Sorin Șelaru

The Orthodox Church, in her unity and catholicity, is *the Church of Synods* (Εκκλησία τῶν Συνόδων), from the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15.5-29) to the present day. The Church in herself is a *Synod* (Σύνοδος), established by Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit...” “*The synodal work* (Τό συνοδικόν ἔργον) continues uninterrupted in history...¹.

This statement by the bishops gathered in the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, in Crete (2016), emphasizes both that the life of the Church is built on the foundation of the Seven Ecumenical Councils and of the councils with “universal value” in the Orthodox Church, and also that synodality is a constitutive and permanent dimension of ecclesial life.

The theme of synodality as a manifestation of the koinonia of the Church is a beautiful and delicate subject for an Orthodox theologian today. Beautiful, because it touches upon the very nature of the Church’s beauty, which is her specific koinonia; delicate, because the Orthodox koinonia is currently experiencing a painful synodality crisis. If only we were to remember that koinonia and synodality are manifested above all in the preservation of Eucharistic communion between the various autocephalous Churches.

That is why, from the outset, I would like to highlight that, when we speak of the synodality of the Orthodox Church, any simplification could be misleading because it reduces the concrete experience of this

1. Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, no. 3. <https://www.holycouncil.org/encyclical-holy-council>.

ecclesial reality or its modes of manifestation over time to a single idealized and abstract model, which fails to grasp the full diversity of perspectives and experiences within Orthodoxy. Rather, one could speak of different models of Orthodox synodality, because Orthodox synodality is the very expression of an experience of unity in diversity. Of course, from a practical point of view, the lack of homogeneity in the way of approaching and living synodality and ecclesial communion leads to differences of interpretation between the various autocephalous Orthodox Churches regarding the organization and functioning of the Church at the level of the entire or universal Church. In particular, we can see that there are different understandings of the exercise of primacy at this level. We have not yet been able to agree on how this primacy should function within synodality in order to serve or ensure communion and unity among the various autocephalous Orthodox Churches. Equally, we have not yet been able to agree on the organisation of what we generically call “the Orthodox Diaspora”. There are now these “Orthodox Episcopal Assemblies”, which bring together the bishops of different jurisdictions in certain regions of the world, but which are practically devoid of authority and ecclesiological content. This is a result not only of different interpretations of certain canons from the first Christian millennium, but also of a different experience of synodality in specific historical and regional contexts: because synodality is not organised identically in the Romanian Orthodox Church, or in the Moscow Patriarchate, or in the Patriarchate of Constantinople. So, although the entire Orthodox world speaks of the Orthodox Church as being synodal and, consequently, of Orthodox synodality, there is not one model, but several models of the manifestation of the synodal principle within Orthodoxy.

The theological content of synodality

Despite the distinct ways in which synodality is experienced in the Orthodox Church today, there is a remarkable consensus among Orthodox theologians regarding the theological content of synodality. They have shown that synodality is an organic expression of ecclesial *koinonia*; as a result, the nature and expressions of synodality can only be understood in light of the mystery of the Church. Her work and

mission converge towards gathering people into the loving presence and work of God, settling them in freedom on the path of communion with God, the Holy Trinity, “as one who works in the faithful the same unity as in God”².

It is interesting to note here that, along with its technical meaning of assembly, meeting for worship and deliberation, the term “synod” has also been used in patristic theology as a synonym for union, unity, or communion. One example of its various applications is the Trinitarian Theology of St Gregory of Nazianzus, who refers to the unity of the Father and the Son as a “synod”: “for the two are one... through their union/synod” (εἰ γὰρ καὶ τὸ συναμφοτέρον ἓν... τῇ δὲ συνόδῳ τούτων)³. St Cyril of Alexandria uses the term synod to designate the union of the two natures in the unique Person of the Saviour:

If anyone divides in the one Christ the hypostases after the union, joining them only by a conjunction of dignity or authority or power, and not rather by a coming together in a union by nature (συνόδῳ τῇ καθ’ ἑνωσιν φυσικῇν), let him be anathema⁴.

St Ignatius Theophorus calls the members of the People of God “σύνοδοι/companions on the journey”, in an age of the Church when all Christians called each other saints, because, he says, Christians are

2. Maxime le Confesseur, *La mystagogie*, introduction, traduction, notes, glossaires et index par Marie-Lucie Charpin-Ploix, Les Pères dans la foi 92, Migne, Paris 2003, p. 85.

3. Or. 30, 8 in Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 27-31, introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes par Paul Gallay, avec la collaboration de Maurice Jourjon, Sources Chrétiennes 250, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1978, p. 242.

4. Anathema 3 of the Third Letter to Nestorius, in Giuseppe Alberigo (ed.), *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, editio tertia, Instituto per le Scienze Religiose, Bologna 1973, p. 59.

bearers of God (theophoroi), living temples (naophoroi), bearers of Christ (christophoroi), bearers of holiness (agiophoroi)⁵.

These examples illustrate the term's patristic broad theological meaning, embracing the distinct ways in which Orthodox theology considers both unity or communion in God and communion between God and man in Christ and His Church. For this reason, the Orthodox approach to synodality can at once be a very broad, comprehensive one, expressing the unity and catholicity of the Church. At the same time, it can be restrictive, specific, institutional, and directly linked to the idea of a synod, in the sense of a decision-making ecclesial assembly composed (only) of bishops.

For more clarity, I would point out here that from an Orthodox point of view, the terms *synodality* and *conciliarity* cover the same ecclesial reality⁶. If, however, we reserve conciliarity only for the holding of councils, then synodality includes conciliarity. The relationship between synodality and bishop *collegiality* is understood in much the same way from an Orthodox point of view, the latter being accepted only within the communion of local Churches and as a consequence of it.

Two important milestones for the ontology of Orthodox synodality

Today, however, any Orthodox theological understanding of the Church's synodality is tributary to the two ecclesiological perspectives

5. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Ephesians 9.2, in Ignace d'Antioche, Polycarpe de Smyrne, Lettres. Martyre du Polycarpe, ed. Pierre Thomas Camelot, Sources Chrétiennes 10, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1958, pp. 78-79.

6. For different semantic meanings of the terms used today to designate the synodality of the Church, see Michel Stavrou, Théologie et manifestations de la synodalité. Un défi permanent pour l'Église, «Recherches de Science Religieuse», 2018/3 Tome 106, p. 403-422. Metropolitan Kallistos [Ware] of Diokleia, "Foreword", in John Chryssavgis (ed.), Primacy in the Church. The Office of Primate and the Authority of Councils, vol. 1: Historical and Theological Perspectives, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Yonkers, New York 2016, pp. 7-14.

that have marked the last two centuries: the ecclesiology of *sobornost* and the *eucharistic* ecclesiology⁷.

The ecclesiology of *sobornost* has its starting point in the vision developed by the Russian Aleksei Khomiakov (1804-60), “the first real ecclesiologist in Orthodox history”, as Metr. Kallistos Ware called him⁸. Concerned with the prospect of communion-harmony, of the spiritual unity of the Church, Khomiakov, who was a layman, and the followers of his thought, who were later called slavophiles, promoted the organicist-spiritual idea of the Church as a living body, sharing a life united in freedom and love, without any institutional or juridical constraint. For this aim, they used the term *sobornost*, derived from the adjective *sobornaya*, which translates the Greek word *katholikè* in the Creed, derived in turn from the noun *sobor* which can mean at once a synod, a synaxis, an important church or a feast. This term better expresses their understanding of the spiritual unity, the Church’s symphony, the synodality of the entire Church, which, however, is not limited to councils. The ecclesiology of “sobornost” in fact emphasizes the conciliar aspect of the Christian faith, as a communion in the Holy Spirit that transcends space or time. Or, as Sergey Bulgakov explains,

7. Cf. Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 2019. Joseph Famerée, *Conciliarité de l’Église. Théologalité, pluralité, historicité*, « *Recherches de Science Religieuse* », Tome 106, 2018/3, pp. 443-460. Michel Stavrou, *La catholicité de l’Église*, « *Contacts* », 49 (1997), pp. 330-351; *Lineaments d’une théologie orthodoxe de la conciliarité*, « *Irénikon* » 16 (2003), pp. 470-505; *Théologie et manifestations de la synodalité. Un défi permanent pour l’Église*, « *Recherches de Science Religieuse* », Tome 106 (2018/3), pp. 403-422. André de Halleux, *Le modèle oriental de la collégialité*, « *Revue théologique de Louvain* », 2^e année, fasc. 1 (1971), pp. 76-88.

8. Kallistos Ware, *Sobornost and eucharistic ecclesiology: Aleksei Khomiakov and his successors*, « *International journal for the Study of the Christian Church* », 11 (2-3) (2011), p. 218.

“the *sobornaya* Church is the Church that gathers, unites, reconciles, it is the Church called synodal/conciliar”⁹.

The communitarian life of the Church is one of freedom and love, a true unity in plurality. Each member of the Church is called to practice sobornicity in order to be enriched by the experience of others and to give in turn to the Church what he has been enriched by. For this reason, the Church itself is seen as a *great synod* or an ongoing, perpetual synod, in which all Christians participate.

Although this approach has been corrected by some Neo-Patristic Orthodox theologians, who have criticized it for abstract idealism, excessive pneumatocentrism or for giving priority to communion (or communality) over the person, the slavophiles have revalued a profound truth of ecclesial life, that of *communion through synodality* of the whole People of God, which explains why this teaching, without ever being officially adopted, has had an important influence on Orthodox thought and ecclesiology¹⁰.

The eucharistic ecclesiology is the other ecclesiological perspective, that has remained dominant in Orthodox theology to this day, underscoring primarily the intimate link between the Church and the Eucharist, between the mystical Body of Christ and His sacramental Body.

Considering the Eucharist as the place par excellence of the manifestation or epiphany of the Church's identity, theologians who have promoted Eucharistic ecclesiology have revalued the importance of the local Church in ecclesiology. The local Church is the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church in a specific place, not just a part of the One Church. Each local Church has and lives the fullness of Christ, of faith, and of the Eucharist in the Holy Spirit, that is, the fullness of the divine life communicated to the people. Since the catholicity in Orthodoxy is

9. Serge Boulgakoff, *L'Orthodoxie, L'Age d'Homme*, Paris 1932, p. 84. This book begins with the statement that “Christ's Church is not an institution, but a new life with Christ and in Christ, directed by the Holy Spirit (la vie nouvelle avec et dans le Christ, mue par le Saint-Esprit)”.

10. Cf. M. Stavrou, *Lineaments d'une théologie orthodoxe de la conciliarité*, cit., p. 478.

tightly connected to the local Church, to the community assembling in a Eucharistic context around the bishop, synodality finds its ecclesial origin in the local Church, rather than in the universal Church. Synodality expresses this full local catholicity in the full universal catholicity as full Churches in communion. Thus, the Orthodox ecclesiology of communion is a synodal ecclesiology grounded on *communio Ecclesiarum*, on the plurality of local Churches in communion.

In this context, centred on the local Church and its Eucharistic foundation, the bishop has a particular ministry because he is a Eucharistic person and guarantor of the authenticity of the Eucharist. Synodality is a manifestation of the episcopal pastoral ministry in the Church because it expresses and actualizes both the bishop's unique ministry of communion within his diocese and his sacred mission of ensuring the communion of the local Church with the others in the unity of the whole Church. The bishop in synod embodies or represents the local Church: "the bishop is in the Church and the Church in the bishop" (St Cyprian of Carthage). Thus, the bishop manifests and attests to the identity of the local Church in the whole Church: "The Churches come together and fulfill themselves as One Church in and *through* the unity of bishops"¹¹. The synodality of the episcopate is distinct from, but must always be considered in complementarity with, the general sobornicity of the Church. At the same time, the synodal system is an indispensable condition of the Church's sobornicity, for theologians like Metr. John Zizioulas, because through it "the catholicity of the local Church is guaranteed and protected"¹².

I wanted to bring forward these ecclesiological models, one centered on baptismal ecclesiology and the whole People of God, the other on eucharistic ecclesiology and episcopal ministry, in order to understand better the way Orthodox theologians ground and relate to synodality today. There is, in fact, continuity between the two ecclesiological models. Although ecclesiology of sobornost promotes a

11. Alexander Schmemmann, Toward a theology of councils, « St Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly » 6 (4/1962), p. 183.

12. Métropolite Jean de Pergame, L'Église et ses institutions, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 2011, p. 220.

social, communitarian model and eucharistic ecclesiology a sacramental and liturgical one, what both ecclesiologies highlight is an insistence upon the Church as a living “organism, rather than a juridical organisation, and an understanding of Church membership as participation in a common life, rather than the acceptance of truths and rules imposed by superior authority”¹³. It is true that both ecclesiological perspectives emphasized the importance of the Trinitarian and Eucharistic model in ecclesiology; they have shown that the source of Church communion is first and foremost spiritual and sacramental, and not juridical. Synodality should therefore be considered in this spiritual and sacramental ecclesial perspective in which Eucharistic ecclesiology, not separated from baptismal ecclesiology, provides the foundation for assuming and living ecclesial communion.

The Orthodox ecclesiology of communion, which starts from the local Church¹⁴, highlights the importance of the *perichoretic model* for the synodality of the Church. As a living unity in pluriform communion, the synodality of the Church does not manifest a simple juridical or external unity, but presupposes communication, interiorization, mutual giving and receiving. In the ecclesiological concrete, if a Christian or a local Church does not receive or does not accept what is decided in another sister Church, then we cannot speak of synodality. If a local Church does not make room for another, withdrawing or limiting its “privileges” if necessary, then it is not faithful to the trinitarian and Christological *Ur*-unity.

Ecclesiastical unity is carried out by synodality as perichoresis, in the reciprocity of self-giving, in the *koinonia* of local Churches. That explains why, from an Orthodox point of view, the expression of unity and supreme authority of an autonomous or autocephalous Church is not the *protos* itself, but the *synod*. Primacy is an aspect of the synodality

13. K. Ware, Sobornost and eucharistic ecclesiology, cit., p. 226.

14. Even for the followers of the theory popularized by Theodor of Regnon, it might be interesting to analyze how this view of the trinitarian unity can influence the approach to synodality. Because in one way, synodality will be organized and lived as it begins from a single center to culminate in diversity, and in another way, synodality can start from the diversity of local Churches to come together in unity.

of the Church, of course, an essential, fundamental aspect, but still an aspect of it. From the point of view of the ecclesiology of communion, the natural source of primacy is synodality, not privileges, whether political, historical, or otherwise. However, the source of Orthodox synodality is not primacy. And here we can place also the critical issue of the election or appointment of bishops. It is very important whether bishops are elected by the synod or appointed by another bishop to be part of a synod. Orthodox episcopal synodality is not the sum of many appointed by one. For this, the *primus* has his *curia*, he does not need a synod. So, from an Orthodox point of view, there is a sensitivity that translates a deeper distinction, between a statement such as “The patriarch and his synod,” which shows a thinking centred on the former, and one such as “The synod with its patriarch” or “The synod headed, presided over, by its patriarch,” which naturally values synodality.

Expressions of the orthodox synodality

As an ecclesial reality at once permanent and dynamic¹⁵, synodality has been expressed in various ways and forms throughout Church history: from that of the smallest local ecclesial community to that of the entire Church, from the most inclusive to the most exclusive one, and from the earliest forms to those lived today in the Orthodox Church.

If we consider their membership, the synodal structures developed by the Church can be *episcopal assemblies* or *mixed assemblies* of bishops, clergy and laity. According to their authority, they can be *decisional* (*decision-making*) or *consultative* assemblies. At the same time, when we consider their scope, we speak of *local*, *regional*, and synods of *the entire Orthodox Church*. If the basic synodality, that of the parish community organized in the Parochial Assembly or Council, is the most inclusive form of Orthodox synodality, the largest type of synod, the Holy and Great Council of the entire Church, is the most exclusive. Depending on the frequency of the convocation, the synods may be *standing bodies*

15. A more in-depth discussion on the spiritual and theological foundations of synodality, as well as its manifestation in the Orthodox Church, can be found in Sorin Șelaru, *Expressions of the Church's Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, « Louvain Studies » 43/3 (2020), pp. 260-277.

or occasional/extraordinary gatherings. The standing bodies are permanent synods and periodical synods. The periodical regional synods are to convene twice a year (Apostolic Canon 37, Canon 5 of the First Ecumenical Council, Canon 19 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council) or at least once annually (Canon 8 of the Quinisext Council, Canon 6 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council). However, the Church may assemble in synods or councils whenever necessary. In this case, such meetings are referred to as extraordinary synods or councils. All seven Ecumenical Councils, just like the other synods recognized as having “universal value” in the Orthodox Church, are extraordinary manifestations of the constitutive synodality of the Church¹⁶.

It would be helpful to insist a moment on the first point of the classification above, i.e., on the composition of the Orthodox synods today, because on the one hand this is where most contemporary critics converge, and on the other hand it underlines how ecclesial koinonia is reflected in them. According to Romanian Orthodox canonists, episcopal synodality and mixed synodality are complementary forms of exercising the synodality of the Church¹⁷.

The voice of the laity and clergy in synods is clearly a consultative one nowadays. Synodality in the Orthodox Church is a “hierarchical synodality”, to use the expression of Father Schmemmann¹⁸, and Orthodox *communio Ecclesiarum* is manifested primarily through the gathering of synods of bishops. The Seventh Ecumenical Council, in

16. Cf. Sorin Șelaru, Nouvelle «bibliographie obligatoire» dans le dialogue théologique catholique – orthodoxe ? Le Concile de Crète et les conciles avec une autorité universelle dans l'Église orthodoxe, in B. Bourguine (ed.), *Le souci de toutes les Églises. Hommage au professeur Joseph Famerée*, coll. Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovanienses, Peeters, Leuven 2020, pp. 215-232.

17. Nicolae Dura, *Le régime de la synodalité dans les huit premiers siècles. Les types de synodes*, «L'Année Canonique» ; hors-série, vol. I, La synodalité. La participation au gouvernement dans l'Église. Actes du VII^e Congrès International de Droit canonique, Unesco, Paris, 21-28 septembre 1990, p. 281.

18. Alexander Schmemmann, *Toward a theology of councils*, cit., p. 173.

Canon 3, recalls that: “the one to be raised to the episcopate must be elected by the bishops”¹⁹. For substantiation, it cites Canon 4 of Nicaea, which speaks of the institution/consecration of a new bishop by all the bishops of a diocese. So, the norm today in the Orthodox Church is that decision-making synods are made up of bishops, and the decisive importance of episcopal synodality for the communion of the Church, both the communion of the Churches in the *Una Sancta* and the communion within the local Church, need not be repeated here. The pan-Orthodox consensus during the preparation and conduct of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church was clear in this regard.

However, the historical development that has made the orthodox synods the competence of bishops does not exclude the People of God from synodality. First of all, the episcopate is not an ecclesial reality that exists as a *vis-a-vis* or above the *koinonia* order of the Church, but rather within her communion. Therefore, the episcopal synodality is contained within ecclesial synodality, which means the synodality of the whole Church, the mission, responsibility, and ministry of each Christian together with all the others.

Founded on the Eucharistic synaxis, the prototype of every form of synod, the synodal conscience of the Church implies the active participation of the whole People of God in her unity and catholicity, in her holy communion. Of course, there are distinct ministries but carried out together with a shared responsibility or *co-responsibility*. Moreover, following the model of Eucharistic communion, synodality manifests co-responsibility only when it is truly lived as a unity of communion, as a unity in *complementarity*. Between the least and the greatest, between the first and the last, between the various gifts, services and works in the

19. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Second Series, Hendrikson Publishers, MI 1995, p. 557. Already in the 4th century, the Canon 13 of Laodicea forbids the multitudes (or crowds) to make the election of those to be instituted into the priesthood.

Church, which St Paul also mentions in his first epistle to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 12:1-8)²⁰. So synodality involves not only the gift of communion we receive from God in the Church but also our cross laid upon this gift, that is, our striving for communion, for listening, communicating, and cooperating with others for the good of all. Ecclesial life is at once divine-human synergy and inter-human synergy. Complementarity and ecclesial co-responsibility are fulfilled in discerning and working together. Thus, synodality is a synergic communion.

In the Orthodox Liturgy, which etymologically means service or common work (*laos + ergos*), this synodal principle is evident. The bishop alone or the priest alone cannot celebrate the Church's sacrament, the Eucharist. There must be someone to accompany him, to concelebrate with him, and to confirm or respond to him with "Amen". The mystery of the unity of the Church embraces everyone: "Unite us all to one another who become partakers of the one Bread and Chalice in the communion of the one Holy Spirit", as we pray in the Liturgy of St Basil²¹.

Also, the Orthodox process of receiving the decision of an episcopal synod expresses very clearly this ecclesial synodal ethos. Any synod must be validated or received by the whole Church. It is not enough to have the consent of *communio episcoporum*, but one needs the *consensus ecclesiae*, the *sobornost* of the whole people of God, which thus manifests *communio Ecclesiarum*: "Truth in the Church does not depend upon any infallible institution, but is an experience always available in the *communio* of the Church – this communion being understood, of course, both as faithfulness to tradition and as openness to the *consensus fidelium* today"²², said Fr John Meyendorff.

20. The Apostle emphasizes the synodal purpose of these gifts when he says that to each one is given the showing or manifestation (ἡ φανέρωσις) of the Spirit for the common good (πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον).

21. The Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great, the prayer after epiclesis.

22. J. Meyendorff, What is an Ecumenical Council? "St Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly", 17 (4/1973), p. 270.

Therefore, I believe that we must not fall into the temptation of ignoring the deeply Orthodox meaning of the idea of *sobornost*, which requires the involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church. If the synodality of the Church expresses a way of being God's Church, as well as a way of being and participating together in the Church of Christ, then synodality faithfully manifests ecclesial koinonia when it is lived as open synodality, that is, respectful of the ecclesial experience of the whole People of God and even beyond.

In this sense, I would like to mention here that the Romanian Orthodox Church seeks to maintain a balance between the hierarchical, episcopocentric principle, and the communitarian principle, which includes both the clergy and the lay people, in the organization and experience of synodality as a manifestation of the unity of the Church. Therefore, it has organized a synodal way of cooperation of the bishops with the clergy and laity that highlights both the distinct responsibilities and the common work within the ecclesial koinonia. This Romanian tradition, which predates the Moscow Synod of 1917, has been preserved to this day in the synodal organisation of my Church. According to Article 3 of the *Statutes for the Organization and Functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, the Romanian Orthodox Church (1) has a synodal hierarchic leadership, according to the teaching and canons of the Orthodox Church and to her historical tradition, and (2) is administrated autonomously through her own representative bodies, made up of clergy and lay members. If the first point of this article already places the synodal-hierarchical structure of the Romanian Orthodox Church within the ecumenical Orthodox Tradition, as a communal structure that ensures its internal unity, the second point highlights the distinct character of Romanian Orthodoxy in terms of the way synodality is structured, stressing and recognizing the "organic" role of the laypeople in the life of the Church.

In fact, the Romanian expression of church synodality is a legacy perpetuated by the entire Romanian Patriarchate in its first *Statutes for functioning* (1925), since the 1868 *Organic Statutes* of the Orthodox Church in Transylvania, drafted by Metropolitan Andrei Șaguna (1808-1873). This document instituted joint synods, made up of one-third

clergy members and two-thirds laypersons, at all levels of authority for all important decisions in Church life. That is why, up until today, in the Romanian Orthodox Church, a *Diocesan Assembly* functions at the level of each diocese, and a *National Church Assembly* functions at the level of the entire Patriarchate, both of which keep the Transylvanian format of 1/3 priests and 2/3 lay people. These assemblies have a consultative role today, coordinating their efforts with the episcopal synodality organised at provincial/regional level as the *Metropolitan Synod*, and at the level of the entire Romanian Orthodox Church as the *Holy Synod*.

In the specifically Romanian understanding of the manifestation of ecclesial communion, the synodal structures present at all levels of Church life provide a broad framework for cooperation between bishops, clergy, and laity in the Church, and the participation of all members in the life and mission of the Church.

Conclusions

Despite some significant challenges in how synodality is expressed in practice today, synodality is fundamental to the Orthodox Church's identity and life: "For conciliarity is not something which the Church *has* – it is what the Church *is* – an orderly communion of persons freely united in the Holy Trinity in truth and in love"²³. With these words the American Father Thomas Hopko concluded his critical exposition of Orthodox synodality, more than 30 years ago. And since I began with a text from the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, I thought it would be good to recall at the end what is conveyed in the *Message* of the very same Council of Crete: "The Orthodox Church expresses her unity and catholicity 'in Council'. *The synodality* (ἡ συνοδικότητα) pervades her organization, the way decisions are taken and determines her path"²⁴. If synodality determines the destiny of the Church, as stated in the *Message*, it means that synodality, like ecclesial

23. Thomas Hopko, On ecclesial conciliarity, in J. Breck, J. Meyendorff, and E. Silk (eds.), *The Legacy of St Vladimir*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY 1990, p. 224.

24. Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, no. 1. <http://holycouncil.org/message>.

communion, is a reality that should not only be studied, admired, and preached but one that is assumed and lived permanently by every Christian and every generation of Christians. Synodality is intimately linked to the nature of the Church, to her life, which cannot be understood without experience, nor buried in the ground like a treasure to await its discovery at the last coming of the Lord. Synodality is lived in every moment of the Church's communion, from the smallest to the most comprehensive. It is lived as an open sobornicity through ecclesial self-giving to one another and to others. It is lived as living communion with the living God, as the joy of gathering in the Spirit of Christ. It is lived as God's gift over which we must place our cross or sacrifice. It is lived as kenosis or bending of the great to the small. It is lived as a service to communion and unity. It is lived as a pilgrimage or journey together toward the Kingdom of God. It is lived as co-responsibility, complementarity, and cooperation for salvation and sanctification. Synodality belongs to the DNA of our Church, but it continues to be for each of us a holy mission and a saving vocation.

RESPONSES

Catholicity and Synodality are Two Sides of the Same Coin

Svetoslav Riboloff

Synodality in the Orthodox Church originates from apostolic tradition and authority. It is undoubtedly experienced as a charismatic event, directly related to the descent of the Holy Spirit in the Church and above all, due to the fact of the communal perception of the continuous divine revelation in the Church. This continuous divine revelation presupposes the very event of the Church as constantly *happening*, and this is realized above all in her sacramental life. As St Nikolas Cabasilas notes: “The Church is realized, it is denoted in the sacraments”.¹ Thanks to the sacraments, i.e. above all, of the Divine Eucharist, and due to this fact, the various ministries of the original early Church developed, while from these ministries arose the various hierarchical degrees in the Church and its strictly Christocentric reality was born.

The admonition of St Ignatius of Antioch in the 2nd century to different local churches to remain united in one and unique Eucharist under the supervision of one bishop, and in one altar, is an echo of a similar historical reality.² Throughout the period of the three first centuries and in all regions of the Roman Empire, the principle of the unity of each church in one Eucharistic assembly and under one bishop, was faithfully preserved. Because of this, at the beginning of the 4th century, the principle that every church has one and only “unified

1. See St Nicolas Cabasilas, *On the Life in Christ*, 1.

2. See *The Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch*.

sanctuary” was established.³ Moreover, the First Ecumenical Council, despite the existing practical difficulties at that time, determined that one and only one bishop could reside in one city⁴

Despite the prominence of the “orthodoxy” element, i.e. of the Orthodox faith, the divine Eucharist continued to be inseparably associated with the Catholicity of the Church. This element appears in two forms. First of all, Orthodoxy without the Eucharist is meaningless. This is precisely what St Irenaeus of Lyon expressed with particular insistence. He wrote:

Our belief [i.e. the Orthodox faith] agrees with the Eucharist and the Eucharist confirms the belief... Because we offer to Him [i.e. God] the same gifts rightly, proclaiming communion and union, and confessing the resurrection of flesh and spirit ⁵.

Parallel to this distinction, are two perspectives that have been marked by Fr Sorin Selaru as synodality; understood as the general communion of all the baptized, and collegiality; the episcopal ministry and communion of local Churches through hierarchical communion, according to the expression of the International Theological Commission (“Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church”, 6 and 7).

Thus, Catholicity and synodality are two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, there is the realization of the church at the local level in the sacraments, and on the other – the convergence, recognition and verification of this reality, respectively – of the truth and validity of its sacraments – by other churches in the person of their bishops. In this way, the communion between the bishops in the sacraments, the verification of the teaching, i.e. of the *dogma* preached by these bishops, is a particularly important element of synodality, which realizes in practice the so-called *koinonia*. The supreme expression of this *koinonia* is *synodality*, i.e. the gathering of the bishops of the Church into a

3. See Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 10.4.68.

4. 1st Ecumenical council, canon 8 (ed. Ῥάλλη-Ποτλή, Σύνταγμα Ἱερῶν Κανόνων, t. 2, 133).

5 St Irenaeus of Lyon, Against the heresies, 9, 18, 15.

conciliar institution, which is thus the supreme legislative and confessional institution of the Church. For its part, the convening of a council requires and presupposes the very hierarchy of the Church, which began to take shape from the time of the apostles, but acquired its complete character centuries later. This hierarchy is expressed not only in the three-level sacred hierarchy of the Church, but also in the hierarchization of the local churches themselves.

The formation of two ecclesiastical centers in the Roman Empire – Rome and Constantinople – had a defining character for the council institution both in the West and in the East. In this way, Rome and Constantinople represent to the present as exclusive bearers of the event of synodality, and it would be difficult to realize it without them. Evidence of this is the so-called “Slavic Orthodoxy”. In the history of the Orthodox Church since the 16th century, i.e. since the elevation of the Moscow as a Patriarchate, Orthodoxy in the Slavic countries have suffered a detachment from the conciliar principle in the Church⁶. This has led to a misunderstanding of Constantinople’s role as a guarantor of orthodoxy precisely in the context of synodality. From here, there were often violations of communion between the Slavic churches and the other Orthodox churches. The misunderstanding of the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church concerning the leading role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, has led to a lack of a real desire and need for communion between the bishops of the Slavic churches and the other Orthodox churches. Some researchers call this process “provincialization” of Orthodoxy, but it can simply be understood as self-closure and self-sufficiency precisely on the basis of a *specific church ethos*.

For example, the collection of canons made by St Nicodemus Agiorite *Pedalion* became very popular in the Slavic Churches headed by the Russian Church. The anti-papist interpretations of the canons of Chalcedon in this book were attributed without any doubt to the

6. See Sv. Riboloff, “Ekklesiologičnīat model sled izvoyuvaneto na patriaršesko dostoynstvo za Russkata cārka”, *Christianstvo i kultura*, 9 (2013), 58-64.

Ecumenical Patriarchate. This was also a visible trend in the new translation of *Pedalion*, published in Moscow a few years ago⁷. As a consequence of this tendency in the Slavic Orthodoxy, a number of deviations in the spiritual and sacramental life of these churches appeared not only in the last century, but also in the centuries before that.

During the historical development of the Russian Church we can encounter multiple attempts of substituting the person with the higher spiritual authority of the Patriarch, with the scarified person of the Tsar. Such a state of Orthodoxy that needs the personality of a king to function hierarchically around a center has produced the abstract concept of “sobornost”. Actually, it does not need a center of spiritual authority in the same Church. Such a *royal ecclesiology* naturally tended to neglect the natural center of Orthodoxy in Constantinople and replaced it with political authorities based on secular or political power. This is the reason why anti-papist writings and interpretations of the canons are being spread extremely successfully in Russia, but also writings polemicizing against the role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the Orthodox Church are being reproduced with enormous intensity. From the time of Catherine the Great (†1796), with the increased expansion of the Russian Empire among other Slavic countries, this *royal ecclesiology* actually began to strongly influence the formation of the new Slavic churches in the 19th century. So, it turns out that the synodality in this system, from a eucharistic *koinonia* becomes a *koinonia* of imperial affiliation, headed by a sacral king, but not by a patriarch.⁸ It is also understood as ethnicity, i.e., an *ethnic ecclesiology* and an *ethnic conciliarity* were formed, in which the representatives of one ethnicity were united. Such is the example, of the ecclesiology of Alexey Khomyakov in the 19th century.

7. Преп. Никодим Святогорец, Пидалион: Правила Православной Церкви с Толкованиями (В 4 Томах), Ново-Тихвинский Монастырь, 2019.

8. The specificity of the current situation with the aggression against Ukraine and the reluctance of the Russian Church to comply with the other Orthodox churches, and especially with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the sabotage of the Great and Holy Synod in Crete by the Russian Church in 2016 are evidence of this.

In conclusion, I would say that the concept of synodality developed in the Slavic churches is somewhat distant from the traditional concept of synodality in Late Antiquity, which is rooted in the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church. This causes cyclical crises and misunderstanding of the meaning of a clearly defined center of the Church in the East, which is charged with the responsibility for the practical realization of the synodal events.

Problems Concerning Episcopal Synodality and What an Orthodox Expects from the Upcoming Synod on Synodality

Amphilochios Miltos

First of all, I would like to express my thanks for the invitation to participate in this conference. We also thank Fr Sclaru for his speech.¹ Let me say here that it is truly a blessing that synodality is now at the very center of theological interest, especially after the prophetic statement of Pope Francis that synodality is the way that God expects of the Church in the third millennium.²

The theme of the keynote is familiar to all Christian traditions; both the notions of synodality and of *koinonia* are widely employed and a fundamental agreement seems to exist about their importance for the life and even for the very being of the Church.³ Consequently, it is quite easy to discourse on how the Christian Church is synodal in her nature, sometimes building, as Fr Sclaru says, on an idealized interpretation of the life of the Church, or to use the term synodality as a panacea for Catholic-Orthodox dialogue.

1. Response to Keynote Speech “Synodality as a manifestation of Koinonia in the Church” by Fr Sorin Sclaru.

2. Pope Francis, “Address to the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops”, Rome, 17 October 2015, Documentation Catholique, n° 2521, 2016, p. 76.

3. The bibliography on both themes is immense. For the significant pluralism of the use of the concept of Communion in Ecclesiology see D. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology, Vision and Versions*, N. York, Orbis Books 2000 and his contribution: D.M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology*, in M.D. Chapman, M. Haar (eds.), *Pathways for Ecclesial Dialogue in the Twenty-First Century. Revisiting Ecumenical Method*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2016, pp. 21-27.

However, as Cardinal Kasper has put it, the wide reception or use of the notion of *communion* “must not conceal the fact that behind that unique notion are hidden very varied representations and concepts which are related to ecumenical differences not resolved in terms of ecclesiology”⁴. Thus, the danger is that by using the same notions, like synodality or *koinonia*, we risk having a false impression of a rapprochement, while we continue to be separated in theory and in practice.

The keynote speech has mentioned a very shared distinction of synodality, between (a) the general meaning, the synodality of the Church (personally, like other theologians, I prefer the expression “ecclesial conciliarity”, and not merely for reasons of clarity⁵) and (b) the specific expressions of it, namely, the conciliar institutions or the synodality of bishops. I think that Catholics and Orthodox share the former (synodality of the Church) but have some problems or disagreements about the latter (synodality of bishops).

It is important that the two major orthodox ecclesiological movements of the 20th century mentioned by the Keynote, *Sobornost* and Eucharistic Ecclesiology, have influenced and in a way prepared the excellent theology of the people of God of the Second Vatican Council. Thus, I believe that the second chapter of *Lumen gentium* could easily be signed by an Orthodox with only insignificant amendments, while this would not be so evident with its third chapter.

As it is rather the institutional or ministerial synodality that poses problems, the question in my view is the following and is a double one: what are the problems particularly concerning episcopal synodality and how can this fundamental agreement on the theology of the people of

4. W. Kasper, *L'Église catholique*, Paris, Cerf 2014, p. 47.

5. See A. Miltos, *Collégialité et Synodalité, Vers une compréhension commune entre catholiques et orthodoxes*, Paris, Cerf 2019 (« Unam Sanctam nouvelle série » 7), pp. 49-51.

God, or on synodality as a “constitutive dimension of the Church”⁶ help us to clarify or solve these problems?

Along with Fr Șelaru, I too will follow the now-classic distinction of the three levels of Church’s organization: local, regional and universal and I propose to highlight issues still under discussion in relation to Communion ecclesiology,⁷ which has also become a common theological *topos*, before concluding by pointing out the expectations that an Orthodox could have from the upcoming, in October 2023, Synod of Catholic bishops on synodality.

Local level: the bishop as a “corporate personality”

We all agree that in a synodal church each baptized member has their own place and responsibility within the ecclesial community, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁸ The issue here is how to unite the different views of each Christian within the community. The discussion about the “synodal path” (*Der Synodale Weg*) in Germany (independently to the questions raised by its lay members) shows how problematic a pure representation of different ecclesial groups vis-à-vis the Episcopal body at a national level could be.⁹

6. Pope Francis, “Address to the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary”, p. 77.

7. For our own understanding of Communion Ecclesiology see A. Miltos, *Collégialité est Synodalité*, cit. p. 44-48.

8. See, for example, Document of Ravenna § 5 or BEM § 6.

9. The risk is that, at the national level, each group of faithful would defend its own interests or ideologies (through the vote). The problem is that such a national assembly constitutes more a democratic forum of individuals than an expression of the *communio ecclesiarum* (if we believe e. g. that the Church in German is a communion of Local Churches, i.e., dioceses). If the unity of each local Church and the communion between them have to be assured, each community must be represented outside of it by one voice, that of the bishop, on condition that he is truly the corporate personality of the community.

The first point to suggest is that communion cannot exist outside of a community. John Zizioulas, starting from the principle that truth is identical to love, arrives at a very fundamental (according to him), and interesting (I think) for our purpose, equation: “Communion and community are identical. Communion is expressed only in terms of historical existence (this is the biblical mentality). The concrete structures of the community are not forms of the expression of love – of a love or communion that is somehow conceivable in itself – but they *are* this love and this communion. You love only by being a member of a concrete structured community.”¹⁰

If this concrete structured community is the local church (a diocese), the first question is: according to which criterion does someone become a member of this community? The canonical principle for the formation of a church has always been the locality or territoriality, being the most neutral way to form this community.¹¹ Should we replace this ancient, and maybe for some anachronistic, criterion and have ecclesial groups composed according to genre, job, ideology, nationality, rite, sexual orientation, or cultural identity? If we agree that the unity of all these groups is assured by the ministry of *episcopate*, the bishop has to be the bishop of a certain *place* in order to represent all the diversity of this community. But how can he manage to be the voice of his community?

An answer to the question in which way the bishop, as a shepherd and not as a deputy, expresses the synodality of the faithful and thus represents his flock outside the diocese, would be the following: by being

10. J. Zizioulas, *Comment on Communal Spirit and Conciliarity in The One and the Many*, Alhambra (California), Sebastian Press 2010, pp. 217-218.

11. Cf. J. Zizioulas, *The Local Church In a Perspective of Communion in Being as Communion*, Studies in Personhood and the Church, New York, St Vladimir's Seminary Press 1985, pp. 193-194 and H. Legrand, *La réalisation de l'Église dans un lieu* in B. Lauret F. Refoulé (ed.), *Initiation à la pratique de la théologie*, t. III: *Dogmatique 2*, Paris, Cerf 1983, pp. 156-180.

the “corporate personality of his eucharistic community”.¹² If the Eucharist, as Fr Sorin said, is the fundamental (I would say also the ultimate) realization of synodal life, should not all the deliberative procedure of consultation within the local Church be linked to it? Before answering these questions, Catholics and Orthodox should discuss again the articulation between pneumatology (see *sobornost*’s problems¹³) and Christology (theologies of ordained ministry¹⁴) within the framework of a common comprehension of the notion of *koinonia*.¹⁵

Regional level: is *communio episcoporum* enough for *communio ecclesiarum*?

In regard to regional organization, it seems to me that the challenge is also a double one: a communion supposed to be brought via the bishops and the development of episcopal synodality serving *communio ecclesiarum* but avoiding self-sufficient isolation or schisms.

12. For this notion see A. Miltos, La notion biblique de “personnalité corporative”. De l’exégèse biblique à la théologie dogmatique, « *Θεολογία* » 85/2 (2014), pp. 147-175 and our Collégialité et Synodalité, cit., pp. 473-540.

13. For a review of Orthodox criticisms see e. g. M. Stavrou, Linéaments d’une théologie orthodoxe de la conciliarité, « *Irenikon* » 76 (2003), pp. 476-478 and K. Ware, Sobornost and eucharistic ecclesiology: Aleksei Khomiakov and his successors, “International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church” 11 (2011), pp. 224-225.

14. For a brief idea of Christological expressions for the priesthood see (among many others) H. Legrand, Les ministères de l’Église in Initiation à la pratique de la théologie, cit. pp. 239-242. See also the defence of Vatican II’ shift to a more balanced theology of ordained ministry by Y. Congar: Pneumatologie ou “Christomonisme” dans la tradition latine? in *Ecclesia a Spiritu Sancto edocta* (Lumen gentium, 53). Mélanges théologiques, Hommage à Mgr G. Philips, Gembloux, J. Duculot 1970 (« *Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium* » 27), pp. 41-63.

15. Cf. J. Zizioulas, Christ, the Spirit and the Church in Being as Communion, cit. pp. 123-142.

The first question here is: is the regional church an entity or an organism? According to our common ecclesiology, she is not a super-church but a communion of local churches within each of which the mystery of Church is eucharistically realized. If this is so, can any other member except the bishop, represent a local church? If we respond yes, I think that we can no longer speak of a eucharistic community, even of a church. Does this mean that we limit the laity exclusively to the local level? Personally, I am afraid, yes. But in any case, we have to articulate our democratic mentality to our Communion Ecclesiology.¹⁶

Concerning the second issue, an Orthodox finds problematic Catholic theory and reality. Although the document on Synodality of the ITC, in the section of the Episcopal Conferences, repeats a phrase of Vatican II that “the individual Bishops represent each his own Church,”¹⁷ we could demand why coadjutors or auxiliary bishops are members of these regional institutions (to be honest, it is the same with the Assemblies of Orthodox Bishops in the Diaspora). Episcopal Conferences could be a real expression of the synodality of bishops at the regional level, but the doctrine of collegiality limits their competence, in particular with regard to their doctrinal authority. In the Catholic perspective we see two poles: the pope and the bishops. I think that the schema “tous, quelques-uns, un” (usually referred to as the faithful, bishops and the Pope) should be applied also to bishops, of course on a different basis: all the diocesan bishops, the primates and the Pope.

The Orthodox Church has her own problems. As mentioned in the keynote, the Orthodox Church is going through an important crisis between the Autocephalous Churches, revealing once again the recurrent danger of tensions with national and political interests. Is this not a permanent struggle for the Christian Church?

16. Cf. M. Hanby, *Synodality, Sociologism and the Judgment of History*, “*Communio*” 48.4 (2021), pp. 687- 726 (especially p. 718ff).

17. International Theological Commission (ITC), *Synodality in the Life and the Mission of the Church* (2.3.2018), § 90.

Universal level: a shift from collegiality to synodality

For the above reasons, I think even the majority of the Orthodox accept today that a universal primacy is required, which nevertheless, should not be founded on a universalistic ecclesiology, like the one expressed by the Vatican II doctrine of the universal college of bishops (collegiality).

Though the ITC's document on synodality defines collegiality again in relation to the local churches (something that *LG* had not done), it says that the communion between local churches is "brought about by means of the hierarchical communion of the College of Bishops with the Bishop of Rome" (§7). This presupposes a certain priority of the college, and so of the universal Church, because (as it is expressed here) it is *by means of* the college that the *communio ecclesiarum* becomes a reality and not *by means of* the catholicity of each local church. You could say that it is all about different accents or ways to express finally the same thing. I believe this is not the case. Here we have the entire problem of the priority of the universal against the local. Such a priority denies the catholicity of the local church and understands communion as an imposition of the one over the many. Let me recall Zizioulas' interpretation of the application of the trinitarian foundation of *koinonia*: we cannot have the one without having at the very same time the many, and vice-versa.¹⁸

Concluding remarks

To conclude our very brief thoughts above, complementary to Prof. Şelaru's paper and intended rather to provoke further discussion, let me briefly suggest what an Orthodox would expect from the Synod on Synodality in October 2023.¹⁹

Firstly, it is important to consider the bishop as a "corporate personality of his eucharistic community" in order to explain, on the one hand, his responsibility towards the *pleroma* of his Church to recapitulate

18. Cf., for instance, J. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, cit. p. 51 or p. 265.

19. See also A. Miltos, *Le développement actuel de la synodalité au sein de l'Église catholique : promesses, difficultés, attentes. Un point de vue orthodoxe*, « Semi-Annual Bulletin Centro Pro Unione » 100 (2021), pp. 68- 84.

their *sensus fidei*; on the other, his right to be the one that represents the local church at the supra-local level.

That means, to define episcopal synodality by means of the Local Church and not by means of the episcopal college, in other words not by a universalistic ecclesiology. For this it would be extremely significant if the Synod employed the term synodality also for the bishops, instead of collegiality.

We hope that the Synod will give more importance to the regional level by defining a clear status to Episcopal Conferences. Moreover, despite the reservations that an Orthodox may have about the institution of the Synod of Bishops (universalistic paradigm, representativity), it is necessary that the synod of bishops have a deliberative vote and not merely a consultative one. Otherwise, “communion is understood as a subordination to unity.”²⁰

Finally, as far as papal primacy is concerned, if primacy and synodality are mutually constitutive and if primacy is *de jure divino*, then synodality has also to be by divine right. If we really believe that synodality is a condition sine qua non for the Church to be a communion, we shall change our minds and our practices, guided by the trinitarian concept of *koinonia*.

20. A. Miltos, *Collégialité et Synodalité*, p. 671.

PRACTICES OF SYNODALITY

The Council of Nicaea (325)

Metropolitan Vasilios (Karayiannis)

It is commonly accepted that the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea holds a prominent place in comparison to the previous local synods convened to deal with problems that have arisen over time, which had to be confronted not only by the local Church, under the bishop and including the presbytery and the faithful, but also with the participation of neighboring bishops. This was the case, for example, for the election and ordination of bishops, given that the jurisdictional boundaries of the *eparchies* (provinces) had not yet been established. Moreover, an effort was made to resolve the issue of Arianism in Alexandria, where it had its origins, by convening a local synod (324). This was not possible, however, given that the Arian heresy had exceeded the local boundaries of the Church of Alexandria. Furthermore, the issue had not been resolved by convening a synod in Caesarea in Palestine (325) with the participation in both cases of Hosius (Ossius) bishop of Cordoba (256-357/58), acting as an envoy of the emperor Constantine the Great (306-337).

Favorable conditions at that time made possible the convening of synods of bishops, in contrast to the previous period when the emperor Licinius (308-324) had forbidden the convocation of episcopal synods. Therefore, the convocation of the First Ecumenical Council at the emperor's initiative and the participation of a large number of bishops have ecclesiastical and ecclesiological dimensions, and also political.

From a political point of view, this was the first time, since the spread of Christianity within the boundaries of the Roman empire and the cessation of persecutions, during which the emperor had become personally involved in Church affairs, aiming at the unity of the empire. This unity was ensured by overcoming the doctrinal divisions of the Christian Churches. This purpose coincided with the Church's pursuit

of unity, which was imperiled by the different heresies – Arianism specifically.

The initial and central question of our contribution concerns the pre-existing synodal practices that were followed in the formation of “the Holy and Great Council” of Nicaea. Researchers introduce numerous perspectives and approaches on the matter. However, some evidence supports the view that the extant practices of the local Churches were followed, which were applied for the resolution of issues arising in the various regions of the Roman empire.

From the existing, although fragmentary, catalogue of recorded signatures, it is concluded that concerning the representation of the local Churches, the practices of the various Churches and regions of the empire were followed.¹ Until the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451), this catalogue was subject to interventions and, as a result, several variations appeared, presenting a large number of bishops who took part in the sessions to emphasize, to a greater extent, the authenticity of the Council². The one who addressed the emperor at the beginning of the sessions of the Council of Nicaea was not the president of the council, but instead, the local bishop of Nicomedia, Eusebius, a fact affirming the respect for the locality of the Churches. The president of the First Ecumenical Council was Hosius bishop of Cordoba.³ The emperor did not follow the established protocol of the Roman Empire designating, for example, that he should take his predetermined place and sit on the imperial throne, but he was waiting for the permission of the bishops, probably after the prayer.³ This implies that the emperor did not impose his views on the structure and work of the council. It also appears that neither the protocol nor the structure of the sessions

1. See Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3.7, ed. F. Winkelmann, *Eusebius Werke*, Band 1.1: *Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin*, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 1975, p. 80.

2. David M. Gwynn estimates that in the Council of Nicaea the number of bishops, priests and laymen assistants of the bishops etc. was about two thousand. D. M. Gwynn, *Reconstructing the Council of Nicaea*, in Y. Kim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Council of Nicaea*, Cambridge Companions to Religion, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2021, pp. 95-96.

3. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, 3.10, cit., p. 81.

corresponded to those followed by the Senate of Rome, as it has been argued by some scholars, given that the practices of synodality had already been established in the practices of the local councils. 4. The emperor did not preside over the work of the council, a practice retained by the emperors in the following ecumenical councils. 5. Finally, an important fact that reveals the practices of synodality, was the 6th canon of the Council of Nicaea concerning the administration of the Church following the “metropolitan system”, being in accordance with the administrative division of the empire in provinces. The conscience of the fathers and members of the Council on this subject, is formulated and expressed mainly in the canons with the repeated use of the phrase: *τὰ ἀρχαῖα κρατεῖτω* (the old customs must be kept) or *ἡ ἀρχαία παράδοσις* (the ancient tradition) must be respected.⁴

It becomes evident that the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, given the political conditions which favored the Church, and due to the challenges arising from Arianism, acquired an exceptional authority within the Church – an authority that was extended to the succeeding ecumenical councils. At the same time, the Council of Nicaea became the paradigm for the convocation and formation of the following councils, ecumenical or local. Of particular importance is the reference made to the *ὅρος πίστεως*, the formulation of the faith of the Council, especially from the succeeding ecumenical councils, except for the

4. Τὰ ἀρχαῖα ἔθη κρατεῖτω, τὰ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ, καὶ Λιβύῃ καὶ Πενταπόλει, ὥστε τὸν ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ ἐπίσκοπον πάντων τούτων ἔχειν τὴν ἐξουσίαν· ἐπειδὴ καὶ τῷ ἐν Ῥώμῃ ἐπισκόπῳ τοῦτο σύνηθές ἐστιν. Ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ κατὰ τὴν Ἀντιόχειαν, καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις ἐπαρχίαις, τὰ πρεσβεία σφύζεσθαι ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Καθόλου δὲ πρόδηλον ἐκείνῳ· ὅτι, εἴ τις χωρὶς γνώμης τοῦ μητροπολίτου γένοιτο ἐπίσκοπος, τὸν τοιοῦτον ἡ μεγάλη σύνοδος ὥρισε μὴ δεῖν εἶναι ἐπίσκοπον. Ἐὰν μέντοι τῇ κοινῇ πάντων ψήφῳ, εὐλόγῳ οὕσῃ, καὶ κατὰ κανόνα ἐκκλησιαστικόν, δύο, ἢ τρεῖς δι' οἰκειᾶν φιλονεικίαν ἀντιλέγωσι, κρατεῖτω ἡ τῶν πλειόνων ψήφος (6th Canon), Ἐπειδὴ συνήθεια κεκράτηκε, καὶ παράδοσις ἀρχαία, ὥστε τὸν ἐν Αἰλίᾳ ἐπίσκοπον τιμᾶσθαι, ἐχέτω τὴν ἀκολουθίαν τῆς τιμῆς· τῇ μητροπόλει σφωζομένου τοῦ οἰκείου ἀξιώματος (7th Canon). Ed. G. Alberigo, *The Oecumenical Councils. From Nicaea I (325) to Nicaea II (787)*, *Corpus Christianorum Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta* 1, Brepols, Turnhout 2006.

Council of Ephesus (431) and other local synods. Aside from their purpose of addressing administrative matters, we observe that almost all synods had a dual aim: firstly, the definition of the orthodoxy of the faith, and secondly, the condemnation of heresy.

Apart from the unprecedented fact of the convocation of the ecumenical councils by the emperors, a practice introduced at the First Council of Nicaea, we observe various other features which influence the following ecumenical councils to some extent. We have already mentioned the question concerning the list of the participant bishops. The various drafts resulted in the symbolic number of “three hundred and eighteen” bishops, corresponding to the number of the three hundred and eighteen soldiers against whom Abraham fought and prevailed, being those who captured his nephew Lot. Therefore, the doctrinal decision of the First Council of Nicaea as a triumph against heresy forms a parallel to the triumph of Abraham and the liberation of Lot. This analogy opens a new interpretative perspective on synodical practices in general.⁵ The investment of historical events with a symbolic parallel extends even to the emperor. According to a narrative, quoted by Theodoretus of Cyrrhus in his *Religious History*,⁶ the emperor Constantine is presented as the New Zerubbabel. During the Babylonian capture of the Israelite people, Zerubbabel succeeded in bringing the exiled people back to their homeland. Parallel to that, Constantine the Great restored the exiled bishops, restored the dismantled local Christian Churches, and convoked the Council of Nicaea by inviting “all the presidents of the Churches” to contribute to its formation.

Another event is preserved again by the historian Theodoret of Cyrrhus, referring to monk James from Nisibis (*Ἰάκωβος ἐκ Νισίβεως*), known for the power of his prayers. This monk was invited to the Council, as Theodoret implies, or came as a member of the delegation of

5. A similar example was also used by Cyril Patriarch of Alexandria in regard to the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431).

6. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, translated with an introduction and notes by R. M. Price, Cistercian Studies Series 88, Cistercian Publications, Collegeville Minnesota 1985. Cf. P. Canivet – A. Leroy-Molinghen (eds.), *Théodoret de Cyr, L’histoire des moines de Syrie*, 2 vols, Sources chrétiennes 234, 257, Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1977, 1979.

the bishop of his Church, chosen because of his spirituality. During the theological debates, difficulties seem to have arisen between the bishops supporting the Orthodox faith and those insisting on the Arian teachings. Then, according to Theodoret,

the divine James urged them all to mortify themselves with fasting and simultaneously for seven days to beseech God to grant what would benefit the churches. Since they all welcomed the proposal of the inspired man, whom they knew to shine with apostolic charisms, fasting was combined with prayer, while the Helmsman of the churches decreed what would benefit them. When the appointed day arrived on which the majority anticipated the reconciliation of the miscreant, and the time had come for the divine liturgy and everyone expected to see the enemy of God receive pardon, at this very moment there occurred a truly divine and extraordinary miracle. While in a disgusting and noisome place [...] the miserable creature instantly breathed his last and underwent this most shameful death....⁷

Despite the lack of historical credibility in the description of the death of Arius, the close relationship of prayer and the Eucharist in the synodal process is attested.

Some other examples, which are used to affirm the illumination of the Holy Spirit during the work of the synodal process, will make clear this perspective. In the Old Testament, there is a reference to the visit of the three angels to Abraham to announce to him the decision of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The dialogue with the three visitors, as in the form of a synodal session – perceiving also the dinner offered by hosts Abraham and Sarah as foreshadowing the eucharistic table – concerns the moral behavior of the inhabitants of the two cities. The final decision was the destruction of the two cities after the flee of Lot and his family. The second example, again from the Old Testament, is that of the ascension of Moses, together with the leaders, to receive the

7. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, cit., pp. 17-18; Théodoret de Cyr, *L'histoire des moines de Syrie*, vol. 1, cit. pp. 180-183.

Law. This is not a moral matter, but it concerns receiving the Law and accepting the Covenant with the people of God. When the presence of God was experienced, a meal was offered (Ex 24:9-11),⁸ also a foreshadowing of the eucharistic table.

Similar examples are also found in the New Testament. An example par excellence of this is the Last Supper, according to which the synod of Christ and the Apostles seals the New Testament of God with his Church by the blood of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross.⁹ Modern scholars inextricably link the synodical system of the Church with the Eucharist.¹⁰ The eucharistic gathering of the bishop, the presbytery, and all the people is a synod. Further interpretations of the function of synodality in the Church are: a) the Apostolic Synod of

8. Ex 24:9-11: "Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank."

9. Mt 26:26-29: Ἐσθιόντων δὲ αὐτῶν λαβὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὸν ἄρτον καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασε καὶ ἐδίδου τοῖς μαθηταῖς καὶ εἶπε· λάβετε φάγετε· τοῦτο ἐστὶ τὸ σῶμά μου· καὶ λαβὼν τὸ ποτήριον καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς λέγων· πῖετε ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες· τοῦτο γάρ ἐστι τὸ αἷμά μου τὸ τῆς καινῆς διαθήκης τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυνόμενον εἰς ἅφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν. λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐ μὴ πῖω ἅπ' ἄρτι ἐκ τούτου τοῦ γενήματος τῆς ἀμπέλου ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης ὅταν αὐτὸ πίνω μεθ' ὑμῶν καινὸν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου / "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

10. See John Zizioulas (Metropolitan of Pergamon), Ἔργα Α'. Ἐκκλησιολογικὰ μελετήματα, Athens 2016, pp. 651-771. Vlasios Phidas, Ὁ θεσμός τῆς πενταρχίας τῶν Πατριαρχῶν, I., Προϋποθέσεις διαμορφώσεως τοῦ θεσμοῦ (Ἀπ' ἀρχῆς μέχρι τὸ 451), Athens 1969; Idem, Ὁ θεσμός τῆς πενταρχίας τῶν Πατριαρχῶν, II., Ἱστορικοκανονικὰ προβλήματα περὶ τὴν λειτουργίαν τοῦ θεσμοῦ (451-553), Athens 1977. Idem, Ἡ Α' Οἰκουμένη Σύνοδος. Προβλήματα περὶ τὴν σύγκλησιν, τὴν συγκρότησιν καὶ τὴν λειτουργίαν τῆς Συνόδου, Athens 1974.

Jerusalem, which determined the obligations of the Christians to the Law; (Acts 15:6-29) b) in Chapter 18 in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 18:15-18) on how to manage the fault of a brother; and c) the intervention of Paul the Apostle in matters of moral behavior in the church of Corinth and his counsels on the resolving of the issue from the eucharistic community with the expulsion from the communion (excommunication) and the anathema of the guilty (1 Cor 5:1-12).

The character of the synodal decision and the formulation of the faith by the synod

The aforementioned point out the main principles upon which the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea was based and which practices of synodality were followed by that particular ecumenical conciliar body. It is obvious, however, that even for the formulation of the faith *horos* (*ὁρος πίστεως*), the fathers, members of the Council, did not introduce any kind of innovation. As the pre-existing local synodical acts were used for the convention and constitution of the synod, in the same way, the pre-existing baptismal symbols formed the basis of the formulation of the faith. The basic Christological question, which was posed by Arius, was: who is Jesus Christ to whom we believe and confess in the Church? The answer has been expressed in the synod's faith *horos*.

*Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα θεόν, πατέρα, παντοκράτορα, πάντων ὁρατῶν
τε καὶ ἀοράτων ποιητὴν,
καὶ εἰς ἕνα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ,
γεννηθέντα ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς, μονογενῆ, τουτέστιν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ
πατρὸς,
θεὸν ἐκ θεοῦ, φῶς ἐκ φωτός, θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ,
γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα, ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρί,
δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο τὰ τε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ τὰ ἐν τῇ γῇ,
τὸν δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν
κατελθόντα καὶ σαρκωθέντα, ἐνανθρωπήσαντα, παθόντα καὶ
ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ, ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς ἐρχόμενον
κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς.
καὶ εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα.*

τοὺς δὲ λέγοντας ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν καὶ πρὶν γεννηθῆναι οὐκ ἦν καὶ
 ὅτι ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων ἐγένετο ἢ ἐξ ἑτέρας ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας
 φάσκοντας εἶναι [ἢ κτιστὸν] ἢ τρεπτὸν ἢ ἀλλοιωτὸν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ
 θεοῦ
 τούτους ἀναθεματίζει ἡ καθολικὴ καὶ ἀποστολικὴ ἐκκλησία.

We can distinguish the creed of faith in two parts: a) in the pure doctrinal part, and b) in the anathemas of the second part. We will not extend our discussion to the pure doctrinal theme, a matter of continuous conversation in the period after the Council of Nicaea until the Council of Chalcedon (post 325-415), also being put under the scrutiny of research about its theological accuracy in recent years. We will merely point out the difference in perceiving the content and the possibility of intervening in the text of the Nicæan creed. This indeed is the very point upon which the disagreement between Cyril of Alexandria and John of Antioch was concentrated. In this conflict, the reformulation and the extension of the creed approved by the Council of Constantinople (381), initially convened as a council of the bishops of the East and subsequently recognized as the Second Ecumenical Council, was not taken into consideration.¹¹ The conclusion coincides with John's writing in the *Book of Revelation*:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and the holy city, which are described in this book (Revd 22:18-19).

11. The main reason for the absence of reference to the Council of Constantinople by the Third Ecumenical Council (Ephesus, 431) is obviously the conflict between the thrones of Constantinople and Alexandria for holding the second place in the diptychs, in which Constantinople as the New Rome was later elevated to and Alexandria took the third place. Probably the Synod of Constantinople at that time was not yet recognized as ecumenical. Another reason can be found in the theological discussion about the possibility of developing the Nicene faith formulation or not.

The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (Crete, 2016)

Nicolas Kazarian

Introduction

I know of no good to have come from even a single synod; I know of no solutions that resulted, but only additional problems that arose. Their only outcomes are arguments, ambitions and rivalries; bishops prefer to reprove others rather than resolve internal church issues¹.

When Archdeacon John Chrysavgis quoted these words of St Gregory the Theologian during a conference at St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in January 2016, nobody yet anticipated the challenges that the Holy and Great Council would face. At the time, after a preparatory process of over fifty years, all the primates of the Orthodox Churches were committed to coming to Crete from June 19 through 26, 2016. The 4th century words of St Gregory echo with great accuracy the living reality and difficulties of a council. I can still hear Dr. Paul Gavriluk saying as we were leaving how this experience was essential in the understanding and appreciation of conciliar dynamics, the sometimes-messy power struggles. The Holy and Great Council, like all the other councils before it, is simultaneously and paradoxically both the synergistic collaboration of the Holy Spirit with the college of hierarchs (representing clergy/laity, the body of the faithful) and more prosaic concerns, like how many photocopiers do we need to print copies of the documents for all the participants, how do we make sure all the hierarchs have an opportunity to sign the document, ensuring the translations match, and building bridges between the conciliar meeting room and the world outside the walls of the Academy of Crete.

I am in debt to many authors who have written extensively on this conciliar process, in the actual days of the Council, as well as on the

1. St Gregory the Theologian, Epistles, PG 37, 228-232.

reception process of the Holy and Great Council. Some will be mentioned during these remarks, others in the comprehensive written version of this paper. In light of the limited time that I have, I would like to focus on my recollections, or snapshots from the Council, and try to elaborate and unpack the idea that the practices of synodality also speak to the conciliar nature and identity of the Orthodox Church today, this journey in companionship, despite the many questions around its legitimacy, ecumenicity, canonicity, and suitability.

To put the Holy and Great Council into a few figures, it was: 1 place, the island of Crete; 8 documents, 14 autocephalous churches invited, at least 50 years in the making; 163 conciliar fathers, including 10 primates plus the hierarch in charge of the secretariat, H.E. Metropolitan Jeremy of Switzerland, and over 500 participants, including special advisors to the conciliar fathers, staff, security, journalists, and many more.

You might ask me: where were you during the Council? I was part of the secretariat that drafted the encyclical, a member of the Press Office of the Ecumenical Patriarchate led by Revd Chrysavgis, who also supported the work of the secretariat towards the end of the Council, which allow me to be the proverbial “fly on the wall.” So, I would also like to thank the organizers of this conference for allowing me the opportunity to look back at my own diary of the Council, the few notes I threw on paper during the three weeks I was on the island, together with many people and friends present here whom I invite to complete these remarks if they think I have missed anything.

The purpose of this presentation is certainly not to dive into the theology of synodality with regard to the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Many presenters here are far more qualified than I am to address that question. I intend to focus on the ecclesial dimension and experience of someone who attended the Holy and Great Council, working behind the scenes and witnessing how the process of synodality, with all its challenges, continues to be a living reality of the Church. Synodality is more than collegiality. A communion of Churches is more than a federation of faith-based organizations. Both demonstrate the mystery of the Church in the present. The convening of a Holy Great Council was necessary for four reasons according to His-All Holiness Ecumenical

Patriarch Bartholomew: 1. to manifest the Church's mission; 2. to express the Church's unity; 3. to resolve new challenges like the diaspora; and 4. to discuss the Orthodox engagement in the Ecumenical Movement. His-All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew stated in his opening address: "Since we adopted the principle of consensus with regard to decisions taken by the Council, we simultaneously also adopted the approval of any proposed changes only if all the sister Churches are in agreement with these changes."² Allow me to unpack here the decision-making process of the Council.

1. The decision-making process of the Council

Some of us recently attended the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Germany, where we experienced first-hand the benefits and limits of such a process. Don't worry, I won't walk you through the complex use of orange and blue cards, since they were not in use during the Council. However, it is important to mention the rules and procedures of engagement that were decided upon during the Synaxis of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches in January 2016. First, who could participate in the Council? The Primates and their delegations, composed of no more than 25 participants with the right to speak and vote, assisted by no more than 6 special advisors, clergy or laity, married or monastic, men or women.

The consensus model was preferred to the unanimity model because it allows the Council to take into account a less binary approach which I would qualify as the silence approach of the Council; a space that allows decisions to be made despite disagreements, even though veto power remains a possibility. In other words, conciliar fathers were asked the question: "Can you live with these decisions?" Looking back at the minutes of the 3rd Panorthodox Precounciliar Conference of 1986 which dealt in part with the two documents, "The Orthodox Church in relation with the rest of the Christian World" and "The Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement", one can find profound similarities with the

2. H.A.H., "Opening Address by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Inaugural Session of the Holy and Great Council", June 20, 2016. <https://holycouncil.org/opening-ecumenical-patriarch>

Council thirty years later. The questions in 1986 were perfectly summed up by Metropolitan Anthony of Transylvania as follows: “What will happen if an Orthodox Church doesn’t participate in sessions of a dialogue with another Christian family? Does a Church have the right to veto? And if a church doesn’t participate in a dialogue, is the result of this dialogue valid despite the absence of a Church?”³ Wouldn’t the same be true for a council?

These questions, which arose in the context of inter-Christian relations, are of primary importance for the Pan-Orthodox discussion because they crystallize the obvious catholicity of churches whose universality, understood as a quality of the Church and not only as a number, cannot be reduced to the total of the Orthodox Churches and therefore to a federal vision of Orthodoxy. This question is not purely theoretical because several Orthodox Churches have withdrawn from certain bilateral dialogues, or even from the Holy and Great Council. In the 1980s, for example, the Church of Cyprus refused to take part in the Commission’s dialogue with the Anglican Church because of the issue of women’s ordination. More recently, the Patriarchate of Moscow refused to sign the Ravenna document (2007) of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church due to the participation of representatives of the Autonomous Church of Estonia (Ecumenical Patriarchate). In the same way, four Churches chose not to attend the Council. Does their withdrawal, especially in a pan-Orthodox context, undermine the catholicity of Orthodoxy?

Going back to the minutes of the 1986 debates, two lines of argument emerged. The first was represented by Professor Alexei Sergueïevitch Bouevsky, an advisor of the Russian Orthodox Church, who held that only the *pleroma* of the Church has the capacity to make

3. Secrétariat pour la préparation du saint et grand concile de l’Église orthodoxe, Synodica X. III^e conférence panorthodoxe préconciliaire, Chambésy, 28 octobre-6 novembre 1986. Procès Verbaux – Documents, Centre Orthodoxe du Patriarcat œcuménique, Chambésy-Genève, 2014, p. 109.

decisions about the restoration of communion with a non-Orthodox Church. The withdrawal of an Orthodox Church which “is not opposition but nor is it acceptance”⁴ acts in opposition to the unity of the Church.

The opposing argument is represented by Professor Vlassios Phidas, who was a member of the delegation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Let me quote his intervention *verbatim*:

... it is I who proposed the wording of the sentence we are discussing now. It expresses a canonical sensitivity. Silence is not an unknown element in the canonical tradition of our Church. It always means acceptance by the ecclesial conscience. On the other hand, when we say openly, ‘I won’t accept it’, it is indeed rejection and not silence. This sentence reflects the canonical tradition.⁵

The first position is perfectly understandable. The declared unanimity of all Orthodox Churches will restore the bond of communion at the end of a theological dialogue. Unanimity is the very experience of conciliarity, which manifests the catholic unity of the Church. However, because each local Orthodox Church is the depositary of the full experience of salvation through the mystery of the Eucharist, unanimity should not be understood as uniformity. The identification of these two terms in Russian Orthodox theology seems to reflect the evolution of the word “catholic” itself. In Slavonic, the Nicene Creed originally translated *katholiki* by *kafolitcheskaya*, before being replaced in the 16th century by “*sobornaya*”. From this word, Alexei Khomiakov coined the term “*sobornost*” which means a conciliarity in which there is no room for individualistic positions. Even though the dialectic between the one and the multiple still exists in *sobornost*, it implies a strong sense of solidarity, and thus of unanimity.

The second argument reflects the complex reality of how communion between Churches operates. In that instance, it is clear that the pan-Orthodox principle of unanimity is not always met. But in this instance, the word “silence” is a dimension of ecclesial consciousness. If

4. Ibid., p. 222.

5. Ibid.

we consider that Orthodoxy is a communion of Churches and not a federation of spiritual institutions, it implies precisely the ability to express the catholicity of the Church's point of view. I do not mean to imply that a simple majority would be a better thing – in fact quite the opposite. But we must also accept that the conciliar process is sometimes freer than we think. In this respect, the Trinitarian paradigm that inspires the ecclesial conscience of whole of our theology is a hermeneutical key for our tradition. As Professor Michel Stavrou put it: "The catholicity in God indicates the paradoxical truth that the Holy Trinity is both consubstantial and inconfusable."⁶ The silence of the Churches, in an Ecumenical or even pan-Orthodox conciliar context, could be considered a way of dealing with the Church's economy, which is sometimes also the Church's diplomacy. Those are some of the principles that ultimately supported the work of the Council, especially during the debate around the use of "church" for non-Orthodox Churches in the document "Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World" during which the Church of Greece needed to be at best convinced, at least "silent", regarding this traditional terminology.

2. Dialogue and Synodality

Allow me now to tackle the second aspect of my paper, which will focus on the dialogue-synodality nexus. To illustrate this articulation, I will draw from a very symbolic event which changed the whole dynamic of the Council. As you may remember, and it is well documented in His Grace Bishop Maxim's *Diary of the Council*, the participation of the Patriarchate of Serbia was not clear up until the last moment, especially when the Churches of Antioch, Georgia, Bulgaria, and Russia decided not to participate. A couple of days prior to the opening of the Council, the drafting committee of the message was formed and I was part of the secretariat at the time. A document acquires its conciliar nature by the quality of dialogue being implemented as the methodological means by which Church documents are being prepared. Thus, in this context of great uncertainty, when we all knew that the Council would not be exactly as anticipated participation-wise, the conciliar fathers'

6. Michel Stavrou, *La catholicité de l'Église*, Contacts 180 (1997), p. 347.

commitment to a dialogue in its theological dimension permitted the drafting committee to fulfill its mandate (from June 8-16) and to a certain extent, saved the future of the Council⁷.

I mentioned the uncertainty regarding the commitment of the Patriarchate of Serbia. It was thanks to the participation of Metropolitan Amfilohie of Montenegro who, by contributing to the deeper theological theme – the mention of the Palamite’s theology or the accent placed on the catholicity of the Church – and acknowledging that his views and opinions on the document being prepared were positively received, ensured the Serbian participation in the Council. During this process, he got a foretaste of the broader work of the Council. The coalition against the Council was weakened. The initial message would actually become the encyclical since a text of 6,000 words was certainly too long to carry the prophetic voice that H.B. Archbishop Anastasios of Albania longed for. This is how he took the responsibility of drafting what would become the message, only 2,000 words long, sharper and certainly more insightful.

I do not have time here to get into the difficulties of managing the theological language of the documents in four languages simultaneously (Greek as the original, English, Russian, and French). By diving into the theological dimension of dialogue which is founded on the very principle of the incarnate *Logos*, we can explore new dimensions of synodality. In other words, dialogue is synodality in practice. The document *For the Life of the World, Towards a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, published in 2020, which is a direct response to the Holy and Great Council, tried an initial approach to this question when it says:

Dialogue, in the Orthodox understanding, is essentially and primordially a reflection of the dialogue between God and humanity: it is initiated by God and conducted through the divine Logos (*dialogos*), our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Pervading all human life, dialogue takes place in all our encounters, personal, social, or political,

7. Cf. Bishop Maxim of Western America, *Diary of the Council*, Sebastian Press, Alhambra CA, 2016.

and must always be extended to those who adhere to religions different from ours. And in all our connections and relationships, the Word of God is mystically present, ever guiding our exchange of words and ideas towards a spiritual union of hearts in him⁸.

Conclusion

The Holy and Great Council of Crete was more than a synodal moment, it was an Orthodox moment. I would like to close by sharing with you the most iconic moment I had the privilege of witnessing during the Council and I would like to share with you a very vivid memory I have of the drafting of both the message and the encyclical. It was, if I am not mistaken, Friday, June 24, late in the morning, just before lunch. There were some issues about the paragraph on freedom and human rights in both texts and we were trying to come up with new language. We first tried members of the delegations. But nobody wanted to take the responsibility. At the very last moment, before the afternoon closing session, Dr. Elizabeth Prodromou, who was a member of the delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as advisor, meaning she could not speak during the sessions, went to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and asked him to consider some changes to paragraph 10 of the message (paragraph 16 of the encyclical). Several seconds later, Elizabeth was standing with Patriarch Bartholomew around Archbishop Anastasios who was changing the wording and with the language dictated by both of them.

In my opinion, this is exactly what a Council is all about, to be able to reflect the experience of the Church, regarding freedom in that case, articulating two forms of languages: theological and academic (even legal). In fact, this paragraph is very important because it counterbalances the Orthodox view of human rights as the root of individualism that leads to secularism. The paradox here, and it was clear during the discussions of the Messaging Committee, is that the Orthodox Church opposes human rights as an influence of Western Civilization which leads to the cultural liberalism. But simultaneously, human rights

8. For the Life of the Word: Towards a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline MA, 2020, par. 54.

allow Orthodox minority communities to seek social inclusion and religious freedom. This oxymoron, which sometimes flirts with spiritual schizophrenia, reflects the complexity of contexts of the Orthodox Churches, their level of exposure to globalization, and their will to address and not to oppose it. The biggest improvement to the message during the days the Committee worked on it was the change in tone. In the first draft, the expression “The Orthodox Church opposes...” was very frequent; it is much less so in the final version.

In closing, let me quote His Grace Bishop Maxim’s words: “When you are at some council, your experience begins only when the council ends. For then, the council visits you”⁹.

9. Bishop Maxim of Western America, *cit.*, p. 88.

WORKSHOPS

Permanent Synods in Church History and Today

Dimitrios Keramidas

Synodality in the Church

Synodality is a *permanent* reality that has accompanied the life of the Church since the beginning of her historical existence – the Council of Jerusalem (49 AD) was the first “synodical” witness *of* the Church’s unity and universality.

Synodality among the Churches

During the second and third centuries, synodality became a concrete expression of the visible communion *among* the Churches as well as a means to resolve issues of discipline and faith or to proceed to bishop elections. The custom of holding regular synods was ratified by the First Ecumenical Council (canon 5), which on the basis of previous church legislation (such as the provisions of the Apostolic Canon 37), deliberated that an eparchial council should be held twice a year.

The development of synodality from the local to the regional and universal level

A particular form of synodal practice in the first centuries was that of “Major Synods” (Gr. *Μετζίονες Σύνοδοι*), that is, of *supra-regional* synodal ruling bodies in which bishops of different ecclesiastical provinces participated. These Synods were extraordinary; however, they had administrative and judicial competencies and were held under the canonical guidance of the respective metropolitan or exarch – later, patriarch.

The solidification of the synodal system on the *regional* (see Apostolic Canon 34) and *supra-regional* levels did not hinder the Church from exercising conciliarity on the Pan-Christian (*universal*) domain. The Ecumenical Councils, despite their extraordinary or occasional character, arose as a means of a *constant* exercise of conciliar authority in the Church and of resolving matters for the entire Christianity. Thus, the Ecumenical Councils of the first millennium, among other things, defined the Christian dogmas, confirmed the prerogatives of various ecclesiastical sees (metropolitanates, exarchates, and, later, the Pentarchy), received the deliberations of previous councils, and established the *synodical* affirmation of Christian unity.

Other permanent forms of synodality in the East

The institution of the *Endemousa* (*endemic*) *Synod* took the form of a local Patriarchal Synod (of the Church of Constantinople), it was either ordinary or exceptional and belonged organically to the synodal system which the Church had already established. The endemic Synod turned into a *permanent* Patriarchal Synod which, in some of its features, became something more than a governing body of a local Church, as the *Endemousa* Patriarchal Synod of Constantinople could also involve bishops of other jurisdictions (like the Eastern patriarchs who temporarily resided in Constantinople after the Arabic conquest of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt). The Endemic Synod constituted, by custom, a form of constant communion among the Churches of the East and an expression of their visible unity. Twentieth-century Russian theologian John Meyendorff considered these enlarged-endemic councils a “permanent magisterium”, and he noted that their decisions were incorporated in the *Synodikon* of Orthodoxy – a liturgical book portraying synodal decisions of the first and second millennium (e.g., synodal decisions against the Decree of Union of the Council of Lyon, or in favour of the Palamite doctrine on the distinction between divine nature and energies).

In particular, the Patriarchal Endemic Synods had *legislative* (see the Protodeutera Synod of 861 and the *Tomos Unionis* of 920) and *judicial* competencies and were charged with *administrative* prerogatives which usually were undertaken by an Ecumenical Synod (the

declaration, for example, of the Autocephaly of the Moscow Church was made by the Patriarchal Synod of 1593, whereas later Autocephalies were granted by the permanent Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople). The Endemic Synod dealt also with questions regarding Christian dogmas, such as Christology and its effects, or the veneration of the icons (see the Endemic Synods of 394, 448, 518, 536, 543, 843). Thus, the Patriarchal Endemic Synod became *de facto* a synodal organ of greater Orthodox prestige. One, for example, can look at the synodal decisions of 1054, 1638, 1672, 1691, 1727, 1838, and 1872, which dealt with Pan-Orthodox issues varying from the condemnation of protestant tendencies within Orthodoxy to the condemnation of phyletism and relations with the Latin Church.

Synodality today in the Orthodox Church

The question for today is whether there can be *Pan-Orthodox synodical bodies* of permanent nature that could guarantee the visible unity of the Orthodox Church beyond the restricted character of the local Synods of the Patriarchal and Autocephalous Churches. These synodical bodies could forward the relations with the rest of the Christian world, or deal with liturgical and pastoral renewal programs. To this end, in his opening address at the Holy and Great Council of Crete, ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew noted that “while this structure [of the Autocephalous Churches] is canonically and ecclesiologically correct, the danger of its conversion into a kind of “federation of Churches,” each of which promotes its own interests and ambitions – which themselves are not always of a strictly ecclesiastical nature – renders necessary the application of synodality. The atrophy of the synodal institution on a Pan-Orthodox level contributes to the development of a sentiment of self-sufficiency within the individual Churches and in turn leads them toward introspective and self-absorbed tendencies – namely, to a sense that

I have no need of you” [...] If the synodal system is generally mandatory in the life of the Church, the system of Autocephaly renders it still more obligatory for the protection and expression of its unity.

The recent experience of the Holy and Great Council of Crete (2016) clearly showed that the synodal conscience is still active within Orthodoxy. Yet, the

absence of some Churches from the Council of Crete raised, in my view, the need for *centers* of primacy in all synodal processes, whether permanent or occasional, and on *all levels* of synodal life (local, regional, and Pan-Orthodox).

Synodality cannot exist separately from forms of primacy, and primacies cannot be exercised without synods. From the Orthodox viewpoint, the absence of synodality weakens the unity of the Church. But it is also true that synodality without *centers of primacy* risks becoming a confederation of independent, self-sufficient (national) churches with no solicitude to each other, that, despite being united in faith and sacraments, are divorced as to issues that can range from the relations with the heterodox to how Orthodox tradition should be understood, applied, and renewed.

Synodality and Pan-Orthodox unity

Can, therefore, the institution of the *Synaxes* of the Orthodox Primates (inaugurated in 1992 by ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew and exercised until 2016, that is, the convocation of the Holy and Great Council) become a model of *permanent* communion, representing the worldwide Orthodoxy and, if so, what would be its canonical authority? Can a permanent *Inter-Orthodox Secretariat* be an organ of an ordinary, synodical, albeit non-episcopal, coordination of all Orthodox Churches? Or it seems more reasonable to rehabilitate the institution of the *Endemic Synod* (with the participation of delegates of all the Orthodox Churches) under the auspices of the patriarchate of Constantinople? Should the latter be the case, what would then be the function of this responsibility: would this primatial role limit itself to a simply honorific position, or perhaps it should become more faithful to the canonical tradition of the Eastern Church, that is, a *canonical* primacy with concrete prerogatives regarding Pan-Orthodox unity (conveying and presiding over synods, establishing the conciliar agendas, receiving appeals, coordinating joint activities, etc.)?

The answer to these questions should be given by Orthodoxy herself, in light of her canonical tradition, of today's complex missionary, pastoral, and ecumenical challenges, and of the accountability that the "primatial" Church should be ready to have for the worldwide Orthodoxy.

Liturgy, Communion, and Synodality

Andriy Dudchenko

Let me, as a priest of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, first share my thanks with the organizers for their trust in delivering the opening remarks to this workshop.

For an Orthodox participant, the term “synodality” sounds like a neologism. We usually include the meaning of this term in the meaning of the term “catholicity”, which had been translated into the Slavic languages as “sobornost”. By the catholicity of the Church, we often understand the conciliar, or rather synodal, structure of church life – both of liturgical life and of the ministries of administration and teaching.

Synodality for us is a dimension of the catholicity of the Church as of the Body of Christ, as of a living reality that finds its source of being and its fullness in the Eucharist, when all the gathered become the one Body of Christ.

As stated in the document of the Ecumenical Patriarchate “For the Life of the World”, “fundamental to Orthodox ecclesiology is the notion that the individual member of the Church exists only in communion or relation with the whole body of the Church and ultimately with Christ, who is the head of the Church”.¹

In the document of the International Theological Commission “Synodality in the life and mission of the Church”, it is well noted that the ecclesiology of the People of God “stresses the common dignity and mission of all the baptized, in exercising the variety and ordered richness of their charisms, their vocations and their ministries”.²

1. For the life of the world. Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church, 60. <https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos>.

2. Synodality in the life and mission of the Church 6. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html.

The synodality of the Church must be manifested at all levels of its existence: a parish, a diocese, an autonomous or autocephalous Church, the Universal Church. In Eucharistic ecclesiology, which Father Nicholas Afanassiev preached so enthusiastically in the 20th century, the local church is perceived not as a part of the Universal Church, but as a manifestation of the Church in its fullness. The Eucharistic celebration of a given community re-presents, or makes present, the Church of Christ in a given place and at a given time. At the same time, the Universal Church is not a sum of parts, but a whole Body of Christ, composed of many members who are in communion and co-service with each other.

At the parish level, the concept of synodality of the Church is inseparably linked with the idea of royal priesthood of the laity. At baptism and chrismation, which in the Orthodox tradition immediately follows baptism, the believer is ordained into ministry as a member of the people of God, he receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, and regains the dignity of king, prophet, and priest. As we understand it, this does not mean that a layman can replace a presbyter and lead the liturgy. This means that the Eucharist, like all the other sacraments of the Church, like everything that is celebrated in the Church and by the Church, takes place with the joint participation of all the people of God – both clergy and laity, all ordained to special ministries. God sanctifies the Eucharistic gifts, and this happens not through the prayers of the presider alone, but through the prayers and faith of the entire congregation. This is clearly indicated by the dialogic structure of the Eucharistic prayers, especially the anaphora. Is it worth also noting that the Orthodox Divine Liturgy cannot be celebrated by one person alone, even a priest – at least two must be present.

According to Fr Georges Florovsky, the Eucharist is “the catholic sacrament, the sacrament of peace and love, and therefore unity”.³ This mutual love and unity finds its source in the mystery of Holy Trinity, and is implemented by the ministries of all the baptized. It reveals itself most clearly in the Eucharistic communion. And the document of the

3. G. Florovsky, “Eucharistia i Sobornost”, Put’ (Way), n. 19, 1929, in Russian, p. 8.

International Theological Commission also asserts: “The source and summit of synodality are in the celebration of the liturgy and – in a unique way – in our full, conscious, and active participation in the Eucharistic synaxis”.⁴

We should think about whether everything is right with the participation of the faithful in the Eucharistic celebration. Over the past few decades, the number of faithful who regularly partake Holy Communion has increased significantly in our country. However, the majority of lay people in most churches are still deprived of the opportunity to hear the words of the Eucharistic prayers, to answer them with “amen”, and thus to participate more meaningfully in the common sacrament. Synodality should be visibly manifested at every Eucharistic meeting by the concelebration of clergy and laity. Actually, this concelebration makes what we do a common business, the liturgy: the very word “liturgy” means “the common work”.

In this regard, let me quote St John Chrysostom:

There are occasions in which there is no difference at all between the priest and those under him; for instance, when we are to partake of the awful mysteries; for we are all alike counted worthy of the same things: not as under the Old Testament [when] the priest ate some things and those under him others, and it was not lawful for the people to partake of those things whereof the priest partook. But not so now, but before all one body (one loaf) is set and one cup. And in the prayers also, one may observe the people contributing much. (...) In the most awful mysteries themselves, the priest prays for the people and the people also pray for the priest; for the words, “with your spirit”, are nothing else than this. The offering of thanksgiving again is common: for neither does he give thanks alone, but also all the people.⁵

It is worthwhile to pay attention to the method of partaking we practice. Chrysostom says that during communion the priest does not differ from those under him. But the way we partake communion express rather a kind of essential difference between clergy and laity, does it not?

4. Synodality in the life and mission of the Church, 47.

5. John Chrysostom, in II Cor. XVIII, 3.

Clergy usually receive communion in the sanctuary with the gates closed and curtained, first taking a part of precious Bread and then drinking three times from the Chalice. In ancient times, this was the common way of partaking for all the Christians, including the laity. But now, for many centuries on we have been using a spoon to share Communion with the laity, and only the Covid-19 pandemic has become a catalyst for some churches for their return to an older method of communion. In addition, as Fr Robert Taft brilliantly revealed, in the ancient Church, no one of the upper clergy gave communion to himself. Even the bishop did not himself take the Body of Christ from the altar table, but received it from the hand of the concelebrating presbyter. Holy Communion is a gift that we, clerics, also receive, and not which we dispose of at our own discretion. It is worth considering whether we in our churches can rediscover this deeply meaningful ancient custom of sharing the sacrament with each other.

Another forgotten classical form of expressing the synodality of the Church is the participation of the laity in the election of clergy. It is worth noting that persons ordained to special ministries in the Church obtain a dignity, which in the very name expresses the synodal dimension. Thus, a deacon was historically appointed to provide diakonia, and today the liturgical service of a deacon also implies the obligatory participation of those to whom the deacon addresses with the call “Let us pray to the Lord!”. A presbyter is literally an elder, and this ministry also makes sense when there are those to whom the elder is “senior.” Moreover, the bishop – literally “overseer” – the one who paternally oversees the local church, takes care of its flock as its presiding minister. The entire history of the ancient Church testifies to the fact that the entire local congregation of a given city took part in the election of a bishop. A particularly striking is the case of the election of St Ambrose in Milano. And after the consecration of the new bishop, the congregation proclaims to him “Axios – Worthy”, thus manifesting the reception of its new shepherd. In the relatively recent history of the Russian Church, there was a case when students of the St Petersburg Theological Academy shouted out “Anaxios! – Unworthy!” at the ordination of their fellow student, which did not prevent the bishop, however, from completing the ordination.

In the Ukrainian tradition, even after the annexation of the Kyiv Metropolis by the Moscow Patriarchate, there was a custom of electing presbyters for local communities. The bishop did not arbitrarily appoint a priest to the parish, but at the request of the community. We should think about whether it is possible to re-implement the participation of all the people of God in the election of the clergy for the church of this people.

Here we come close to the question of education and catechesis. Who will elect the bishop or presbyters? In no way do I want to belittle the dignity of the laity. However, unfortunately, many of our baptized can hardly be called faithful. Saying this I mean not only lack of attendance at divine services or infrequency of communion of many of baptized. I mean mostly what can be defined as a paganism of Orthodox rite. And at the same time, among the laity there are those who, for example, have the gift of church teaching and from whom the clergy might also learn. I have heard sermons at the Orthodox liturgy from at least three lay Christians, and I myself learned a lot from them. A good presbyter not only teaches the laity, but also learns from them. This is a good example of “reciprocal exchange of gifts in the light of truth.”⁶

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the participation of representatives of the clergy and laity in the highest body of church administration, the Local Council, has become a recent tradition of the Ukrainian Church, as well as of the Russian one. This council differs from the council of bishops precisely in its participants. Not only bishops take part in the Local Council, but also delegates from the clergy, monastics and laity from each diocese. In practice today, this often comes down to the fact that the bishop simply takes with him those whom he trusts, that is, those who will unconditionally support him.

The problem that opposes to synodality is the clericalism of our clergy. The clergy had become the ruling class in the Church, more willing to accept service to themselves than to serve the faithful. Bishops demand complete obedience of presbyters, presbyters sometimes strive to completely control the life of the laity, at least their church life. They prescribe how often to partake Communion, how to fast, how to pray,

6. Synodality in the life and mission of the Church, 9.

and even sometimes regulate sexual relations in families, demanding unconditional submission. They forget the words apostle Peter addressed to shepherds, instructing them “not to lord over those entrusted to you, but to be examples to the flock” (1 Pet 5:3). No less remarkable is that some lay people willingly refuse the great gift of freedom and mistake the caricature of unconditional subordination for Christian obedience to a spiritual father.

“A synodal Church is a Church of participation and co-responsibility,” states the document of the International Theological Commission.⁷ We need our churches, from the parish level to the ecumenical, to become truly synodal, in the exchanging of gifts and ministries, in the communion of love. What exactly we can and should do today, let’s discuss at our workshop.

7. Synodality in the life and mission of the Church, 67.

Monastic Coenobium as an Icon of Christian Synodality and the Eucharistic Communion of Many in One

Sava Janjić

Christian coenobitic monastic community is not simply a gathering of monks or nuns living together under a monastic Rule in order to perfect themselves spiritually and achieve individual salvation. They are much more than that. In fact, the monastic coenobium is essentially based on the eucharistic life in which we offer ourselves and one another to God as individual grains to manifest our new life in Christ as one Holy Bread – the *Body of Christ*. Without wasting our talents for individual gains, but using them for the upbuilding of our community, we struggle to overcome in the process of *metanoia* of our individual self, our “old man” (*ho palaios anthropos*) in order to live as a “new man” (*ho kainos anthropos*) in Christ, according to the teaching of Apostle Paul (Rom 6:6; Col 3:9-11; Eph 2:15, 4:22-24). The organisation of life in the monastery is therefore firmly rooted in the mystery of synodal life in which we are all members of one body with an Abbot as an image of Christ who *presides in love* in accordance with the image of Bishop who *presides in love* in a local Church (St Ignatius, *Letter to Romans* 1:1). In this sense, a monastic community is inherently founded in the eucharistic life of the Church.

Our monastic life in coenobium goes beyond individual ascetic exercises per se, so that our ascetic labours become an expression of a collective ascesis in which we daily crucify our egotistic habits in order to be able to live together as members of a new organism, a new community, through which by the grace of God we are being saved in Christ. “We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us, so that we would no longer be enslaved in sin” (Rom 6:6). In fact, the monastic life, especially in a coenobium, is a re-enactment of the mystery of baptism in which we mystically die “as the old man of sin”, living under the burden of the

fallen nature, in order to be reborn as “a new man” by the grace of Lord. Monastic tonsure is hence often called by monks as a moment of “new baptism” and spiritual rebirth. Living in asceticism, the monks’ goal is not to simply improve the “old man” with various methods, nor to bring satisfaction to God with spiritual labours, but to regenerate the gift of spiritual grace received in the holy baptism through an ontological change or in the minds and hearts (metanoia). In our ascetic labours, we struggle to open our hearts to be transformed by the life-giving energies of God in order to become “the partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:3-4). This change makes us capable to intensively participate in the Body of Christ (the Church) even in our earthly life and one of the icons of this new life is a monastic community as our “home church” (Philem 1:2). In this context, the asceticism has a particularly communal role of divesting ourselves from old habits of the fallen nature and finding the new life in Christ together with others in hope that we may say with the Apostle: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; but not I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). In monastic life we primarily learn how to live as members of one body, of one family. Even hermit monks, although rare in our times, must always be associated with a monastic house, which provides them a blessing and provisions to live alone, but as members of the community (as can be seen in Mount Athos, today). From this perspective the monastic synodality is a fraternal mystical collaboration expressing the mystery of our common life in Christ, as *many in One*.

We “put on the new man” (Eph 4:22) which is supposed to live “not in deceitful desires” of individual self-will and arrogance, but to be “renewed in spirit”. Although different, we are not separated as “*we have the mind of Christ*” (1 Cor 2:16). Becoming “renewed in spirit” and putting on the “new man who has been created in God’s image” (Col 4:24), we accomplish the new law of the Lord to live in love which is experienced profoundly as a deep ontological interconnectedness of many members in one body who live in fraternal union in Christ, recognizing the image of Christ in one another. “You have seen your brother, you have seen your Lord”, one of the sayings of desert father teaches us. From this love, as a new way of life, all other virtues emerge. Humility is one of the most important, as we know that all good what we

do is inspired by God's grace which manifests as a product of our collective labour for one another and not as our individual achievement. Every good thing we do we see as an act of God performed in us, and every failure a result of relying on our self-will and pride. We grow in faith as an expression of our firm reliance on Christ, our Lord crucified and risen for the life of the world. Our life becomes filled with hope because we no longer rely on our individual efforts, talents and our spiritual struggle, but find strength in our community, our Church, and the Lord who has "overcome the world" (Jn 16:33). And finally we as monks live in chastity and fraternity because regardless of origin, we live as members as our community as the Body of Christ in which "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Col 3:28). In this context our ascetic labours: fasting, personal sacrifice for others, our prayers, etc., in our community as our spiritual habitat are being focused on achieving love in Christ. As Bishop Atanasije Jevtić of blessed memory would say, "God will judge us not on the basis of our achievements or failures but according to the measure how much he will recognise the image of his coeternal Son in us", and we could freely add – according to the measure how much we have lived as true members of his Body. In this sense, the measure of our love for God is manifested in our relationship towards our brethren and true love for the others is measured by our love of God.

With such an approach to the meaning of the Christian coenobium, the underlying pattern of organization of our life is of synodal nature which, as the cornerstone of Church, is imprinted in all aspects of the Church life, in parishes, monasteries and dioceses. The focal point of such a way of life remains the Holy Eucharist in which we gather as many to become one, according to the old Eucharistic prayer in the *Didache* (9:4) "As this broken bread scattered on the mountains was gathered and became one, so too, may your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom. For glory and power are yours through Jesus Christ forever. "For this very reason the coenobitic monastery without a central role of the eucharistic life cannot accomplish its fullness, because by partaking the Holy Mysteries we reconfirm day by day that we are one in Christ, a fraternal community and not a group

of individuals who live and work together for our personal gains and ambitions. The monastic life is therefore not just a “*fuga mundi*” per se but a leaving of the worldly life and our self-will in order to be able to live in a more intensive eucharistic reality of the Kingdom of God, which is already here and now. In this context, our monastic life is essentially inseparable from the fullness of life of the Church in which there are many vocations and charismatic gifts by which we serve God and one another in love.

The architecture of many monasteries in the Eastern Orthodox tradition is often circular so that the main church “the katholikon” is in the centre of the monastery compound. We begin our day with our midnight service, Matins and the Holy Liturgy, as the life of our community organically spreads in a circular form from the church to the refectory, library, offices, guest quarters where we receive pilgrims, our workshops (iconography, wood carving, etc.) and even further away, into our fields where we grow vegetables and keep our cattle, sheep and other animals. Beside our communal prayers, we share communal meals and perform our daily activities in a prayerful way in order to gather at the end of the day in the katholikon again. There we complete our day with the Vespers and the Compline and withdraw to our cells (rooms) for our prayer rule and reading before the night’s rest. So, a coenobitic monastery lives in a liturgical rhythm, pulsating in concentric circles which open and spread every morning to finish the day in the main church in the evening. This rhythm is one more symbol of our communal – synodal life. Even those who perform some chores or duties out of the monastery, adjust themselves to this rhythm as much as possible, as no one does anything without the blessing of the Abbot.

In such a community the role of an Abbot is not that of a director, but rather of a coordinator of love among the brethren and caretaker of this model of life, with necessary interventions whenever there is a challenge to the order and the rule of the monastery. This is done by spiritual counselling and confessions, by constant inspiring of the fraternal unity or even disciplinary measures if necessary. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, synodality is imprinted in every organisational unit of our Church in our monasteries, parishes, dioceses or the Local Churches, in the spirit of the ancient 34th Canon of the Holy Apostles,

which teaches us that nothing is done without the consent of the one who presides (in wider sense, an Abbot, Presbyter, Bishop, Archbishop). At the same time, those who “preside in love” should do nothing without the consent and consultation with others. Essentially, as organs of one Body we are all of equal importance, with different charismatic gifts. We are organically interconnected and interdependent, but the hierarchy of duty and service makes us responsible for different activities through which we serve one another and keep our communities alive. The monastery is therefore both a hierarchical and egalitarian community at the same time, without one principle excluding the other. The role of the monastic rule is not simply to practically organize our life but to set boundaries to our individual freedoms and prevent it from becoming an anarchy. The monastery preserves this way of life by regulations which we freely accept in our vows of obedience, chastity and poverty (not having anything for ourselves only).

The Rule in the Orthodox Christian tradition may always be adjusted on the basis of “*economia*” (concession) or “*acribeia*” (strict application of the Rule) as the ultimate goal should always remain charity and compassion. The practice of “*economia*” or “*acribeia*” in the Orthodox Christian tradition ore of profound importance in spiritual discernment, as all aspects of communal life cannot be always covered by the Rule. Therefore, all decisions in the monastery are made not by Abbot himself but always together with the Council of elder monks who are responsible for the most important duties in the monastery, or in case of specific decisions, exhortations or a discussion when a synaxis of all monks is convened. The Abbot’s role is to spiritually discern what community feels and needs and to find compromise between different ideas, keeping the unity and love. At the same time the Abbot is supposed to inspire the brotherhood but also recognise useful suggestions of his brethren which may be beneficial for the community. Every parish, diocese and the local Church are called to exercise these principles of synodality in concordance with their organisation. Ultimately, in traditional Orthodox ecclesiology, the universal Church lives as a synodal body with the first as a coordinator of mutual love and order.

As Orthodox Christian monasteries are all diocesan, some decisions which may pertain to the diocese, need to be approved by the bishop. Thus, a bishop is a guardian and overseer (*episcopus*) of this order in all spheres of church life in his diocese. Also, the monastic rule stipulates the election or dismissal of an abbot and other practical issues related to the reception of new brethren, the time of their monastic tonsure and vows, or a consecration into the rank of a hiero-deacon or a hiero-monk. These provisions are present in various forms both in Western and Eastern Christian monastic Rules.

In conclusion we can see that serving others in a monastery, as in all organisational units of the Church, originates organically from the eucharistic order of life, which makes participation in the Holy Mysteries our daily reminder and vow to live not for our own selves but for the community that we constitute as its members. A coenobitic monastery is therefore one of the most powerful and significant models of synodality in Church, deeply rooted in the Holy Eucharist. Even more, the daily life of the community in this way becomes a perpetual continuation of the Holy Liturgy through our daily activities which are all performed in the liturgical and eucharistic rhythm. As coenobitic monks we find our salvation (which is a healing of our individual and egotistic separateness from God and others through Christ) only in the context of sharing with one another mutual love in one Body of Christ and thus partaking in His eternal life.

Synodality at the Regional Level: The Example of the Metropolitanate of Karlovci

Dragica Tadić Papanikolaou

Introduction

The word *synodality* has multiple meanings. First, it generally refers to the unanimity and state of mind of the first Christians. Then, it signifies how the Christian Church faced problems, always acting as a community.¹ The way in which it functions on the local and universal level is also characterized as synodal, while synodality can refer to the existence of specific structures that implement synodal awareness in the life of the Church.² In the broadest sense, synodality means a specific way of life and mission of the Church in which all its members participate in different ways,³ and which in practice realizes and expresses its unity. This article presents the way in which synodality was realized in the Metropolitanate of Karlovci during the 18th and 19th centuries, and investigates the causes and origin of a particular way of functioning in this local Church, as well as the questions that arise regarding the specific institution of the National Church assembly.

1. Cf. International Theological Commission, Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church, n. 3-5, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html.

2. Cf. J. Zizioulas, 'Ο Συνοδικὸς Θεσμός. Ἱστορικά, ἐκκλησιολογικά καὶ κανονικά προβλήματα, «Θεολογία» 2 (2009), pp. 5-41; N. Denysenko, Primacy, Synodality, and Collegiality in Orthodoxy: A Liturgical model, «Journal of Ecumenical Studies», 48/I (2013), pp. 20-44.

3. Cf. Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church, n. 6.

Serbian Community in the Habsburg Monarchy

The Metropolitanate of Karlovci was established in the territory of the Habsburg Monarchy. It consisted of Serbs that migrated there during the Great Migration that took place in 1690, as well as before and after that. Most Serbs left their homeland following the Austrians when they withdrew from Northern Macedonia and the South Serbia territories during the Great Turkish War (1683–1699). They feared Ottoman revenge because they fought on the Austrian side, so in 1690, led by Patriarch Arsenije III Čarnojević, they moved to the regions north of the Sava and Danube rivers.⁴

Before crossing the territory of the Habsburg Monarchy, Patriarch Arsenije III convened an assembly on June 28, 1690 in Belgrade that included both Church and lay representatives. They discussed the legal position of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Habsburg Monarchy and decided to ask the emperor for some of the benefits that he had previously promised to the Balkan people, inviting them to join the Austrians in the battle against the common enemy.⁵ To show gratitude for their participation in the war, on August 21 of the same year, Emperor Leopold I granted Serbs the privilege that enables them to “appoint their archbishop, among themselves, with their own governance, from the Serbian people and language, elected by the Church and laypeople.”⁶ This privilege represented the legal basis for

4. Cf. R. Veselinović, *Velika seoba Srba 1690*, in R. Samardžić (ed.), *Istorija srpskog naroda*, III/1, Srpska književna zadruga, Beograd 1983, pp. 530-542, and D. Popović, *Srbi u Vojvodini: Od najstarijih vremena do Karlovačkog mira 1699*, Matica Srpska, Novi Sad 1990, pp. 308-316.

5. Leopold I, *Litterae Invitoriae*, in J. Radonić, M. Kostić, *Srpske privilegije od 1690. do 1792*, Srpska Kraljevska Akademija, Beograd 1954, pp. 89-90.

6. Cf. J. Radonić, M. Kostić, *Srpske privilegije od 1690. do 1792*, cit., pp. 91-92. The term archbishop refers to the head of the Serbian Church in the Habsburg Monarchy, whichever title he might have, metropolitan or patriarch.

establishing Serbian National Church assemblies in the Habsburg Monarchy.⁷

National Church Assemblies of the Metropolitanate of Karlovci

The first National Church assembly was held in 1708, in the monastery of Krušedol. In addition to the election of the new archbishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church within the Habsburg Monarchy, the relationship between the newly organized Church and the Patriarchate of Peć was also defined there. Namely, the Metropolitanate of Krušedol, later renamed the Metropolitanate of Karlovci, was established as an autonomous entity within the Serbian Patriarchate of Peć.⁸ Its leaders were elected by the clergy and the people at National Church assemblies, but they were formally confirmed by the Patriarchs of Peć. However, when the Patriarchate was abolished in 1766, the Metropolitanate of Karlovci continued to exist and function as an independent ecclesiastical entity.⁹ Although the socio-historical context did not allow for a *de iure* autocephalous Serbian Church, in relation to other Orthodox Churches, the Metropolitanate of Karlovci was *de facto* autocephalous, while its internal organization was largely regulated by the laws of the Habsburg Monarchy.

One of the main features of the functioning of the Metropolitanate of Karlovci was the joint discussion and decision-making about the life of the people and the Church. During its two-century history, 47

7. I. Točanac, *Srpski narodno-crkveni sabori (1718-1735)*, Istorijski institut, Beograd 2008, pp. 15-16; I. Točanac Radović, *Nastanak i razvoj institucije srpskog narodno-crkvenog sabora u Karlovačkoj mitropoliji u 18. veku*, in: D. Mikavica, D. Njegovan (eds.), *Tri veka Karlovačke mitropolije, 1713-2013*, Proceedings from a scientific conference, Sremski Karlovci, 1 November 2013, Novi Sad 2014, pp. 122-128.

8. Cf. R. Grujić, *Postanak Krušedolske mitropolije*, «Glasnik istoriskog društva u Novom Sadu», II/1 (1929), pp. 53-65.

9. Cf. R. Grujić, *Avtokefalnost Karlovačke mitropolije*, «Glasnik istoriskog društva u Novom Sadu», II/3 (1929), pp. 365-379.

National and Church councils were held, both official and unofficial. Official ones were assemblies convened with the authorities' consent and whose decisions were discussed at court. In contrast, unofficial ones were convened without the knowledge and approval of the ruler and thus without the obligation to discuss their demands.¹⁰

Although the National Church synods were mostly convened for the appointment of bishops or archbishops, they also discussed the violations of privilege rights, economic issues of the population, financial problems of the Metropolitanate, the need to establish schools and printeries, and other matters significant for the position of the Serbian people and the Orthodox Church in the Habsburg Monarchy.¹¹

From the very beginning, both clerics and lay people participated in the assemblies. The deputies were elected by dioceses, and their number amounted to about one hundred. In 1749, the Decree to convene the assembly specified that 25 representatives would participate from each of the three estates – clergy, military and citizens. In addition, the Imperial-Royal Commissioner would necessarily attend the assembly.¹²

Origin of the Serbian National Church Assemblies

The Serbian National Church assemblies in the Habsburg Monarchy arose due to the specific conditions of life in the Serbian Orthodox community. Ever since the fall of the medieval Serbian state under the Ottoman rule, and especially after the restoration of the Patriarchate of Peć in 1557, the Church became the bearer of preservation of the religious and national identity of Serbs. It continued with this attitude when a large number of Serbs moved from the Ottoman Empire to the Austrian Empire during the Great Migrations in 1690 and 1739. In the new environment, they faced new challenges. On the one hand, Jesuit missionaries strived to convert them to the Union with the Roman

10. Cf. I. Točanac, *Srpski narodno-crkveni sabori (1718-1735)*, cit., p. 17.

11. Cf. I. Točanac, *Srpski narodno-crkveni sabori (1718-1735)*, cit., p. 16; I. Točanac Radović, *Nastanak i razvoj institucije srpskog narodno-crkvenog sabora u Karlovačkoj mitropoliji u 18. veku*, cit., pp. 128-129 ff.

12. Cf. I. Točanac, *Srpski narodno-crkveni sabori (1718-1735)*, cit., pp. 48-50.

Catholic Church, but on the other hand, the Hungarians denied them their political rights. In order to endure new problems and challenges, while also preserving the religious and national Serbian identity, the representatives of the Church, who became the leaders and representatives of the people due to the socio-historical circumstances, collaborated closely with all layers of Serbian society.

The Serbian people brought with them the tradition of joint decision-making on important religious and political issues from the Ottoman Empire. After 1557, and the restoration of the Patriarchate of Peć, the patriarch became *milet-pasha*, the representative of his flock at the Sublime Porte. Therefore, in the minds of the people, he was not only seen as a religious but also a political leader, so together with representatives of the higher clergy, some laymen participated in his election. In many eparchies also, the representatives of the people were taking part in the election of bishops.¹³ Furthermore, the patriarchs occasionally gathered the most prominent representatives of the people for consultation on critical political issues.¹⁴ Traces of this practice, in which the representatives of the clergy and the people cooperate when making decisions important for the nation, can be traced back to the medieval Serbian state of the Nemanjić dynasty (12th-14thc.). Sources show that the great councils of the whole Church had representatives of the people participating. On the other hand, besides the ruler and his close family, the head of the Church and representatives of two privileged classes – high clergy (bishops, abbots) and nobility also participated in national assemblies. In character, Serbian medieval assemblies were class-based. They did not have essential advisory or legislative functions but steered the king's government.¹⁵ However, it is

13. Cf. Đ. Slijepčević, *Istorija Srpske pravoslavne crkve*, BIGZ, Beograd 1962, pp. 414-415.

14. Usually, during Church feasts or fairs, such as official gatherings, were forbidden. On the roots of the Serbian National Church assemblies in the practice of the time of the Ottoman occupation, cf. R. M. Grujić, *Gde je osnov našim narodno-crkvenim Saborima?*, Srpska manastirska štamparija, Sremski Karlovci 1908.

15. More on Serbian medieval assemblies, cf. T. Taranovski, *Istorija srpskog prava u Nemanjićkoj državi*, Lirika, Beograd 2002, pp. 170-201.

important to note that there has been cooperation between the representatives of the Church and the people in Serbian history since the period of the Nemanjić dynasty.

Institution of Church Congregation

The institution of Church congregation is a remnant of the particular way the Metropolitanate of Karlovci functions, in which laypeople had an active role in decision-making in Church matters. This ecclesiastical institution also existed in the Serbian Orthodox Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina from at least the mid-17th century. Its inception is not yet fully understood, but it is assumed to have resulted from a rapprochement between clergy and people after falling under Ottoman occupation. In these institutions, the laity participated in the election of the lower clergy and jointly decided on all important ecclesiastical and secular issues.¹⁶

During the 18th century, Orthodox people of all nationalities in larger cities of the Habsburg Monarchy organized themselves in Church congregations.¹⁷ In the Metropolitanate of Karlovci, however, Church congregations were introduced as an obligatory way of organization of Church life by a royal decree from 1868.¹⁸ They were organized in exactly the same way as Protestant church congregations on the territory of the Habsburg Monarchy.

16. Cf. M. Mirković, *Pravni položaj i karakter Srpske crkve pod turskom vlašću (1459-1776)*, Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika SRJ, Beograd 1965, pp. 127-128, and M. Tomić, *Statusna i crkvenopravna pitanja Srpske pravoslavne crkve na teritoriji Bosne i Hercegovine između dva rata*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Belgrade, Beograd 2022, pp. 120-121.

17. Cf. A. Stamenković, *Istorijski razvoj crkvenih opština i laičke službe u Srpskoj crkvi XVIII-XX veka*, «Crkvene studije» 11 (2014), pp. 391-392.

18. Cf. A. Stamenković, *Istorijski razvoj crkvenih opština i laičke službe u Srpskoj crkvi XVIII-XX veka*, cit., pp. 241-242; D. Perić, *Crkveno pravo*, Beograd 1997, p. 181.

In 1931 the Constitution of the united Serbian Orthodox Church was drafted, influenced by practices of the Metropolitanate of Karlovci and the Serbian Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it included the institution of Church congregation. Thus, according to the current provisions, there are self-governing church bodies in which both clergy and laity participate and in which decisions are made by a simple majority of votes.¹⁹

Justification of the Existence of the Institution of National Church Assemblies

The particular way the Metropolitanate of Karlovci functions, where laypeople were involved in the administration of the Church and election of her presides, through the institutions of National Church assembly and Church congregation, represented the result of specific socio-historical conditions. As we saw, after falling under Ottoman control, the difficult circumstances compelled the Serbian clergy and people to become even closer, while the Church became a bearer of the spiritual and political identity of Serbs. Finally, this approach was transferred to the Habsburg Monarchy, where the living conditions of the Serbian minority were different, but their main goal remained the same: the preservation of religious and national identity. For this reason, the participation of the clergy in political decision-making, as well as the participation of the laity in the election of Church leaders, was a natural consequence of the socio-historical environment in which the Serbs from the Metropolitanate of Karlovci found themselves.

Its functioning was not perfect and can be subjected to theological criticism. For example, the existence of National Church assemblies is incompatible with the mainstream Orthodox position on the bishop as a corporate personality that represents the whole Eucharistic communion as her presider and guarantor of its *sobornost* (synodality). The

19. Constitution of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Beograd 1957, articles 182, 183, 184, 187.

participation of representatives of all church services in the National Church assemblies, including the laity, is seen as a deformation of synodality, since the presence and voice of others, besides bishops, indicates disunity within the congregation.²⁰

The institution of Church congregation is also challenged by some contemporary theologians who question its ecclesiological foundation.²¹ It is considered that the Protestant principle of democracy does not correspond with the hierarchical organization of the Orthodox Church. A body in which a layperson can outvote a bishop and a priest is contrary to the understanding of majority, according to which the bishop is a representative of the entire body of the Church he leads.²² Moreover, the secular tendencies in modern society led to many deviations in the functioning of Church congregations.²³ Lay people, who are members of the Church's self-governing bodies, are often prominent members of society but not necessarily practising believers who regularly participate in worship. Since bishops confirm them on the recommendations of priests, a question of the criteria that clerics use in selecting members of Church congregation arises.

As we can see, the function of the Metropolitanate of Karlovci developed in a concrete community, under specific conditions. It was an answer, perhaps the only possible and efficient one at the time, to rising questions of a local Church that found itself in a situation in which it was exposed to constant external pressure and limitations. The only alternative was gradual assimilation and complete abolition of the Metropolitanate. Its functioning models were not perfect and could be criticized from the point of view of Orthodox theology and ecclesiology.

20. Cf. J. Zizioulas, 'Ο Συνοδικὸς Θεσμός. Ἱστορικά, ἐκκλησιολογικά καὶ κανονικά προβλήματα, cit., pp. 12-15, 37-39, and Atanasije (Jevtić), Na putevima Otaca, I, Hrast, Beograd, pp. 27-28.

21. Cf. Z. Krstić, Akuelni crkveni Ustav i proces sekularizacije, «Glasnik Srpske pravoslavne crkve», 10. oktobar 2003, p. 243.

22. Cf. above n. 20.

23. More on this, Z. Krstić, Akuelni crkveni Ustav i proces sekularizacije, cit., pp. 240-244, and A. Stamenković, Istorijski razvoj crkvenih opština i laičke službe u Srpskoj crkvi XVIII-XX veka, cit., pp. 395ff.

However, it cannot be said that the consequences of the functioning model of the Metropolitanate of Karlovci, where laypeople were involved in the administration of the Church and election of her presides, were entirely negative. We could say that this local Church achieved the best it could under challenging conditions.

Instead of a Conclusion: Synodality as Participation of Everyone in the Life of the Church

The existence of the specific church structures that emerged in the Metropolitanate of Karlovci and then disappeared as they became obsolete is not strange for the historical life of the Church. Namely, its institutional structures are constantly emerging and dissolving because every historical period produces its own framework in which the eternal and unchanging truth is expressed at a particular historical moment. Given that Church institutions do not have their *raison d'être* in themselves like the secular ones, but they are serving causes that transcend them, they should be elastic and flexible, continuously emerging and disappearing.²⁴ From today's perspective, many of these structures can be judged as problematic, but this does not mean that they were not functional in their time. Also, the way one Church was organized at a particular time and social context may not always be transferable to other times and circumstances.

24. "This constitutes one more reason why the structures of the Church should not be considered sacrosanct. That they serve holy ends does not mean they have divine origins. They emerged and were developed by the Church as instruments of convenience and outcomes of conventions. All structures have from time to time deviated from their initial purpose and rationale. Some of them have perished as a result. Others have been renewed over time, such as, for example, the clerical orders of bishops, presbyters, and deacons. In other cases, completely new structures have emerged under old names, as has occurred with autocephaly.", C. Hovorun, *Scaffolds of the Church. Towards Poststructural Ecclesiology*, James Clarke & Co, Cambridge 2018, p. 197. Cf. R. Bigović, *Crkva u savremenom svetu*, Službeni glasnik, Beograd 2010, p. 23.

A modern man that lives in a democratic society is accustomed to making his own decisions and having his voice heard. Nevertheless, in the Church, he is invited to enter a community in which authority seems to come from above. He is expected to submit only passively to the instructions given, since active participation in Church life belongs only to the clergy, who are the holders of hierarchical power. For this reason, one can hear the proposals about the application of democratic principles to the existing Church organization in order to make it closer to the contemporary people.²⁵

In the context of today's society, one should certainly not blindly follow Church structures from the past, but reveal new ones that will enable believers to participate in the life and administration of the Church. However, in the Church, as a theanthropic organism, the models of a democratic society cannot be literally applied, nor can people who are only formally members of the Church decide about its administration. Given that the Church is an organism that lives in this world, but is not of this world, the fundamental criterion in the formation of Church structures should be synodality which derives from the unity of the Body of Christ, realized by the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist. The governance of the ecclesiastical community must always start from the inner synodality, from the eschatological unity of those who receive communion from the same Chalice, which flows from there into their historical existence as a concrete Christian community.²⁶ When authority in the Church is obtained in a sacramental way, through baptism, chrismation, ordination, then not one single individual, whether a cleric or a layman, does not govern it, but he participates freely, in dialogue

25. R. Bigović, *Crkva u savremenom svetu*, cit., p. 24.

26. "It is the Eucharist that holds the Church together and makes it one Body in Christ. Ecclesial unity is not imposed from above by power of jurisdiction, but it is created from within by communion in the sacramental Body and Blood of the risen Lord" (Kallistos Ware, *Synodality and Primacy in the Orthodox Church*, «International Journal of Orthodox Theology». 10/1 (2019), p. 22). The same can be said about synodality as well.

with the other members of the Church, in its administration, through structures that are compatible with the historical moment and social circumstances. Therefore, in order for Church structures to be able to meet the demands of modern times and to achieve synodal participation of all members of the Church in its historical life, what is needed is not their democratization but a fundamental Christianization²⁷ that focuses on liturgical life as the source of synodality, on achieving interdependence of all Church services and an emphasis on mission.

From the example of the Metropolitanate of Karlovci, we can learn that the organization of Church life should always consider the context that gives the historical framework to a concrete ecclesiastical community. However, since the Church is a reality that lives in this world but is not from this world, its structures should not serve history, but embrace all members of the Church. It should always aim and move towards the Eschaton by realizing its missionary work through the witness of Christ and the call to follow His path.

27. R. Bigović, *Crkva u savremenom svetu*, cit., p. 25.

1.2.PARTICIPATION: WALKING TOGETHER WITH THE WHOLE PEOPLE OF GOD

KEYNOTE

Reception and Inspiration of Synodal Processes in Church Life

Teva Regule

Introduction

This section of our conference focuses on the participation of the whole People of God walking together along the path towards God. It is reflected in the root of the word *synodos* – *syn* [with] + *odos* [path]. My comments will focus on some of the synodal processes in Church life particularly.

The Trinitarian Foundation of the Church

Our understanding of the Church starts with the revelation of the Trinity – a community of persons in a perichoritic relationship, united by mutual love and one that works together in harmonious consensus. It is a unity strengthened with diversity, and a diversity imbued with unity. Furthermore, it is a community in which the equality and dignity of each person is respected.¹ It is the model of the “perfect” community, and as such, is the model for the Church.²

The Christian, both personally and collectively, participates in the life of the Trinity through Christ – the God-human – with the power of

1. Nonna Harrison, “The Holy Trinity: A Model for Human Community,” *The St Nina Quarterly* 3/3 (1999), p. 1.

2. Ultimately, the Trinity is a mystery. Our understanding of the inner life of the Trinity is only known through what God has revealed to us. We can try to emulate this community, but human relationships can only begin to approximate the fullness of this reality. A fuller development of Trinitarian theology is beyond the scope of this paper.

the Holy Spirit. Just as Christ is in a perpetual state of *kenosis* with the Father, the Christian community is called to constant self-emptying. Just as Christ is in constant dialogue with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the Christian community is called to be in a constant dialogical relationship with the Godhead and one another. Just as Christ as a human being lived in this world and shared its concerns while oriented to the holy; an eschatological orientation, the Christian community is called to do likewise. These are not distinct aspects of the Christian life, but ones that are essentially interwoven. Christians are called to a communion grounded in the life of the Trinity. They are called to be in constant union with God and one another through self-emptying and healing, to be in a continual dialogical relationship of receiving and giving, of reception and *diakonia*, and to be continually engaging with the present, while being oriented to the future. Our participation in this Trinitarian life may take different forms, but we have a common foundation and orientation.

Communion Ecclesiology

Many metaphors have been used to describe the Church. For example “the People of God” (especially popular in the Roman Catholic realm after Vatican II) highlights the human reality of the church; “The Temple of the Holy Spirit” uplifts the continual presence and work of the Holy Spirit within the person and community; “A therapeutic healing community” points to the reconciliation and healing that is constitutive of this community; and “The Body of Christ” emphasizes our connection to Christ and one another. The Orthodox Church tends to privilege this latter description.

As Christians, we have all been baptized into the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12, Rom 12:4-8, Gal 3:26-28, Eph 4:3-6). Cyril of Jerusalem opines that our pre-baptismal anointing (which in the Greek tradition, is administered by the Godparents of the soon-to-be baptized) begins to graft one into this Body. He says that by this anointing, “[the candidate] becomes a sharer in Jesus Christ, who is the cultivated olive tree.”³ This

3. Cyril of Jerusalem, “Sermon 3: The Anointing at Baptism” in Edward Yarnold, S.J. (ed) *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville 1994, p. 77.

ritual act is a communion with Christ and all of those who are a part of Christ, both past and present (and future). It represents the unity of a life in Christ. Christ is the vine, the source and life for the branches; the branches are both connected to Christ and one another through Christ.

This communion or in Greek, *koinonia*⁴, is described variously throughout the Biblical text. For example, in Acts, it is used to describe the life and witness of the church (Acts 2:42-45); in first Corinthians, it is used to describe fellowship with Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:9) and the sharing of the Eucharist (1 Cor 10:16ff) and in second Peter is it used to describe the participatory knowledge of Christ that allows us to become “partakers of Divine Nature” (2 Pet 1:4)⁵ or in Greek, *theosis* – to become God-like. It is this communion with both the human and divine that John of Damascus emphasizes in his *Explanation of the Orthodox Faith*. He says,

Participation is spoken of; for through it we partake of the divinity of Jesus. Communion, too, is spoken of, and it is an actual communion, because through it we have communion with Christ and share in His flesh and His divinity: yea, we have communion and are united with one another through it. For since we partake of one bread, we all become one body of Christ and one blood, and members one of another, being of one body with Christ.⁶

Our communion or *koinonia* is constitutive of the new life in Christ – the Church.

4. Koinonia is derived from the Greek verb koinoneo that means to share, to participate, to have something in common.

5. Other biblical references of koinonia include: Gal 2:9 where it is used to describe reconciliation, Romans 15:26 to describe the collection for the poor, 2 Cor 8:3-4 to describe witness and ministry, in Phil 1:5 to describe fellowship with Gospel and in 2 Cor 13:14 to describe fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

6. John of Damascus, *Explanation of the Orthodox Faith* IV, 13, PG94.1153.

Liturgy – The Synodos in Worship and Prayer

The liturgy⁷ of the Christian church is the communal work of the Body of Christ – Christ and the faithful. The liturgy is where the Christian encounters God as a community in self-offering⁸ and dialogue⁹ and seeks to draw all into communion with God. For those who privilege liturgy as the source and summit of this encounter, it is the primary way that the faith is experienced, understood, expressed, and transmitted. It forms the identity of the person made in the image of God and called to grow into God's likeness, helps to nurture them along the way, and ultimately gives them an opportunity to be transformed into, as Cyril of Jerusalem says in his baptismal catechesis, "little Christs."¹⁰ In baptism, the Christian begins this process. The ministry of the Christian is to be "Christs" to the world, reorienting all of creation back to God.

Participation in Liturgy

By virtue of our initiation, we are full members of the Body of Christ and are called to full, conscious, and active participation within it. In the

7. Liturgy or leitourgia (Gk.) comes from leitos=people and ergon=work. In the ancient Greek secular context, it was the public work of a person (or group of people) for others. In the Hebrew context, it came to be associated primarily with the work of the high priest. For the Christian, I understand liturgy to be the work of Jesus Christ, the High Priest, and by extension, all the people of God (i.e., His Body) for the salvation of the entire world.

8. Self-offering in Liturgy is to God and one another.

9. Dialogue is the back and forth dynamic of listening and speaking. It is constitutive of the dynamism of the Godhead and the revelation of God to humanity as well as all human interaction. It is also part of the nature of the Church as a communion rooted in the life of the Trinity. Dialogical communication is found in most liturgical expressions—in words (e.g., petition), gestures and symbolic actions.

10. Cyril of Jerusalem, "Sermon 3: The Anointing at Baptism" in Edward Yarnold, S.J. (ed) *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville 1994, p. 81.

Eucharistic celebration, we participate in ritual action,¹¹ in the work of Christ and ultimately, in the life of God.

Ritual Action

As Christians, we walk together on this path. In many ways the early, undivided Church, especially the Cathedral Rite of Hagia Sophia upon which the Byzantine liturgy is based, can serve as a model for this journey. We begin by entering the worship space together as Church. The original Entrance prayer of the *Liturgy of Chrysostom* that was said as both the clergy and people entered the church (building) reminds us that this is a communal effort. It speaks to the reasons for gathering together as a Body and appeals to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for help and guidance to become more fully the Church. It reads:

Benefactor and Creator of all creation, receive the *Church* [emphasis mine] which is advancing [together], accomplish what is good for each one: bring all to perfection, make us worthy of your Kingdom; by the grace and mercy and love for [us] of your only begotten Son with whom you are blessed, together with your holy good and life-giving Spirit, now and always...¹²

During the celebration, all the faithful continue this journey. They sing and pray together, often in dialogue with the celebrant. In the Cathedral rite, especially, the faithful participate by actively singing short responsorial refrains, usually to psalm verses, that join their voices to the voice of the Church – past, present, and future. Furthermore, during the Offering prayer, their voices are joined with those in the heavenly realm. Their conscious participation is engendered by listening to the hymns and prayers of the service that not only teach the faithful about God, but

11. Ritual action can be understood as “pre-arranged patterns of behavior, sanctioned by convention, that govern human social interaction, especially on occasions fraught with anxiety, such as great person or social importance”. Cf. Mark Searle, *Called to Participate: Theological, Ritual, and Social Perspectives*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 2006, p. 19.

12. Hugh Wybrew, *The Orthodox Liturgy: The Development of the Eucharistic Liturgy in the Byzantine Rite*, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1989, p. 77.

also deepen our relationship with Him. For instance, by hearing the Great Eucharistic prayer of the *Anaphora* [Offering] aloud, we not only hear the story of salvation from a Christian perspective, but it becomes our story as well – a story of God and us. It is part of our dialogue with God; we learn about God and all that God has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ as well as our relationship with one another and the world around us. We actively pray for this world in petition. Furthermore, our prayer to God is often embodied in physical gestures in which we all participate (e.g., the sign of the cross) and motion (e.g. processions), engaging our entire bodies.

Participation in the Work of Christ

Our participation in the Eucharist is a participation in the work of Christ. We are called to participate in reconciling all with the Whole – the Triune God. God has given us the invitation. We must respond. Reconciliation begins with conversion and conversion begins with us – our humility, forgiveness, and renewal of the heart. We are to emulate the kenotic relationship between Christ and the Father, one of self-emptying, self-sacrificing, and self-giving love. In the Eucharistic celebration, we do this on both the vertical and horizontal levels – our offering to God and our offering to one another. The latter is expressed in the Kiss of Peace – a sign of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. In antiquity, it was also a visible sign of a practicing Christian. In the Byzantine liturgy, Christians actualize the love of God between one another by the sharing it.

Participation in the Life of the Triune God

Our participation in the Eucharistic celebration is also a participation in the Life of God. In the Liturgy, we offer the symbols of our life to God through the elements of bread and wine and in doing so they are given back to us through the agency of the Holy Spirit as a means of encounter with God. The efficacy of the reception of the Eucharist in the Liturgy attributed to Chrysostom is multivalent. In it, our reception of the Body and Blood of Christ is for the “vigilance of soul, forgiveness of sins,

communion of the Holy Spirit and fullness of the Kingdom of Heaven.”¹³ Furthermore, according to the Liturgy of Basil, this act unites the community.¹⁴

When Cyril of Jerusalem instructs his neophytes to receive the consecrated elements, he says when receiving the bread,

...receive it as Christ's body... then carefully bless your eyes with the touch of the holy body... after partaking of Christ's body, go receive the chalice of his blood...While your lips are still moist with his blood, touch it with your hands and bless your eyes, forehead, and other organs of sense.¹⁵

The Christians are anointing themselves in the same manner with the Body and Blood of Christ as they were once anointed with oil at their Baptism and Chrismation. For Cyril, participation in the Eucharist is a continual baptismal anointing, a continual baptism into the Life of Christ.

Non-participation in Liturgy

If every Liturgy was celebrated in the fashion in which I just summarized, the people of God would be find the *synodos* of the liturgy to be a Life-giving experience. However, that is not always the case. In fact, in most of the Orthodox world the liturgy has ceased to be a dialogue between the priest and the people and has become almost two monologues. Many of the ritual actions of the celebration have been “clericalized” (e.g., Kiss of Peace) limiting the active participation of the faithful: the prayers are said “silently” and with the advent of the solid iconostasis, the actions of the celebrant are invisible to the faithful, precluding much of the conscious participation of the faithful. (This is assuming that the language of the liturgy is even understood by the faithful.) Frequent

13. The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-divine-liturgy-of-saint-john-chrysostom>

14. The Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-divine-liturgy-of-saint-basil-the-great>.

15. Cyril of Jerusalem, “Sermon 5: The Eucharistic Rite” in Edward Yarnold, S.J. (ed.), *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, cit. p. 96.

communion for the laity has become less of the norm. Although the faithful still have their part to play (especially if they take an active role in singing many of the responses of the service), the laity is often disconnected from the celebration. As Hugh Wybrew has observed,

(There seem to be) two services conducted simultaneously. The one is performed within the sanctuary by the clergy and is largely both invisible and inaudible to the people in the nave.... While the Liturgy may be celebrated for the people it is not celebrated with them.¹⁶

This experience of the *synodos* in worship and prayer for the majority of the laity is something that both Roman Catholics and Orthodox share in our respective histories. Whereas for the Roman Catholic world, many of these concerns were addressed at Vatican II in the Constitution on the Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) and promulgated to the wider Roman Catholic realm in subsequent years, the Orthodox world's steps towards reforming this synodal process has been variously inspired and unevenly received. I will briefly trace one such reform effort – that of the Russian Orthodox Church at the turn of the 20th century.

In preparation for a proposed All-Russian Council that was to be held in 1905-6, the ruling Synod of the Russian Church asked the bishops to describe those features of Russian Church life which, in their view, needed reform or alteration. In their responses, the bishops raised concerns about church governance and the principle of conciliarity (or *Sobornost*), missions and matters of faith, including worship, fasts, chanting, musical composition and prayer for non-Orthodox Christians. Over half of the ruling bishops addressed liturgical issues.¹⁷ Issues of

16. Hugh Wybrew, *The Orthodox Liturgy*, cit., p. 9.

17. The bishops' responses were published as *Otzyvy eparkhial'nykh arkhieereev po voprosam o tserkovnoi reforme* (St Petersburg, 1906) in three volumes. Any citations are from the original and the unpublished Master of Divinity thesis by John Shimchick. (John Shimchick, "The Responses of the Russian Episcopate

performance practice (e.g., liturgical language, saying the prayers aloud, rubrics, keeping the doors of the iconostasis open during the service for visual participation of the faithful) were raised and other proposals for more engaged participation of the faithful were put forth (e.g., development of a parish *typikon* and more emphasis on Scripture.) According to John Shimchick who studied these responses as part of his graduate work at St Vladimir's Seminary:

The Russian bishops touched upon many aspects of worship. Their "responses" reflected the desire that worship should be intelligible, that the congregation must be able to participate in it, and finally, that it must return to its role as the "school" for the teaching of the Christian faith.¹⁸

Formation, as the process of developing an outlook or worldview that allows the faithful to accept God's invitation to relationship and to grow in that relationship, was in the forefront of their minds. In particular, Bishop Nazarius of Nizhni-Novgorod summarizes the formative value of liturgy and the need for the faithful to be actively engaged in its celebration. Here he anticipates the call for the "full,

Concerning Worship – 1905 and the Liturgical Situation in America" [master's thesis, St Vladimir's Theological Seminary, 1980.]) Copy found in the library at New Skete Monastery.

For more information on these responses, see: John Meyendorff, "Russian Bishops and Church Reform in 1905", Jacob's Well, [http://www.jacwell.org/Supplements/russian_bishops_and_church_reform.htm], Nicholas Zernov, "The Reform of the Church and the Pre-Revolutionary Russian Episcopate" Jacob's Well, [http://www.jacwell.org/Supplements/the_reform_of_the_church.htm], and John Shimchick, "Music and Worship: Some suggestions from the Russian Bishops of 1905", Jacob's Well, [http://www.jacwell.org/Supplements/russian_bishops_of_1905.htm].

18. John Shimchick, "Music and Worship: Some suggestions from the Russian Bishops of 1905", Jacob's Well, [http://www.jacwell.org/Supplements/russian_bishops_of_1905.htm].

conscious, active” participation that would become a mark of the movement in the WeSt He says:

The Orthodox faith is acquired, strengthened, and maintained chiefly by means of liturgical worship. Liturgical worship is properly considered to be the best school for teaching faith and morals, for it acts abundantly and solitarily on all the powers and capacities of the soul. But if worship is to accomplish all this, then all the faithful must participate in it *directly, consciously, actively* [emphasis mine].¹⁹

The Council for which these responses were originally solicited did not happen until 1917-18. By then the country was in the middle of the Bolshevik revolution that would halt its work prematurely.

The Revolution forced many of the members of the intelligentsia as well as many prominent theologians and church leaders to flee Russia. A number of them eventually made their way to France. There, they would find ample conversation partners with their western Christian “cousins,” especially in the study of patristics, ecclesiology, and liturgy. In particular, the theological work at Institute of St Sergius in Paris and the cross-pollination of liturgical and theological thought between East and West, was instrumental in spreading the ideas of the Liturgical Movement to other places in the Orthodox world.²⁰

19. II: 454, English translation in Paul Meyendorff, “The Liturgical Path of Orthodoxy in America,” SVTQ, 40 (1996), p. 47. Also, Shimchick, “Responses,” cit., p. 23. Here he translates the phrase as “must be able to have a direct, conscious and active [emphasis mine] participation in it.”

20. For instance, Ioannis Fountoulis (1927–2007), the noted Professor of Liturgy at the University of Thessaloniki, was a graduate student in Europe (Belgium, Germany, and France) during this time and participated in liturgical symposia at St Sergius. He was also interested in patristic studies and the intersection of liturgy and patristic thought. See: Stefanos Alexopoulos, “Did the Work of Fr Alexander Schmemmann Influence Modern Greek Theological Thought? A Preliminary Assessment”, SVTQ, 53/2-3 (2009), p. 276. In addition, one of his students, Nenad Milosevic, became an influential figure in the

One of the young theologians in Paris, Alexander Schmemmann would eventually come to the United States where, in 1951, he joined the faculty of St Vladimir's Seminary. He was a tireless advocate for a Eucharistic revival within the Orthodox Church. Similar to liturgists in the West, Schmemmann stressed the ecclesial dimension of worship. The liturgy was a common action of the clergy and laity together, the Body of Christ.²¹ The faithful are incorporated into this Body in baptism. By virtue of their baptism into the Body of Christ, they participate in the priesthood of Christ.²² For Schmemmann, the liturgy was at the center of church life. The Eucharistic celebration in particular, was, to paraphrase *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the "source and summit" of the faith. It is where the faithful are taught how to live and it "transforms them into citizens of the Kingdom."²³ More than anything else, his reform efforts were directed at the practice of the Eucharist. He advocated for frequent reception of the Eucharist for the laity, the recitation of the prayers of the service aloud as well as reforming other liturgical practices.²⁴ In

liturgical reform movement in Serbia. Moreover, others were influenced by the neo-patristic movement in general. (Both Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic [1880-1956] and Archimandrite Justin Popovic [1894-1979], influential figures in the liturgical reforms of the Serbia church, turned to the Church Fathers in search of a more "authentic expression of Orthodox theology." See: Nina Glibetic, "Liturgical Renewal Movement in Contemporary Serbia," *Inquiries into Eastern Christian Worship: Selected Papers of the Second International Congress of the Society of Oriental Liturgy*, Rome, 17-21 September 2008, Bert Groen, Steven Hawkes-Teeple and Stefanos Alexopoulos (eds.) ECS, 12 (Leuven, 2012), p. 410.

21. Meyendorff, "The Liturgical Path of Orthodoxy in America" cit., p. 53.

22. Schmemmann emphasized that the Christian is anointed as priest, prophet, and king at their Chrismation, participating in Christ as the Priest, Prophet, and King. See: Schmemmann, *Of Water and Spirit*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 1974. Also, *For the Life of the World*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 1973, pp. 67-80.

23. Meyendorff, "The Liturgical Path of Orthodoxy in America," cit., p. 54.

24. See: Alexander Schmemmann, "Notes and Comments—On the Question of Liturgical Practices: A Letter to My Bishop" SVTQ, 17 (1973), pp. 227-238.

particular, he argued for the return of baptism to its communal, Eucharistic context, championing baptismal liturgies. He had a great influence on an entire generation of clergy and faithful, primarily in the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). One can say that the work of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church from the early 20th century was finally received (at least partially) in the Church in America in the late 20th century. This is the vision that would influence my own participation in the life of the church for many of my formative years and into the present.

Church Governance – the Synodos in ordered Church Life

Synods or councils are central to the life of the church. According to the Roman Catholic theologian, Bradford Hinze, they allow for the identity of the church to be “named, narrated, and possessed.”²⁵ At its best, the Orthodox Church has expressed this identity in the spirit of *Sobornost* – a spiritual harmony based on freedom and unity in love. It is a term whose usage is primarily attributed to the 19th century Russian writer Aleksei Khomiakov to underline the need for co-operation between people in the mode of an organic fellowship.²⁶ In other words, the communal dimension of church life is required, not only in liturgy (as developed above), but also in the governing of its life.

The dialogical nature of the Trinity is a model for exercising good church governance. Dialogue is a mutual process of receiving and giving; it is how we enter into, sustain, and build relationships. It is the foundation of trust. Through our dialogue with God, we learn to trust God and grow in faith and understanding. We do so similarly through our dialogue with others. Dialogue also requires mutual participation,

25. Bradford Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church: Aims and Obstacles, Lessons and Laments*, New York: Continuum, 2006, p. 257.

26. For more information see Arhur Mrówczn'ski-Van Allen, Teresa Obolevitch and Pawel Rojek (eds.) *Alexei Khomiakov: The Mystery of Sobornost*, Pickwick Publications, Eugene, Oregon, 2019.

responsibility, and accountability; it is constitutive of the process of mutual discernment and decision-making.

Historically, the laity has participated in the decision-making process of the Church. Although the early Ecumenical Councils were primarily episcopal gatherings, it was secular lay leaders (e.g. Byzantine emperors and empresses) who called them. In addition, it was incumbent on all the faithful to receive their decisions.²⁷ For instance, in Constantinople, conciliar declarations against Arianism would become the genesis of many of the popular processions in the city by the faithful. This was a movement that would eventually become the foundation for some of the stational services throughout the city, as well as the dogmatic formulations that would make their way into the liturgy itself (e.g., *Monogenes*²⁸). Of course, the most famous rejection of a synodal decision by the faithful of the East is the repudiation of the Reunion Council of Ferrara–Florence (1438–39).

Today, especially in those communities in so-called *diaspora*; clergy and laity, both men and women, are active in the administrative life of local community. They take part in deliberations and contribute to decisions. The laity is not only consultative but participate in the decision making of parish governance.²⁹ Both clergy and laity are also active at the

27. Reception can be understood as an interpreter's or group of interpreters' hermeneutical activity of making sense of people, events, traditions, or texts. Reception is the assimilation and "making one's own" of another reality. This process of appropriation involves the interpreter in an active and creative way; the "effect" of past events or texts is determined to a certain degree on the active "reception" of a receiver, Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles*, Mahwah Paulist, 2004, p. 3.

28. The Office of the Three Antiphons was based on the stational liturgies in Constantinople. *Monogenes* was originally the refrain to the psalm verses of the third antiphon. Later, it became the refrain to the second antiphon where it is found today.

29. Of course, one can always find exceptions to this pattern of governance. In the past, Orthodox parish councils in the West have been able to hire and fire

diocesan level, serving on committees and governing councils. However, their role generally does not extend to matters of doctrine. Furthermore, in some dioceses (e.g., OCA and ROEA), clergy and laity have the opportunity to participate in the election of their bishops directly. I was personally involved in the election of the reigning hierarch of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America (ROEA), Archbishop Nathaniel Popp.³⁰

However, the direct participation of the faithful in the election of bishops is not the case in all jurisdictions of the *diaspora*, especially those still under the *omophorion* of their Mother church. In these cases, the clergy and laity may have the opportunity to submit the names of candidates (usually three) for consideration, and have a more general consultative role in the process, or, in some cases, have no voice at all. In all these cases, the ruling Synod of Bishops of the Mother Church elects the hierarch. In response to the lack of lay participation in some aspects of church governance, especially at the diocesan level, independent groups have formed to address this issue using their baptismal voice to speak truth to power. One such group in the United States is Orthodox Christian Laity (OCL). OCL is an independent, national, Pan-Orthodox educational association that is incorporated as a 501c3 non-profit organization in the state of Illinois. It was started to advance the renewal of the Orthodox Christian Church in the United States by advocating for

their parish priest. This is generally no longer the case. Alternatively, some priests exercise a more heavy-handed approach to parish governance.

30. Bishops in the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America (ROEA) are elected directly by the Church Congress made up of clergy and lay delegates. The election is then ratified by the Synod of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). The ROEA is a diocese of the OCA. In the OCA, itself, clergy and laity participate in the election of their bishops similarly and of the Metropolitan through a formula that combines the input of the faithful with the Synod of bishops. (i.e. If a candidate receives two-thirds of the votes in the first round, they are elected outright. If no candidate receives two-thirds of the votes, then the names of the top two candidates are forwarded to the Episcopal Synod for election.)

the laity to remain part of the conciliar governance process of the church in order to continue to provide balance between the hierarchy, clergy and the laity. All would work together in governance, as well as spiritual and other matters to ensure accountability and transparency in the affairs of the Church. It is also committed to the establishment of an administratively and canonically unified, and self-governing Orthodox Church in the United States.³¹ Over the years they have conducted numerous forums to engender this “dialogue from below.” Their work is received variously – in some places it is welcomed and in others, it is considered controversial.

On the international stage, the Orthodox Church has been a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) since its inception, with most autocephalous Orthodox Churches still participating in the council.³² One of the major contributions of the Orthodox Church to the World Council of Churches polity is the advocacy (and eventual adoption) of a conciliar model for decision-making. According to Fr Nicholas Apostola, the long-time secretary for the Romanian Orthodox Metropolis of the Americas, “We have encouraged the WCC to adopt the conciliar model which we claim as our own, but [he asks] do we really practice it in our church governance?”³³

Ministry – The Synodos in the Work of Christ in the Church and the World

The last synodal process in church life that I will address is in the area of ministry and ordained orders within the church. There is only one ministry in the Church – Christ’s ministry. We are all called to participate in it; to participate in the priestly work of Christ on behalf of the world,

31. For information on the mission of OCL, see: www.ocl.org.

32. The Greek Orthodox Church has been a member of the World Council from its inception and in 1961 all the remaining autocephalous Orthodox churches joined the World Council. (The churches of Georgia and Bulgaria have since withdrawn from the Council.)

33. Teva Regule, Interview with Fr Nick Apostola, held on 3/28/06.

calling all into unity with God. As Deacon John Chrysavgis, theological advisor to the Ecumenical Patriarch, says in his book, *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia*, “As prophet, priest, and king, Christ invites [all in] the Church to participate in his ministry of reconciliation and redemption, of service and salvation.”³⁴ All of us are a part of the Body of Christ and each of us has our part to play. As St Paul says in 1 Corinthians, “To each one has been given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Cor 12:7). All persons are endowed with these gifts of the Holy Spirit in ways that uniquely express the fullness of their own humanity and contribute to the fullness of the entire community of believers. We have been given our gifts. It is up to us to offer, share, and nurture them.

When we offer our gifts, we enter into the Church more fully. Sadly, however, our gifts may not be recognized by the community and this may hinder our ability to offer them and participate in the life of the Church, especially the gathering of the assembly. This is most acutely felt and experienced by many laypersons, especially women. (I believe this is also a concern in the Roman Catholic realm as well.)

The Church has rich history of recognizing the spiritual authority of those who offer themselves to God – both women and men – especially those who dedicate themselves to the monastic life. The Church in the East also had a rich history of recognizing both men and women in the ministerial structures of the Church, in particular, in the ordained diaconate. Historically, the diaconate has been a ministry that is focused on service and has included pastoral care and reconciliation (especially reconciling penitents or those who left the church during times of persecution), philanthropic outreach, ecclesial administration, the ministry of the Word, and liturgical service. In particular, it is grounded in the way the church meets the world.

Women have always participated in the diaconal ministry of the Church. In the early church they participated in both ordained and non-ordained capacities. In an ordained capacity the deaconess ministered to women much as the male deacon ministered to men. She assisted with

34. John Chrysavgis, *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia: The Diaconate Yesterday and Today*, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline, Mass, 2009, p. 79.

baptism, took the Eucharist to those unable to attend liturgy, mediated between the faithful and the clergy, taught, counseled, and guided the faithful on their Christian journey, especially those new to the faith. Today, women continue to serve in many of these same ways as chaplains, spiritual directors, chanters, readers, homilists, philanthropic outreach coordinators, and parish administrators. In addition, they are often missionaries and Christian educators, to name just a few of the many diaconal ministries in which they are actively participating. However, today they do so without the institutional authority of an ordination.

For over one hundred and fifty years, there have been numerous calls to reinstitute the ordained diaconate for women, beginning in Russia at the turn of the 20th century and extending to today.³⁵ In 1988, the most substantive gathering to discuss the “ordination of women” was held in Rhodes, Greece. This conference was called by the Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios I (Papadopoulos of Panagiotis) as part of the pre-conciliar work of what was to have been the “Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church” at the time. It was attended by approximately seventy people and included official church delegates (including many bishops and priests) and expert advisors from the Eastern Orthodox Churches from all over the world (with the exception of the Patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem.) It was originally organized in response to the challenge posed to the Orthodox churches by our ecumenical partners who had begun ordaining women to ministry and strove to articulate an Orthodox answer to this question. While the consultation was not in favor of ordaining women to the presbyterate (or episcopacy), it did state that the “order of deaconesses should be revived.”³⁶ The consultation

35. For a more complete list of the various calls to revive the ordained female diaconate in the Orthodox Church see: <https://orthodox-deaconess.org/the-deaconess/calls-for-revival/>.

36. “Conclusions of the Consultation” in Limouris, Gennadios (ed.) *The Place of the Woman in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women*, Katerini: “Tertios” Publications, 1990, p. 31.

concluded that there was ample evidence for this ministry from apostolic times well into the Byzantine period, that the deaconess was ordained (*cheriotonia*) to higher orders, and that such a revival would “represent a positive response to the many needs and demands of the contemporary world...”³⁷

Since that time, additional conferences have been held in Crete (1990), Damascus, Syria (1996) and Istanbul (1997) in which this issue was both discussed and affirmed. Furthermore, in July of 2000, after over a year of careful review of the subject, a formal letter was sent to the Ecumenical Patriarch (Bartholomew) by more than a dozen members of the Orthodox community in Paris, including such noted Orthodox theologians as Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, Fr Boris Bobrinskoy, Olivier Clément, and Nicolas Lossky. The letter traces the history of the female diaconate and notes that the Patriarch himself has stated that there is “no obstacle in canon law [that] stands in the way of the ordination of women to the diaconate. This institution of the early Church deserves to be revitalized.”³⁸ Other groups have drawn attention to this ministry as well, including the *St Nina Quarterly* and St Catherine’s Vision. More recently, two major conferences were held in Thessaloniki, Greece (in 2015 and 2020) to explore the issue thoroughly – from biblical, liturgical, patristic, systematic, canonical, and historical theology. Various autocephalous church synods have even taken tentative steps to revive the female diaconate in the Orthodox church, most notably the Church of Greece (2005) and the Church in Africa (Alexandrian Patriarchate, 2016). Unfortunately, the decisions of these local synods were only partially received by the faithful.

Today, the work of receiving the consensus of Rhodes continues. One such prophetic witness is the St Phoebe Center for the Deaconess,

37. “Conclusions of the Consultation” cit., p. 31.

38. An Orthodox Diaconate for Women? Reported, Sobornost, 23:1 (2001), pp. 60-63.

based in the United States.³⁹ Its mission is to “educate and prayerfully advocate for the revival of the ordained female diaconate to help serve the ministerial needs of the Church and the world today.”⁴⁰ The group has sponsored numerous conferences and public lectures in the United States, and has published study guides to help educate the faithful about this ministry and the need for its revival. Those who advocate for a rejuvenation of this ministry see a great need for this ministry in the life of the Church. They can distinguish between diaconal ministry and that of the presbyterate and see it as a positive step towards meeting the many pastoral challenges of the faithful and the world today. Those who are opposed to this ordained ministry for women question what it might look like in our modern context, but primarily fear that reinstituting this ministry for women will lead to the ordination of women to the presbyterate (something that is not within the Tradition of the Church) and, thus call into question the entire received Tradition. As with the reception of most synodal processes in Church life, time will tell how or if the consensus of the Rhodes Consultation on the restoration of the female diaconate will eventually be received by the Church.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to bring my remarks full circle. In many ways, the diaconate is the ministry in the church that connects together our liturgical life, governance, and outreach to the world. It is a ministry of service that connects our communal gathering with the liturgy of our lives more particularly. In the Divine Liturgy, we offer our sacrifice of praise to God and encounter the joy and peace of the Trinity more fully. As we leave our communal gathering, we continue to share this joy with others, ministering to our neighbor. When we assemble again as the Body of Christ, we bring our encounters with our neighbors with us. Our task is to continue this dance, drawing *all* to Life in Christ. By doing so, we participate in and model the church as that “therapeutic, healing community” that we are called to be.

39. In the interest of full disclosure, I am a member of the board of the St Phoebe Center.

40. <https://orthodoxdeaconess.org/>.

RESPONSE

Synodality without Women? Toward the Theological and Ecclesial Overcoming of the Sacralization of the Structures of the Patriarchal Societies

Pantelis Kalaitzidis

Before I begin my paper, let me first express my sincere thanks and deep gratitude, both for the fact that I am member of the Pro Oriente Steering Committee for the Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue, and also for the invitation to give a response to the highly interesting paper presented by Dr. Teva Regule.

We should be grateful to Teva for having reminded us the initial meaning of the terms synod and synodality, terms originated from the Greek σύν (with)+ὁδός (path). These terms point to the marching together and the coming together of the people of God, the assembly of the faithful, of the *pleroma* of the *ekklesia*, in order to decide on important matters of church life. This understanding of synodality should be complemented, however, with the eschatological perspective and the dimension of the future. It should express not only the “already” but also the “not yet”; not only what has been accomplished, but also what is still pending and has to be done in the future. If this marching and coming together, as reflected in the synodal institution, primarily concerns bishops’ participation, it by no means it excludes lay participation, as witnessed by many textual evidences and institutional examples taken from the Orthodox tradition, but also by the theology of the universal priesthood, as it is graciously described by Teva’s paper in the section which deals with the baptized and chrismated Christians, and their participation in the threefold ministry of Christ: Prophet, Priest, and King.

Today's presentation reminds us also of the major topics elaborated and debated by 20th century Orthodox theologians such as: the Trinitarian foundation of the church, the perichoretic relationship of the three divine persons united in mutual love, thus providing the model of the perfect community and the right balance between unity and diversity; the dialogical nature of the Trinity and its impact in exercising good church governance; the church as Eucharistic community to which we are called to participate, but also the church as communion – a communion with God –, another based on the revelation of the Trinity; communion ecclesiology, and more.

I was happy to see that in the section dealing with Trinitarian foundation, the paper refers to the late Orthodox nun and patristic scholar, Nona Verna Harrison. It would be even better if this Trinitarian approach would be connected to the issue of women's exclusion from church life as presented in the writings of this Orthodox female theologian,¹ but also in Catherine LaCugna's work,² the late Catholic

1. See the works by Nona Verna Harrison, "Human Community as an Image of the Holy Trinity," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (2002), pp. 347-364; "Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology" *Journal of Theological Studies* 41, no. 2 (1990), pp. 441-471; "Orthodox Arguments Against the Ordination of Women as Priests" *Sobornost* 14 (1992), pp. 6-23; "The Maleness of Christ," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 42, No. 2 (1998), pp. 111-151; "The Holy Trinity, A Model for Human Community" *The St Nina Quarterly* 3.3 (1999); "Women, Human Identity, and the Image of God: Antiochene Interpretations" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2001), pp. 205-249; "The Trinity and Feminism" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 519-530.

2. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1992); eadem, "God in Communion with Us: The Trinity" in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1993), pp. 83-114.

theologian who founded her feminist theology on the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers.

Against the above harmonious picture, Teva's presentation also does not fail to raise problems and deficits, mainly with regard to lay participation in liturgy (understood as the *synodos* in worship and prayer), as well as decision-making and governance structures of church life. Concerning this last point, the paper under discussion raises the question of the exclusion of women, and makes an effort to address this *lacunae*, by especially referring to the ordained and non-ordained female diaconate, and the efforts and initiatives toward its re-establishment in our time.³

The up to now unsuccessful efforts, after 35 years of relevant and continuous discussions, (see Pan-Orthodox Conference of Orthodox Women of Rhodes in 1988 under the auspices of the Ecumenical

3. See among the many relevant publications, Kyriaki Karidoyannes FitzGerald, *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church. Called to Holiness and Ministry* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998); eadem, "The Nature and Characteristics of the Order of the Deaconess" in Thomas Hopko (ed.), *Women and the Priesthood* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), pp. 93-137. For the conclusions of the Inter-Orthodox Theological Symposium of Rhodes and especially concerning the reactivation of the institution of Deaconesses, see the collective volume, *The Place of the Woman in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women: Inter-Orthodox Symposium, Rhodos, Greece, 30 October-7 November 1988*, ed. Gennadios Limouris (Katerini: Tertios Publications, 1992), pp. 31-32. See also the more recent works, John Chrysavgis, *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia: The Diaconate Yesterday and Today* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2009); *Ordination of Women to the Diaconate in the Eastern Churches*, essays by Cipriano Vagaggini, edited by Phyllis Zagano (Collegeville, MI: Michael Glazier/Liturgical Press, 2013); *Deaconesses, the Ordination of Women and Orthodox Theology*, ed. Petros Vassiliadis, Niki Papageorgiou and Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017). Rich relevant material in electronic form can be accessed on the website of St Phoebe Center for the Deaconess: <https://orthodoxdeaconess.org/>.

Patriarchate and Resolution of the Hierarchy of the Church of Greece in October 2004) reflect both the marginalized place of the laity and the women in the Orthodox Church. It also relates to misunderstandings and prejudices concerning sexuality and the human body, especially for the women, the ones that are connected to the sacralization of structures, customs, and practices of patriarchal and “traditional” societies.

The well-known Orthodox reluctance concerning the “new” canonical practice of women’s ordination is very characteristic to this crucial point. Canonical matters in Orthodoxy have always been subject to revisions and reformations, insofar as they do not affect the fundamental doctrines of our faith, i.e., the Trinitarian and the Christological. In recent times, Orthodox theologians have tried to respond to the challenges posed by the feminist movement and feminist theologies.⁴ Despite the overall dominant negative Orthodox attitude, in

4. Cf. from the many relevant publications, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, trans. Fr Steven Bigham (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999); Evanthia Ch. Adamtziloglou, “Is Feminist Theology Possible in the Greek Orthodox Tradition?” *Yearbook of the European Society of Women in Theological Research (ESWTR)*, 4 (1996); *Orthodox Women Speak: Discerning the “Signs of the Times”* ed. Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald (Geneva and Brookline, MA: WCC Publications and Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999); Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi, “Authority in Tradition. Reflections on Tradition and the Role of Women in the Orthodox Church,” *Yearbook of the ESWTR*, 8 (2000), pp. 101-110-eadem, “Women and the Proclamation of the Gospel in the NT” in *Einheit der Kirche im Neuen Testament. Dritte europäische orthodox-westliche Exegetenkonferenz in Sankt Petersburg 24.-31. August 2005*, eds. Anatoly Alexeev, Christos Karakolis, Ulrich Luz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), pp. 103-120; eadem, “Women in Church and Society as an Ecumenical Issue” *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism. Resources for Theological Education: “That They All May Be One”* (John 17:21), eds. Pantelis Kalaitzidis et al. (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), pp. 737-740; eadem, “Mission, Gender, and Theological Education: An Orthodox Perspective” *International Review of Mission* 104 (2015), pp. 37-45; *Women’s Voices and Visions for the Church: Reflections from Orthodox Women*, eds. Christine Breaban, Sophie Deischa, and Eleni Kasselouri-

more recent years the opinion has gained ground (even among distinguished Orthodox hierarchs and theologians) that, apart from the criterion of the so-called “tradition,” there seems to be no other serious theological reason hindering the ordination of women. As early as 1968, John D. Zizioulas (former Metropolitan of Pergamon of the Ecumenical Patriarchate), maintained that “on the question of the ordination of women, Orthodox theologians could find no theological reasons against such an ordination. Yet the entire matter is so deeply tied up with their tradition that they would find it difficult in their majority to endorse without reservations the rather enthusiastic statements of the paper.”⁵ For his part, late Metropolitan of Diokleia Kallistos Ware, in a book written in collaboration with the late French Orthodox female theologian Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, had to recognize that in the light of patristic anthropology and of Orthodox theology, there are no serious theological arguments against the ordination of women, except the

Hatzivassiliadi (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2006); Rastko Yovic, “Doing Gender Justice as a Mission Imperative: God’s Justice and Ours” *International Review of Mission* 104, no. 1 (2015), pp. 26-36; Spyridoulas Athanasopoulou-Kypriou, “Emancipation Through Celibacy? The Sisterhoods of the Zoe Movement and their Role in the Development of ‘Christian Feminism’ in Greece (1938-1960)” in *Innovation in the Orthodox Christian Tradition? The Question of Change in Greek Orthodox Thought and Practice*, eds. Trine Stauning Willert and Lina Molokotos-Liederman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 101-121. For the wider discussion on gender in Orthodoxy, see the mainly anthropological approaches of the recent collective volume, *Orthodox Christianity and Gender: Dynamics of Tradition, Culture and Lived Practice*, eds. Helena Kupari and Elina Vuola (London: Routledge, 2019). Cf. also the collective volumes, *Gender and Religion: The Place of the Woman in the Church*, eds. Pantelis Kalaitzidis and Nikos Ntontos (Athens: Indiktos Publications, 2004, in Greek); *Many Women Were There...The Participation of Orthodox Women in the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva and Volos: WCC Publications and Volos Academy Publications, 2011).

5. John D. Zizioulas, “Comments on the Study Paper of the Faith and Order Commission on ‘The Meaning of Ordination’” *Study Encounter*, 4 (1968), p. 193.

argument of “tradition.”⁶ The same view was also expressed by the late Metropolitan Anthony Bloom,⁷ and the late professors Konstantinos Yiokarinis⁸ and Nikos Matsoukas,⁹ while in our days more and more female and male Orthodox theologians started to speak openly about this issue.¹⁰ The same conclusion is reflected in the majority of the papers and the “Common Considerations” issues at the end of the two consultations of Orthodox and Old Catholic theologians on the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry, held in Levadia, Greece (February 25-March 1, 1996), and Konstancin, Poland (December 10-15, 1996), and organized with the blessings of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and His Grace Antonius Jan Glazemaker the Archbishop of Utrecht.¹¹

6. Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Kallistos Ware, *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000). Cf. Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, “L’ordination des femmes : un problème œcuménique. Développements récents dans la sphère de l’Église orthodoxe” *Contacts*, issue 150 (1990), pp. 101-127.

7. Anthony Bloom, “Preface to the French Edition” in Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, trans. Steven Bigham (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999), p. xiv.

8. Konstantinos Yiokarinis, *The Priesthood of Women in the Framework of Ecumenical Movement* (Katerini: Epektasi Publications, 1995, in Greek); eadem, *The Genderedness or Genderlessness of the Incarnated Christ* (Athens: Armos Publications, 2011, in Greek).

9. Nikos Matsoukas, “Women’s Priesthood as a Theological and Ecumenical Problem” in *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic: Ecumenical Reflections on the Church*, ed. Tamara Grdzeldze (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), pp. 218-223.

10. See the review of the relevant discussion in the massive work by Paul Ladouceur, *Modern Orthodox Theology: “Behold, I Make All Things New”* (London and New York: 2019), pp. 378-404. For the most recent discussion of this issue in Orthodoxy see the collective volume, *Women and Ordination in the Orthodox Church: Explorations in Theology and Practice*, ed. Gabrielle Thomas and Elena Narinskaya (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020).

11. See Urs von Arx & Anastasios Kallis (ed.), *Bild Christi und Geschlecht. “Gemeinsame Überlegungen” und Referate der Orthodox-Alt-katholischen*

Quite often the Orthodox theologians in favor of women ordination are accused of introducing in church life and theology, a worldly spirit and criteria by repeating a feminist agenda; in other words, that they follow a secularized ecclesiology. I personally maintain the exact opposite: the present *status quo* of inequality between men and women, and the ecclesial marginalization of the latter constitutes a secularized ecclesiology, one that reproduces the authoritarian spirit of the fallen world and not the vision of the church as a community of men and women. In addition, it should be noted that genuine synodality cannot exist without the participation of women, which is half – and the more active part – of the *pleroma* of the church.

As for the so-called argument of “tradition” which is supposed to prevent any reform or change regarding the place or the role of women in the church, allow me to share with you what Fr Georges Florovsky, the pre-eminent Orthodox theologian of the 20th century, the initiator of the famous “return to the Fathers” said (on another occasion, of course, at the founding Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam, in 1948):

Therefore, true traditionalism in the Church does not preclude development. On the contrary, tradition lives and grows. Consequently, being faithful to tradition does not signify an obstinate fidelity to the Church’s past, even to the apostolic past. Fidelity to the apostolic tradition is, above all, fidelity to the apostolic message. This message is a seed that is regarded as authoritative... For, after all, tradition is only a witnessing of the Spirit who continually reveals and renews the message that was in times past deposited in the Church. Thus, tradition is not solely a historical authority imposed from outside on the living members of the Body of Christ. Rather, it is the uninterrupted Word of God himself that is seized by faith; it is not only a witness of the past, but

Konsultation zur Stellung der Frau in der Kirche und zur Frauenordination als ökumenischem Problem, 25. Februar-1. März 1996 in Levadia (Griechenland) und 10.-15. Dezember 1996 in Konstancin (Polen), in Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift 88 (1998), pp. 65-348; English version: “Gender and the Image of Christ,” trans. Duncan Reid, Anglican Theological Review 84 (2002), pp. 489-755.

above all, a witness of eternity... Moreover, true fidelity to tradition does not imply only an *accord* with the past, but also in a certain sense, a *freedom* with regard to the past understood as an authority that is completely exterior and formal to the catholic experience. In this sense, tradition is not only a principle of conservatism but also a principle of living progress, a principle of growth, of regeneration, of reformation. The Church unceasingly reforms itself *because* she lives in the tradition. True traditionalism is always opposed to the tendencies of servile restoration that consider the past as a formal criterion for the present.¹²

In conclusion, it is admirable that our Western sisters and brothers want to listen to the East concerning synodality, and to learn from the synodal tradition of the Eastern Church. They will, however, benefit even more if they learn not only from our achievements, but also from our shortcomings and failures. Now that the Roman Catholic Church wants to deepen and enrich its synodal path, it would be wise not to repeat the same mistakes. Our two Churches, the Orthodox and the Catholic, are historic Churches, enjoying a profound sense of tradition and catholicity. At the same time, other Christian Churches accepted the ordained ministry of women, while our Churches remain reluctant, if not hostile to such a change. One has to observe that even world religions, even those that are seen as more conservative (such as Judaism and Islam), upgrade women to rabbis or imams. If we really share the eschatological vision of the church, which implies, among others, repentance and self-criticism for our past; if we really expect the kingdom to come, perhaps it is time that Orthodox and Catholics, along with synodality, also reflect on the participation of women in church life and governance, without which the catholicity and the *pleroma* of the church remains a dead letter and wishful thinking.

12. Georges Florovsky, "The Body of the Living Christ: An Orthodox Interpretation of the Church" trans. Robert M. Arida in *The Living Christ: The Theological Legacy of Georges Florovsky*, ed. John Chryssavgis and Brandon Gallaher (London: T&T Clark, 2021), pp. 469-470.

PRACTICES OF SYNODALITY

The Russian Council of 1917–1918: A View from 2022

Alexander Mramornov

I've been invited to speak on the Moscow Local Council 1917-1918 in the context of Conciliarity or Sobornost, which materials and legacy I'm researching for more than fifteen years. I gave a number of general lectures on this Council in the previous years and in different places of the world and for different audiences. But this time it is not an easy task for me, but a rather complicated one, as we cannot put out the question of Local Council's legacy and meaning out of the current political context. Though I am a historian, it would be dishonest and unscientific.

The Local Council 1917-18 became the greatest attempt to turn such a huge Autocephalous Christian Church, as Russian, whose influence extended throughout the Eurasian continent from Poland in the West to Japan in the East, from the mode of subjection to the monarchical state to its free navigation on the basis of Synodality (соборность). But a free navigation in the sea of what? Of democratic state or new strong European republic? Unfortunately, it turned out to be a sewage sea – an invasion of new horde.

The Moscow Local Council became a program event. As composers sometimes compose program symphonies, it was a kind of a program piece for the Russian Orthodox Church to compose and to play, a kind of startup, a work for the future.

I would like to emphasize the creative aspect: not just one person or just one body or committee took and prepared the plan. No, the program has been written for more than 12 years, by different people, and turned out to be unfinished (let's remember, continuing the musical analogy, the genre of unfinished symphonies). To some extent, it can be

called “creative chaos”. Just like the Local Council 1917-18 itself. But perhaps synodality, led by the Holy Spirit, *should* be a creative chaos?

At the plenary and at the department proceedings of the Council 1917–18 the construction of models of the future was clearly carried out; which, however, did not imply the destruction of Russian culture and civilization, in whose frames and borders the Council was making its job. But namely, this kind of destruction began immediately after the Bolsheviks came to power (that is, along with the Council’s work).

This was precisely the culture and civilization – the real Russian culture and civilization – that survived the empire, that gave birth to the growth of the empire (but was itself an offspring of an empire). Russia did not leave the path of the natural course of history (a history that was a part of European one and fits perfectly into its context). As a result, such theological and spiritual forces appeared that, in the conditions of social upheavals, turbulence, and war, they were able to develop models based on the Gospel, Christian tradition and church canons for the existence of the Church in the new conditions.

The model of the autonomous existence of the Russian Church was not spoken at the Council’s proceedings so clearly as to become a mass, popular idea, but nevertheless it *was* created by the Council members’ hard work. It became clear: what was possible then for the Church to base on an Orthodox mission, what to answer to the questioners, etc.

The system of existence of the Church and its management had to become truly independent. The Council put forward the idea of a union between Church and State: not a Byzantine symphony, not a submission, not a complete separation. But what a simple idea: a union, social friendship!

Further. A diocese that freely elects its bishop at the official meeting of clergy and laity leads Church to the triumph of synodality: the Council of 1917–18 approved the procedure for electing bishops: the Patriarch, the Synod, the clergy, and the laity were to participate in the election.

A system of economic independence of the Church was created at and by the Council. Church’s own cooperatives, own finances (even its own bank) and the opportunity to have stable sources of its activity. Later, during most of the 20th and during the first decades of the 21st

century, by submitting the church organization financially and by corrupting the episcopate, the secular authorities received the full control of the Russian Church. It is important; the Council 1917-18 did not exclude and even provided for the Church to receive funds from the state budget, but on transparent grounds, and not through secret, “under-carpet” agreements.

It is important that these very difficult tasks were carried out by people who themselves, mentally and in fact, lived in conditions of monarchical statehood. But they were (or they became) titans of the spirit, capable of quickly overcoming their own stereotypes, getting rid of the obsolete, overcoming their own individual and collective mistakes of their social stratum. Was it not the triumph of synodality: to come to the Council with one opinion and image and to change it, under the influence of strong discipline or herd mentality, but in a free discussion? Actually, it was.

The members of the Council were very interested in leading the Church mission in the rapidly changing world. Many of them literally carried out the projects developed by the Council through their souls, their hearts, projecting all this onto the activities that they were to practically carry out after leaving the Council Chamber in Likhov lane in Moscow.

The legacy of the Council was dispersed in time and space. To some extent, partly, it has been preserved to this day in the Eastern Church, in the European culture. However, the fact is that this legacy itself has become a thing that is destroyed, betrayed to martyrdom, like many of its bearers. This is due to Bolshevism established in Russia in 1917. In my historic concept, it dominates the entire subsequent history of Russia and of the Russian Church and its sad present day (1917-2022), and therefore also over the conciliar heritage and the synodality.

Subjugation of the Church to the brute force of professional bandits (Bolshevik leaders) and uneducated (and not enlightened in Christian faith) lower layers of the Russian society, becomes over time a system conciliation with the untruth of the Bolshevik regime and the inhumane nature of their political practices. The degree of the voluntariness or of the compulsion of this conciliation is not so important as the fact itself.

In October 1917 the Council restored the patriarchate. The office of the Patriarch in 1917 really became an expression of synodality rather than one of primacy.

It was not just the office of patriarch itself that was restored 105 years ago, in the turbulent autumn of 1917, but an episcopal primacy in the context of the reestablishing of the regular convocation of the local councils. And besides, the restoration of the patriarchate was an attempt to stop the national and moral catastrophe that began with the strengthening of the Bolsheviks in power.

The first key decision of the Council, finally adopted on November 4, 1917, and which is the canon of the local Russian Church, reads as the following:

1. In the Orthodox Russian Church, the highest power – legislative, administrative, judicial and controlling – belongs to the local council, being convened periodically, at certain times, consisting of bishops, clergy and laity.
2. The Patriarchate is restored, and the ecclesiastical administration is headed by the patriarch.
3. The patriarch is the first among the equal to him bishops. – *It means primus inter pares.*
4. The patriarch, together with the organs of church administration, is accountable to the Council.¹³

Violation of any of these paragraphs delegitimizes the whole canon and the decision to restore the institution of the patriarchate. One does not have to go too deeply into the current state of the Russian Church to understand that only paragraph 2 of this canon is followed, while paragraphs 1, 3, 4 are voluntarily canceled. But this means that the canon itself has been delegitimized, on the basis of which, the institution of the patriarchate now operates in the Russian Church.

13. Документы Священного Собора Православной Российской Церкви 1917–1918 годов. Т. 5. Деяния Собора с 1-го по 36-е / отв. ред. священник Алексей Колчери́н, А. И. Мраморнов. — М.: Изд-во Новоспасского монастыря, 2015. С. 796.

Patriarch Tikhon (Bellavin), for the first time after his election, was exactly that kind of patriarch whom the Council and the ecclesiastical society wanted to have. Later, on the one hand, he finds himself in forceful submission to the Bolshevik state, and in a state where a monarchical idea of the patriarch is being constructed within the Church and his personality begins to be sacralized (the members of the Council warned about this danger during the discussion about the restoring the patriarchate).

For the highest point of Bolshevism – for the Stalin era– the patriarchate became a political tool, a new option for manipulating at least a part of society. It was a kind of late Stalinist fake pluralism. The Church turns out to be necessary for the regime during a difficult war. For almost two decades, the Bolshevik state did not allow a patriarch to be elected, and in 1943, suddenly, in 10 days the Russian Church received a patriarch. Is not this a demonic caricature of synodality?

“Look there, we still allow the Church and the believers. Actually, they are so decrepit, old-fashioned and crawled out from somewhere in the Middle Ages. And the title of their leader, the Patriarch, is “All Rus’,” and not “All Russia,” as it was established by the Council 1917-18. Still, the full title of the Patriarch includes the mentioning of the nonexistent Rus’, and not actually existing Russia.

After some attempts to commit a counter-revolution in Russia at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s (relative to the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and their absolute power of the consequent decades) and the defeat of this attempt, the political system of neo-Bolshevism was fully formed in Russia. The Church completely submitted to this system. This became a factor in the destruction of the sprouts of synodality that began to grow in the 1990s from the old seeds sown in 1917-1918. These sprouts were rolled into the asphalt of voluntarism of the patriarch and policy of complete conciliation with the state and indulgence towards it; the apotheosis of which became the tragic events of this year. The position of the Russian Church in 2022 completely contradicts the conciliar principles and the concrete program of synodality worked out and approved in practice by the work of the Great Council in 1917-1918.

The Russian Church, if we want to follow the spirit of the Council 1917-18, should now have an opposing position to the lies of militarism.

Any militarism. In Russia, we crucify Christ again first of all with the lies of Russian militarism. Church institutions are placed in a state of direct service to militarism. The “Temple of Armed Forces” became a symbol of this war, and not a temple of Christ. According to circular decrees from the Patriarchate, hypocritical prayers are proclaimed – about the eradication of enemies from the West who have taken up arms against ‘Holy Rus’”. Therefore, it is necessary to develop mechanisms to protect against hypocrisy. The Council of 1917-18 is a good basis for such a development.

The Local Council 1917-18 in many ways tried to return the Russian Church to the ideal of apostolic age, this was a trend at the beginning of the 20th century. We know from ancient Christian texts that participation in the war was an unacceptable thing for Christians before the Constantine era. It became acceptable in Middle Ages by the submission of the Church by the state.

In modern times, the situation has changed. Now the patriarch, who makes decisions to support militaristic policies without asking any special Council, has no ecclesiastical legitimacy. The Council of 1917-18, which restored the seat of the patriarch, delegitimizes and exposes him. The Council itself was a peaceful event. I call what its members were doing in Moscow in 1917-18, a peaceful deed. It is clearly seen from the historical sources that, despite the fact that there were military men and even WWI generals among its members, they did not like the war, they were tired of the war and wanted to pass the fatigue of war to the future generations.

Today, it is in the context of synodality that the question of responsibility for the Church arises. Russian church history of the 20th and early 21st centuries raises the question: if primacy can become absolute, the role of the Council structures is reduced to the role of a chancellery, then is not this already a departure from Christianity?

We put up with the parallel presence of first Catholic and Orthodox bishops in the same city, later we are forced to have different national diasporas in the same cities with their own bishop. But nowadays is it conciliar to create parallel church orthodox structures so that one orthodox patriarchate can politically compete the other? Local Council 1917-18 developed rules on the missions of the Russian Church

outside of Russia, for example, in China, Persia, and Korea. However, the Council spoke nothing about the globalist presence of canonical structures everywhere, on each continent.

Charters of the Russian Church of the first decade of the 21st century were of course, a significant step back from synodality, but still did not cancel it. In 2009 a bureaucratic body appeared, which imitated and is imitating the synodality – the Interconciliar Commission (Межсоборное присутствие). According to the current charter, the Russian Church is governed by Bishops' Councils and episcopal conferences. The Local Council as a governing body of the Church was actually destroyed by its abolition in 2000. Now the local council, in the concept of the Moscow Patriarchate, should be convened only to approve the election of a new patriarch made by the Bishops' Council. But even in the Bishops' council nowadays, ordinary bishops cannot say a word, cannot say anything against the proposed concept of the patriarch. And now the convocation of the Bishops Council has been canceled due to the coronavirus, then the impossibility of participation by the Ukrainian Bishops. Thus, no statutes are observed: neither those adopted by the current episcopate (the bishops Councils are held at least once every four years, the last one was November 2017, five years ago), nor those adopted at the Council of 1917-18.

According to the canon of the Local Council of December 8, 1917 “On the Rights and Duties of the Patriarch”, the patriarch “has a duty of intercession”. For which of the hundreds of political prisoners, thousands of unfairly condemned in Russia over the past 13 years, did the Moscow Patriarch intercede? I personally worked in the central structures of the Moscow Patriarchate since 2009 to 2018, communicating almost daily with the highest hierarchs and coming into contact with issues of higher church administration, but I do not know a single case when a patriarch would stand up for someone before the Kremlin, or would express a public or even just an official protest against repressive decision of the Kremlin. Not only Christian brotherly love, but even secular humanism and ordinary mercy disappeared from the practice and everyday life of the Moscow Patriarchate. This is a sign of complete and winning unconciliarity. The institutional Church in Russia

has turned into a department that follows entirely and completely in line with the Kremlin's policy.

The Council of 1917-18 is declared to sound as an important historical event but is not a guide for the Church to act. The Council and its legacy are unpleasant and inconvenient for the current patriarchate. Therefore, they try to hide it away.

The mentioned act of the Council of December 1917 spelled out the mechanism for accusing the patriarch and dismissing him from his position. Now what has happened is that, considering the Ukrainian dioceses to be his canonical territory, the Patriarch of Moscow left them in a state of critical danger and has not tried to stop the military actions on this territory. But the canonical mechanism has rusted, there is no one to fix it, and therefore nobody inside the Church can legally remove the patriarch from his position.

What does the legacy of the Local Council of 1917-18 tell us about the future? I go beyond the boundaries of its history, but I am basing on it and say the following. The dioceses and parishes of the Russian Church, throughout Russia to the Far East and the Pacific Ocean, are a reliable support for the development of Christianity on the Eurasian continent. But such a development is impossible with a politicized ideology, with ethnophyletism and self-immersion in the ghetto, which has less and less in common with Christianity and the Gospel.

The history of the Local Council 1917-18 tells a story about a strong Christian Russia. Too many people did not want and do not want such a Russia. And with Bolshevism (and with nowadays neo-Bolshevism), with the legalized mafia, with the manipulation of people's consciousness, with militarism – it will never be possible to create it. In churches where Divine Liturgy was or is served, in buildings where synodality and the correct organization of Orthodox dioceses and parishes were once discussed, not the so called "Russian world" (Русский мир), in which no one believes, including the developers of this ideology, will be realized, but the Pan-Turkish and boundless Chinese world. In all three "worlds", there is and there will be no place for the legacy of the 1917-18 Council and for the Christian Synodality.

Orthodox Lay Movements

Georges El-Hage

Following my election as president of Syndesmos, I decided to visit my predecessors as well as some church leaders asking for advice. One of them clearly stated that the only prophetic person in the Orthodox church today was his patriarch. As for another one, he literally claimed to me: “Georges! There is no more need for renewal movements today. Everybody knows how to read and write. We have hospitals, we have built schools, we have founded a seminary to educate future priests and our country is full of monasteries”. He added, “Nowadays, everybody knows how to pray”.

In a way, this church leader was trying to convince me that lay movements were old-fashioned. But in fact, his words were a total homage to the achievements of the Orthodox Youth Movement in Antioch, a lay movement, which had founded monasteries, built schools, launched seminaries, and taught prayers to everyone. Missiology in the Orthodox church is also the fruit of engaged lay people in the service of God. In my short contribution, I shall enumerate three fields in which lay movements may serve the synodality of the church today.

1. Women's leadership

In the Orthodox church, women cannot be in any leading position. In the liturgy, tradition and male chauvinism push women away from any active role. Rare are women even allowed to enter the altar. However, no legitimate excuse can hinder women from reaching top positions in their missionary work, leading projects, and even challenging the status-quo.

In the case of the Orthodox Youth Movement in Antioch, the role of girls and women was not only limited to volunteering or organizational leadership, but they were also encouraged and integrated into the altar service. Many antiochian theologians pleaded for the restauration of the antique tradition of deaconesses.

2. Ecumenical openness

Since the end of the nineteenth century, biblical studies, social engagement, and even missions have been initiated by lay people. Ecumenical movement dynamics are not solely restricted to church leaders, as they are a collective engagement with lay people. It is a synergy between both, as none could operate without the other. In this context, catholicity of the Church also means catholicity of action, of liturgy, and catholicity of responsibility.

Lay engagement reflects a balance between the different components of Christ's body. In today's democratic regimes, this is highlighted by segregating powers with no one-man show, with no practical monopoly. In Western Europe, lay movements such as ACER-MJO (Action Chrétienne des Etudiants Russes) organizes and frequently hosts local ecumenical projects and activities. Today, Orthodox lay organizations are pushing towards a new Paschal calendar, towards Nicea 2025.

As many of our synods are almost dysfunctional, some churches still defend a quasi-totalitarian ethos. Some Orthodox bishops from Romania or Serbia quote Carl Schmitt to criticize freedom. They also take the Anglican church model as a pretext to reject freedom in the church. Furthermore, they never fail to support local governments in their nationalistic and patriotic madness. Thus, such attitudes lead to minority persecution, for example ex-totalitarian regimes and current totalitarian ones exclude and persecute minorities in the name of holiness and the alleged superiority of their people.

3. Sexual abuse

With sexual scandals being cover up in different churches, lay movements provide a safe space to victims to raise their voices.

In Antioch for example, only members of the Orthodox Youth Movement dared to write publicly in local newspapers and on social media defending and supporting sexual abuse victims. Meanwhile, the synod, monasteries, and Orthodox politicians, were defending the abusers under the pretext of protecting the reputation and unity of the Church.

4. Freedom of speech

Lay people benefit from a certain level of liberty to speak their mind, without being hindered by canonical law and threatened by ecclesiastical sanctions.

For example, they can challenge the excommunication between the Patriarchate of Moscow and the Greek-speaking local churches: Alexandria, Cyprus, and Greece. They can also challenge their synods on bioethics, politics, and pastoral matters. Or criticize the break of communion between Antioch and Jerusalem.

They are the sign of the universal love of God. In Christ, there is no more Greek or Jew, man or woman, free or slave.

Conclusion

Today, it is worth highlighting that we still live in a polarized world. The representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate blame the new world order. They plead for a bipolar world order in the name of equilibrium. Russian church leaders aim at polarization to counterbalance the ecumenical Patriarchate or the Hellenic hegemony as they call it. Practically, they are dividing youth movements and manipulating events.

Paradoxically, these kinds of divisive projects are welcome in some kind of dividing milieux. They would like to use the so-called loyalty to the Mother-church in order to control every free and lay initiative.

Neither Carl Schmitt's political theology nor the Byzantine symphony are acceptable or functional today. Collision between imperial and spiritual powers is harmful and obsolete, thus, Orthodox people are called to witness in a democratic and post-modern society.

It is necessary to distinguish between the free lay movements and the divisives ones. The first being in the service of the ultimate good of the church, rather than being the blind followers of hidden political agendas in the name of Orthodoxy.

Lay movements should stay independent in their internal life. No bishop or patriarch should interfere in their internal management, election results, or activity schedule.

For all the above-mentioned reasons, lay movements should not cease to exist, but to be supported so that they can serve more and more, the Synodality of the church.

WORKSHOPS

Canon Law Perspectives: Understanding of Representation and Delegation

David Heith-Stade

*The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter...
Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church...
For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us... having been commended by
the brothers to the grace of the Lord. (Acts 15:8, 22, 28, 40).¹*

*For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have
the same function, so, we, though many, are one body in Christ, and
individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the
grace given to us, let us use them... (Romans 12:4-6).*

*For just as the body is one and has many members, all the members of the body,
though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all
baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to
drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).*

*For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you
are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints
and members of the household of God... (Ephesians 2:18-19).*

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his
own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you
out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9).*

My topic is representation and delegation in the Orthodox canonical tradition. This is one of the most complicated topics in contemporary Orthodox canon law, since representation and delegation exist in the practice of the Orthodox Churches, but there is no theoretical consensus on the meaning and form of this practice. We can note that in the Orthodox Church praxis usually precedes theory and sometimes even exists without theory.

1. All biblical quotations are from the English Standard Version Catholic Edition.

There has been a low-intense controversy on this topic for at least the last one and a half century in Orthodox canon law. The controversy has primarily focused on themes such as the appointment of bishops (especially primates), the appointment of parish clergy, the participation of the parish clergy in church governance, the participation of the laity in church governance, pan-Orthodox synodality, the possibility of convening an ecumenical council in the contemporary world, and the Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement. Other themes in the modern discourse of Orthodox canon that touch on this topic are the relationship between the celibate clergy and the married clergy, autocephaly, and patriarchates (especially the pentarchy or tetrarchy of the ancient patriarchates).

The problem becomes apparent if we compare the two most important Orthodox synods during the last one hundred years: the Russian national synod of Moscow in 1917-1918 and the Pan-Orthodox synod of Crete in 2016. These two synods are separated by almost a century but conveniently illustrate that representation and delegation are still disputed questions.

The Russian national synod of 1917-1918 was composed of eparchial bishops, auxiliary bishops, clergy, and laity with an equal right to vote in the plenary assembly.² Eparchial bishops were members of the synod *ex officio* while the clergy (including auxiliary bishops) and lay representatives were appointed through democratic elections on the eparchial and parish levels. Decrees were passed with an absolute majority in the plenary assembly. However, the bishops (both eparchial and auxiliary) also constituted an upper chamber, which could veto a

2. Franz Jockwig, *Der Weg der Laien auf das Landeskoncil der Russischen Orthodoxen Kirche Moskau 1917/18: Werden und Verwirklichung einer demokratischen Idee in der Russischen Kirche*, Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1971; Hyacinthe Destivelle, *The Moscow Council (1917-1918): The Creation of the Conciliar Institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church*, Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2015.

decree passed by the plenary assembly, if two thirds of the bishops voted against the decree.

To the Pan-Orthodox Synod of Crete, the 14 universally recognized autocephalous Orthodox Churches were invited to each send a delegation of up to 24 bishops.³ There was no representation of the laity or clergy although lay and ordained theologians were active as advisers and administrative staff. There was also a small group of 15 non-Orthodox observers present at the synod. All documents were supposed to be accepted by consensus and there was a failed attempt to achieve a consensus on the documents already during the presynodal process.

At the heart of the controversy lies ecclesiology and especially the topic of authority and power in the church. This is also an urgent topic in ecumenical theology as reflected in the section “The Gift of Authority in the Ministry of the Church” in the latest Faith and Order convergence document on ecclesiology.⁴ The key concept is the biblical concept of ἐξουσία which becomes problematic in translation since it is wider and less technical than the concepts of authority (*auctoritas*) and power (*potestas*).

The classic Byzantine canonists never developed any theory of church power (*potestas ecclesiastica*) beyond the doctrine of ordination based on the holy canons. This is probably because the Byzantine church upheld in practice the prohibition against absolute ordination⁵ and the lack of a benefice system in Byzantium which meant that no one would be ordained without being assigned to an actual ministry in an eparchy, church, or monastery.⁶

Liturgically there have developed separate rites of the ordination

3. Cf. Eva Synek, Das „Heilige und Grosse Konzil“ von Kreta, Freistadt: Verlag Plöchl, 2017.

4. Faith and Order Commission, The Church: Towards a Common Vision, 2013, §§ 48-51.

5. Canon 6 of Chalcedon.

6. Cf. David Heith-Stade, “The Title of Ordination in Eastern Orthodox Canon Law,” *Тeологикон* 4 (2015): 168-172.

and the intronization of bishops, but there is no developed doctrine among the classic Byzantine canonists that the first rite conveys the power of sacred order (*potestas ordinis*) while the second rite conveys the power of jurisdiction (*potestas iurisdictionis*), and the earliest canonical sources presume that a bishop is ordained in the eparchy of his ministry.⁷

However, canon 6 of Nicaea II defined the competence of provincial synods as canonical and evangelical matters. According to the classic Byzantine canonists, canonical matters include judicial decisions, administration of church property, and the election of bishops while evangelical matters include the liturgical life, faith, and morals.⁸

At least since Gratian, Latin canonists have been using a distinction between power of orders (*potestas ordinis*) and power of jurisdiction or governance (*potestas iurisdictionis*). Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) introduced the distinction between power of orders and power of jurisdiction when dealing with schismatics to argue that they had orders but not jurisdiction.⁹ This distinction was commonly received also by Orthodox canonists.

However, in the 19th century, the German Roman Catholic canonist Ferdinand Walter (1794-1879) introduced a threefold division of church power as the power of ministry (*potestas ministerii*), the power of teaching (*potestas magisterii*), and the power of governance (*potestas iurisdictionis*).¹⁰ This division was inspired by the Christological scheme of *triplex munus Christi* which presented the threefold ministry of Christ as prophet, high priest, and king. This scheme had been adopted in the

7. Cf. Job Getcha, *The Euchologion Unveiled: An Explanation of Byzantine Liturgical Practice II*, Yonkers, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2021, 103-108.

8. G. A. Rallis and M. Potlis, ed., *Σύνταγμα τῶν Θεῶν καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, vol. 2, Athen: Chartyphylakos, 1852, 577-580.

9. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 39, a. 3.

10. Ferdinand Walter, *Lehrbuch des Kirchenrechts aller christlichen Confessionen*, 14th ed., 1871, 29-30.

dogmatic theology of most Christian denominations (including the Orthodox Church)¹¹ since the early modern era.

Walter's textbook of canon law was the single most influential textbook of canon law in the 19th century. The first edition was published in 1822 and the 14th edition was published in 1871. It was also translated into several other languages. Many Orthodox canonists adopted Walter's threefold division of church power including the Habsburg Serbian Orthodox canonist Nikodim Milaš (1845-1915) in his handbook of Orthodox canon law.¹² Milaš' handbook of Orthodox canon law was not only translated into German but also into the national languages of most Orthodox Churches and is consequently, the single most influential handbook of Orthodox canon law since the fall of Byzantium.

However, not all Orthodox canonists accepted this threefold division of church power; for example, the Bulgarian Orthodox canonist Stefan Tsankov (1881-1965) argued that teaching belongs explicitly to the power of orders and implicitly to the power of jurisdiction, so the threefold division is artificial, and the twofold division of power of orders and power of jurisdiction should be maintained.¹³

It should also be noted in passing that the *trias politica* of the modern sovereign state is sometimes applied to the power of jurisdiction and conceives it as legislative power, executive power, and judicial power.

The reason why church power is central to the topic of representation and delegation is the question: Who is the subject of

11. E.g., Macarius [Bulgakov], Erzbischof von Litthauen, Handbuch zum Studium der christlichen, orthodox-dogmatischen Theologie, Moscow: A. Lang, 1875, 201-235.

12. Nikodemus Milasch, Das Kirchenrecht der morgenländischen Kirche, 2nd ed., Mostar: Pacher und Kisić, 1905, 235-236.

13. Stefan Zankow, Die Verfassung der bulgarischen orthodoxen Kirche, Zürich: Leemann, 1918, 101-110.

church power? The legislation of the Byzantine emperors and the canons of the synods following the conversion of Emperor Constantine all presume that eparchial bishops are the subject of church power, but does this mean that they are the exclusive subject of church power?

The Byzantine emperors did *de facto* have jurisdiction over the church and the prerevolution Russian canonists invoked the example of the Byzantine emperors as a justification for the *ius circa sacra* of the Russian emperors introduced by the church reforms of Peter the Great (1672-1725).¹⁴ It is tempting to claim that the emperor belonged to the laity and, consequently, the power of the emperor over the church can be exercised by the laity in general after the abolition of the monarchy. However, this is anachronistic at least when it comes to Byzantium since in the mind of the Byzantines the emperor was a sacred figure *sui generis* who belonged neither to the laity nor to the clergy.¹⁵

The first Orthodox theologian who really challenged the *status quo* inherited from Byzantium was the Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan Andrei Şaguna (1809-1873) in the Habsburg Empire. Following the revolutions of 1848, Şaguna managed to establish an autonomous Romanian Orthodox Church in Transylvania separated from the Serbian Orthodox Archbishopric of Karlowitz.

It should be noted that Şaguna *de facto* invented ethnophyletism to justify the separation of the Romanians from the Serbs in the Habsburg Monarchy. He is the first canonist to interpret the word ἔθνος in Apostolic canon 34 as nation in the modern sense and consequently, to elevate ethnicity to a constitutive principle of church organization.¹⁶

14. Cf. Valerian Şesan, *Kirche und Staat im römisch-byzantinischen Reiche seit Konstantin dem Großen und bis zum Falle Konstantinopels*, Czernowitz: Bukowinaer Vereinsdruckerei, 1911, 1-68; James Cracraft, *The Church Reforms of Peter the Great*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1971.

15. Cf. Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

16. Andreas von Schaguna, *Compendium des kanonischen Rechtes der einen, heiligen, allgemeinen und apostolischen Kirche*, Hermannstadt: 1868, 222-223.

Following the Bulgarian Schism in 1872 in the Ottoman Empire, a synod in Constantinople condemned ethnophyletism as an ecclesiological heresy the same year.¹⁷ This condemnation upheld the traditional view of canon law that it is not ethnicity but territoriality that is the constitutive principle of church organization.

However, Şaguna's contribution to our topic is not connected to his ethnophyletism, but to the statute he authored for the new Romanian Orthodox Church of Transylvania.¹⁸ Like contemporary Hungarian Reform Catholicism, he saw absolutism as the greatest danger for the church. To overcome absolutism, he argued that synodality in the form of a constitutionalism in which bishops, clergy, and laity worked together best corresponded to the ideals of the New Testament and the example of the earliest church.

Şaguna's statute from 1868 was based on the ideals of subsidiarity, synodality as constitutionalism, a distinction between purely spiritual matters and educational-economic matters, a separation between legislative power and executive power, the participation of the laity in church governance, and two-thirds lay majority in all legislative and executive organs that were competent in educational-economic matters, and the exclusive competence of the episcopacy and clergy in purely spiritual matters. Parish clergy was directly elected by the parish synod while bishops and regional protopresbyters (deans) were indirectly elected through representatives elected by the parish synods.

It is important to note that Şaguna justified his abandonment of the status quo of Byzantine canon law by invoking the ideals of the New Testament and the example of the earliest church (especially on the topic of the election of bishops by the clergy and laity of the local church instead of the election of bishops by the provincial synod) as well as the

17. Cf. Ernst Reinhardt, *Die Entstehung des bulgarischen Exarchats*, Lucka: Berger, 1912; Ümit Eser, *Nationalist Schism in the Empire: Tanzimat Reforms and the Establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate*, Istanbul: Libra Kitap, 2019.

18. Paul Brusanowski, *Rumänisch-orthodoxe Kirchenordnungen (1786-2008)*, Vienna: Böhlau, 2011, 19-97.

contemporary needs of the church. It is also important to note that Šaguna did not reflect on the difference between the appointment of bishops and the appointment of parish clergy.

Šaguna's reforms were heavily criticized in the 19th century by the Habsburg Serbian Orthodox canonist Emilijan Radić (1857-1907).¹⁹ Radić polemics against Šaguna focused on the fact that Šaguna deviated in his church organization from the positive norms of Byzantine canon law and the historical example of the Byzantine church. Radić noted among other things that Šaguna's distinction between purely spiritual matters and educational-economic matters was an innovation that deviated from the traditional distinction between canonical and evangelical matters. Radić's positivistic approach was quite superficial since it failed to constructively deal with the New Testament exegesis of Šaguna, to provide any theological reflection on the superiority of the Byzantine church as compared with the earliest church, and to deal with the sociocultural differences between the Byzantine Empire and the 19th-century Habsburg Empire.

Nikodim Milaš was much more nuanced and constructive in his critique of Šaguna although he also neglected the theological issue and focused on the interpretation of the historical evidence of the earliest church and Byzantine canon law. Milaš argued that the historical evidence from the earliest church only shows that the laity had a consultative vote in the election of bishops and at synods.²⁰ According to Milaš, the laity did not have a decisive vote and to introduce this undermines the episcopal constitution of the Orthodox Church which is

19. Cf. Thomas Bremer, *Ekklesiale Struktur und Ekklesiologie in der Serbischen Orthodoxen Kirche im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert*, Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1992, 88-103; Radoslav von Radić, *Die Verfassung der orthodox-katholischen Kirche bei den Serben in Österreich-Ungarn*, Werschetz: Radić, 1877, (polemics against Šaguna is found throughout this work).

20. Nikodemus Milasch, *Das Kirchenrecht der morgenländischen Kirche*, 2nd ed., Mostar: Pacher und Kisić, 1905, 355-364.

governed by bishops as the successors of the apostles.²¹ It should be noted that newer research does not completely agree with Milaš interpretation of the historical evidence.²² Furthermore, like Radić, he upheld the traditional distinction between canonical and evangelical matters in church governance.²³ Finally, Milaš noted that the appointment of parish clergy is something else than the appointment of bishops, since the parish priest is a delegate of the bishop although it is a special form of delegation that cannot be arbitrarily revoked without a just cause and a judicial decision.²⁴ It should be noted that Milaš was a moderate and was not in principle opposed to the participation of the laity in the ministry of the church if this did not violate the rights of the bishops and the dogmatic foundation of the church.²⁵

We find many of the arguments from the controversy over Šaguna's church reform, in the presynodal process leading up to the Russian national synod of 1917-1918, but with the additional influence from the lay theologian Aleksey Khomyakov's (1804-1860) theology of *sobornost'*. In the presynodal deliberations we find attempts to identify *sobornost'*

21. Cf. Sergius Bulgakov, "The Hierarchy and Sacraments," 27-64 in: *Called to Serve: Readings on Ministry from the Orthodox Church*, edited by William C. Mills, 2nd ed. OCABS Press, 2016; John D. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries*, Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001.

22. E.g., Johan Leemans, Peter Van Nuffelen, Shawn W. J. Keough, and Carla Nicolaye, eds., *Episcopal Elections in Late Antiquity*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011.

23. Nikodemus Milasch, *Das Kirchenrecht der morgenländischen Kirche*, 2nd ed., Mostar: Pacher und Kisić, 1905, 318-320.

24. Nikodemus Milasch, *Das Kirchenrecht der morgenländischen Kirche*, 2nd ed., Mostar: Pacher und Kisić, 1905, 409-412.

25. Nikodemus Milasch, *Das Kirchenrecht der morgenländischen Kirche*, 2nd ed., Mostar: Pacher und Kisić, 1905, 214-236, 346-351.

with the ideals of the New Testament and the example of the earliest church.²⁶

Khomyakov's theology of *sobornost'* was originally a romantic polemic construction that presents the Orthodox Church as the ideal unity in freedom in contrast to the alleged unity without freedom of Roman Catholicism and freedom without unity of Protestantism.²⁷ It also presents the church as a communion of hierarchy, clergy, and laity. As a magisterial foundation of his theology, Khomyakov invoked the Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchates from 1848, addressed to the pope of Rome, which in passing stated that neither patriarchs nor synods can introduce any innovations in the Orthodox Church since the whole people of God is the defender of the faith. This inspired Khomyakov to develop a theory of reception by the whole people of God as the supreme criterion for the authority of the ecumenical councils. This can be contrasted to the older theory of reception which we find, for example, in the *Pedalion* (1800) of St Nikodemos Hagiorites (1749-1809), who states that the authority of ecumenical councils is among other things based on their reception by universal college of bishops through the pentarchy (i.e., the five ancient patriarchates of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem).²⁸

The participation of the laity in the ministry of the church was also originally on the agenda of the presynodal process leading up to the Pan-Orthodox Synod of Crete in 2016. The topic was given to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church for examination and in 1971, they submitted a one-

26. Cf. Franz Jockwig, *Der Weg der Laien auf das Landeskoncil der Russischen Orthodoxen Kirche Moskau 1917/18: Werden und Verwirklichung einer demokratischen Idee in der Russischen Kirche*, Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1971, 111-218.

27. Cf. Karl Christian Felmy, *Einführung in die orthodoxe Theologie der Gegenwart*, 3rd ed. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2014, 191-216.

28. Cf. David Heith-Stade, "The Pedalion and the Foundation of the Modern Theory of Eastern Orthodox Canon Law," *Orthodoxes Forum* 34:2 (2020): 181-195.

page report that basically stated that this is not an issue for the Orthodox Church, and it was removed from the synodal agenda.²⁹

This provoked among others, the Greek lay theology professor Ioannis Karmiris (1904-1992), who wrote his own report on the topic in which he argued that the laity as a part of the body of Christ participate in the threefold ministry of Christ as prophet, high priest, and king.³⁰ Consequently, the laity has a right to participate in all aspects of the ministry of the church. He also adapted the traditional Orthodox polemics against the Roman Catholic doctrine of the indelible character of ordination³¹ to argue that the distinction between clergy and laity is not ontological but liturgical. The laity cannot preside at the celebration of the sacraments (except for emergency baptism) but still participates in the celebration and the clergy cannot celebrate the sacraments without the laity. Karmiris' argumentation is primarily dogmatic although he also invokes the ideals of the New Testament and the example of the earliest church as well as the contemporary needs of the church to justify his position. He described the exclusion of the laity as the usurpation of the rights of the laity by the emperors and clergy (especially the bishops).

The position of Karmiris is not undisputed. The Russian theologian Nikolay Afanasyev (1893-1966) argued that the laity by virtue of the royal priesthood of all believers are co-celebrants of the sacraments, but to introduce the participation of the laity in church governance through elected representatives would mean a certain secularization of the church since the royal priesthood cannot be delegated to representatives.³² Instead, he argues that the participation of the laity in the ministry of the

29. Interorthodox Commission in the preparation for the next Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church, *Towards the Great Council: Introductory Reports*, London: SPCK, 1972, 22-23.

30. John N. Karmiris, *The Status and Ministry of the Laity in the Orthodox Church*, Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994.

31. Cf. Martin Jugie, *Theologia Dogmatica Christianorum Orientalium ab Ecclesia Catholica Dissidentium*, III: *Theologiae Dogmaticae Graeco-Russorum Expositio de Sacramentis*, Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1930, 418-428.

32. Nicholas Afanasiev, "The Ministry of the Laity in the Church," 1-14 in: *Called to Serve: Readings on Ministry from the Orthodox Church*, edited by William C. Mills, 2nd ed. OCABS Press, 2016.

church should be inspired by the various defunct ministries of earliest Christianity and that the church should institute new ministries that corresponds to the individual charismas of various laypersons.

From the positions thus far presented, we can note that there are some general types of argumentations. Those who argue in favor of reform tend on one hand to emphasize that the positives norms of Byzantine canon law do not correspond to the contemporary needs of the Orthodox Church, and, on the other hand, to emphasize some contemporary ideal such as constitutionalism, *sobornost'*, or democracy as the best solution to meet the contemporary needs of the church. Thus far so good.

However, many Orthodox theologians are unable to resist the temptation to project their theological ideal back on the New Testament or the pre-Byzantine church (or even the Byzantine church) so they can present their suggested reform as a restoration. This strategy makes their theological project vulnerable and dependent on historical criticism and thus the debate tends to move away from the practical solution of the contemporary problems of the church to a debate over the interpretation of history. In this context it is worth noting the approach of the Romanian canonist Liviu Stan (1910-1973).

Livius Stan defended his doctoral dissertation on the laity in church in 1936.³³ Stan's doctoral dissertation was intended as a defense of the reforms of Șaguna in the context of the debate over the constitution of a new united Romanian Orthodox Church in the Kingdom of Romania. His defense is not very original and mostly repeats previous arguments; however, he makes one important original contribution to the debate. Stan emphasized the historical relativity of canon law, and he did so even more in his later writings.³⁴ He did not try to project democracy or constitutionalism back on the New Testament and the earliest church. Instead, he argued that we are now dealing with new political realities

33. Liviu Stan, *Die Laien in der Kirche: Eine historisch-kirchenrechtliche Studie zur Beteiligung der Laien an der Ausübung der Kirchengewalt*, Würzburg: Egon-Verlag, 2011.

34. Stan Liviu, "Das Wesen des orthodoxen Kirchenrechts – göttliche Setzung oder geschichtlich wandelbar?" *Kyrios* 8 (1968): 180-189.

that make it possible to realize new aspects of the dogmatic foundation of the church, the body of Christ, constituted by both the clergy through the hierarchy and laity through the royal priesthood of all believers.

It is possible to argue that the Byzantine period meant that the church adapted itself to the social and political structures of the Byzantine Empire without losing its dogmatic foundation; however, these adaptations to the political and social structures of the Byzantine Empire are neither essential nor constitutive to the church, so it is possible for the church to adapt itself again to the social and political structures of the contemporary world as long as it remains faithful to its dogmatic foundation. This argument can be made without anachronistic attempts to project modern political structures and ideas back on to the New Testament and the pre-Byzantine church and, consequently, it is possible to focus the debate on how to solve the contemporary problems of the church rather than arguing about the interpretation of history!

In sum: almost all theological questions related to delegation and representation in the Orthodox Church are disputed questions. There is no consensus on who beyond the bishops are subjects of authority in the church and, consequently, have the right of representation in church governance. Is the pentarchy or the autocephalous churches representatives of the universal college of bishops? How does an ecumenical council represent the universal church? The doctrine of delegation is also not very developed. Is the parish priest, for example, primarily the delegate of the eparchial bishop or a representative of the local Eucharistic community analogous to the bishop in the early church? All these are open questions. Whatever system of governance the church develops must remain faithful to the dogmatic foundation of the church, which is the communion of members in the body of Christ composed of a hierarchy empowered by apostolic succession, and a laity empowered by the royal priesthood of all believers.

Orthodox Youth Movements

Mira Neaimeh

Basic to the ecclesiology of the Orthodox Church is the concept of conciliarity. The Church is, in fact, at her core always synod, the literal meaning of the word “Ekklesia”¹ (Patsavos, n.d.). Thus, when reflecting upon synodality, we refer to the essence and ethos of the ecclesiastical life in the Orthodox Church.

Exhibiting the concept of synodality draws our attention to the Orthodox movements that have influenced the dynamic ecclesiastical commitment and community engagement of Orthodox youth in the life of the Church, as a cross-cutting matter.

And there it was, a Fall day in 1941 at Saint Joseph University, when it was started with prompting from the Holy Spirit. It brought together Orthodox youth who were committed to their mother churches, yet trying to fit in with their Catholic surroundings. This was indeed the work of the Holy Spirit. Its mission was clear: “the Orthodox Youth Movement is a spiritual movement that calls all the Orthodox believers to a religious, ethical, cultural, and social renaissance.”

The Orthodox Youth Movement not only contributed to the awakening of the Orthodox spirit in Antioch, but it also contributed to the advancement of the ecumenical movement in this part of the world. The development of associations through which Orthodox youth could work has been an important aspect of ecumenical growth between 1948 and 1968. Orthodox youth leaders were the pioneers in establishing the pan-Orthodox youth organization known as *Syndesmos* in 1953, as well as the *World Student Christian Federation in the Middle East* (WSCF-ME) in 1962, mainly through the late Gabi Habib. This laid the foundation for other organizations to flourish, including the *Middle East Council of Churches* (MECC) that was established in 1974, also through

1. Patsavos, L. J. (n.d.). Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Retrieved from Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-synodal-structure-of-the-orthodox-church>.

the hard work of Gabi Habib.

On a broader level, the breakthrough continued into 1978, where, as the archives show, the *Second International Consultation of Orthodox Youth and Students* was organized in Cairo, between September 22 and 28, under the theme: “Christian Obedience and the Search for Liberation: An Orthodox Perspective”. When youth from Lebanon, Romania, Finland, Norway, Egypt, Cyprus, USA, Great Britain, USSR, and Jordan gathered, they called for a church that:

“should have the courage and faith to involve itself in a challenging relationship with secular structures and ideologies, proclaiming the prophetic message of liberation, and should recognize its tradition as dynamic and not static and that it should be opened and expectant of new Fathers of the Church to speak to the modern world ²”.

In a time where youth were locally striving and fighting, others were attending international conferences, tackling Orthodox youth representation in the different aspects of church life. The integrity of Orthodox witness in ecumenism was core in discussions:

“The Orthodox role in ecumenism cannot be abstract, disincarnate or triumphalistic. Rather it should be modeled on the kenosis of Christ, taking the form of a servant, bringing the tradition of faith, into the service of all Christians³”.

Therefore, the ecumenical movement requires of us all an interior liberation and a deep communion with the vision and will of God, in prayerful silence.

As for day-to-day synodality witness, the Orthodox Youth Movement was and continues to be a pioneer in social work in keeping with its fourth commandment: “The OYM refers to the global Christian values in dealing with social issues.” It cares for the poor, the oppressed, and every needy is at the core of living love through service. It also advocates for social issues in order to put an end to poverty, injustice, and all kinds of oppression.

2. Christian Obedience and the Search for Liberation: An Orthodox Perspective, Cairo: World Student Christian Federation, 1978.

3. Orthodox Youth in Ecumenism: Crisis and Hope, 1988.

The Orthodox Youth Movement was the first to help in configuring a certain mentality and ideology within the Church, as it carved a prominent place for seculars in Church, allowing them to teach and preach. It also impacted the Orthodox youth, inviting them to read and discern, lead and pray, as it is their call for a renaissance in the different aspects of Church.

Orthodox youth faced lucidly the different challenges while preserving the continuity of the Church tradition, nevertheless their active participation in today's ecumenical life with a dynamic approach in international ecumenical meetings, is the result of desirability of broadening the spectrum of witness in a disturbed region. Therefore, the synodality path embodied in rapprochement efforts, contributed to shaping the Orthodox Church in the East, by sharing knowledge and contributing to the progression in reflections as well as collaborations.

“For in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

The Role of Youth Movements in the Renewal of Conciliarity

Cyrille Sollogoub

I would like to begin my talk by expressing my thanks to the organizers for the invitation to this very interesting conference and my gratitude for the fact that “youth movements” are present in the program of this important conference on synodality and conciliarity. Actually, I do believe that youth movements have played a major role in the renewal during the 20th century not only for the awareness of conciliarity, but also in the implementation of the conciliarity.

What is meant by youth Movements?

We need first to clarify what is meant by “movement” and more specifically by “youth movement”. It is well known that brotherhood has been experienced in church history not only in eucharistic communities, parishes or monasteries, but also in organized fellowships, brotherhoods, fraternities, confraternities - whatever term we use - which can be defined as a collaboration of laypeople to fulfill one ecclesial service in a perspective of Christian solidarity, but also of diakonia and mission in the world.

There have been several famous examples throughout Church history of such brotherhoods. For example, in the early Church, in the city of Rome or Constantinople, brotherhoods of gravediggers (fossore, dékanoi) gathered laymen or women in charge of the free burial of the deceased people from families without any resources. In Alexandria, we found structures composed with hundreds of nurses (parabalanoi) to care for the sick. Throughout the Roman Empire, in the East and in the West, at a time when the monastic movement was developing, groups of lay people also arose, who gathered and agreed to live a common spiritual life without breaking away from the world. These pious laymen and women, recruited from the craftsmen but also from the wealthy classes, were called the spoudaioi (devotees) or philoponoi

(active workers). In the Slavic and Russian world, it is important to know that fraternities have also been alive over the centuries. For example, so called Ruthenian fraternities (as the Slavic Orthodox populations in the Polish regions were called) gathered the faithful in large cities such as Lviv and Vilnius. They were particularly active in education and opening schools in parishes, when part of the Orthodox elite converted to Catholicism or Protestantism. They also played an important role at the moment of the union of Brest-Litovsk in 1596, resisting the joint pressure of the Polish authorities and the Roman Church. In Tsarist Russia, there was also a multitude of fraternities that developed mainly for charitable and educational purposes, especially after the abolition of serfdom. Finally, many fraternities were created after Patriarch Tikhon's appeal during the Revolution to protect church property plundered by the Bolsheviks¹.

Still, we can notice a radical change in the nature and the mission of brotherhoods in the 20th century with the apparition of movements, lay movements and youth movements. It seems that this change can be linked with the end of the Constantinian era – the collapse of the Russian Empire with the Bolshevik Revolution – and the entrance into the post-Constantinian era. In this new era, the Church no longer had the support of the State, so her strength must have come from within her. At this time, appeared the notion of “movements”, lay movements and youth movements, that would, as their name indicates, try to move forward, to remove from Church life what is extrinsic to catholicity and to promote dormant aspects of the ecclesial Tradition.

Concerning the adjective “youth” in the terminology, we can say that this is somehow a vague, ill-defined notion, even an ecclesiological nonsense, because the notion of youth as a separate category in the Church cannot exist. From an ecclesiological point of view, we can only consider people of a certain age, who are full members of the Church. It seems to me that, when we speak of youth movements in the Church, youth is considered as a state of mind, a way of being, a spirit, rather than a group defined by an age limitation. Therefore, “youth movements”

1. C. Sollogoub, *Influence du Concile sur le renouveau des fraternités et des mouvements de laïcs orthodoxes*, *Contacts* N° 263, (2018), pp. 395-405.

refer to movements with charisma and qualities generally attributed to youth: boldness, courage, dynamism, the ability to adapt to changing realities, but also naivety, innocence, – in other words, movements of renewal of the Church.

Such movements can be considered as real breathes or impulses of the Spirit, born to respond to a need, to particular or tragic historical circumstances. They are spaces of fraternity, dialogue, freedom, creativity and conciliarity. We must recognize, by the way, that their place in the traditional structures of the Church has not been well defined yet and that is the reason there may sometimes be a tension between these movements and the institutions. We can say that the movements are located at the very heart of the classic conflict, tension between Church as “institution”, i.e. a static vision of the Church, and Church as “event” or “living body”, that corresponds to a more dynamic vision of the Church.

The role of youth movements in the renewal of conciliarity

In the second part, I will try to show how youth movements have participated in the renewal of conciliarity or rather catholicity of the Church (*Sobornost'*), based on my experience and my involvement in one youth movement born in the context of the Russian diaspora in the West. The movement I am referring to is the Russian Student Christian Movement (RSCM), (ACER-MJO in French, PCXД in Russian), one of the main Church Movements of the 20th century, that was founded by a group of intellectuals and students expelled from Russia by Bolshevik Revolution in October 1923, in Pšerov (Czechoslovakia).

It must be first emphasized that the historical background of the Russian diaspora has played a great role in the rediscovery of conciliarity: a context of total freedom from any political power, the possibility of rediscovering the universal dimension of the Church, which was not the prerogative of a state or an Empire, the experience of exile and material poverty, the possibility of conducting a sincere and profound dialogue with the Western modern world, in particular Western Christianity. Father Sergius Bulgakov, one of the founders and the most inspiring leaders of the RSCM, likened the Constantinian period in the history of Christianity to the stage of childhood, characterized by its carelessness

and lack of responsibility: “Before, everything in the Church was given and organized by the State, so that one could live passively”. But a new era is beginning, “a new era of ecclesio-historical awareness”, an “era of ecclesial creation. It is now up to us to create, to build ourselves what the State used to give to the Church”. Father Serge called for the completion of the stage of childhood, in order not to sink into “infantilism”, and to take on with courage “the weight of responsibility and freedom”.²

The founding conference of the RSCM in Pšerov was lived as a real Pentecost, a kind of existential experience during which the participants rediscovered, as all baptized, their status of “priests, prophets and Kings”, and that the consequence of this status is their responsibility for the historical journey of the Church, her unity, her mission, and witness in the world. Vassily Zenkovsky, who was one of the leaders of the RSCM, expressed this feeling in a short formula which became well known: “In Pšerov, the theme ‘us and the Church’ disappeared in favour of a new theme, full of joy and responsibility; ‘us in the Church’³. In their experience, the rediscovery of the catholicity of the Church was intimately linked with the sense of responsibility each baptized person holds for the Church.

All the initiatives that arose within RSCM afterwards stemmed from this rediscovery of Catholicity: theological education, work with young people, promotion of unity among the Orthodox, ecumenical dialogue, renewal of the mission. As regards theological education for example, it is clear that if we are responsible for the Church, we must be educated in order to be able to bear this responsibility, hence the development of bible studies, theological seminars and conferences. In the same idea, if we want to serve the renewal, it is quite natural and evident to begin with youth and young people for their education. Similarly, if we have the

2. C. Sollogoub, le p. Serge Boulgakov et l'ACER, perspectives historiques, *Le Messager Orthodoxe*, N°152 (2012).

3. V. Zenkovsky, *Iz moej jizny: Vospominania* (From my Life: Memories), izd.Dom Russkogo Zarubejia im. Aleksandra Soljenitsyna, 2014, p. 58 (in Russian).

conviction to be part of the one, Catholic and Apostolic Church, so it is natural to promote unity and mission.

Moreover, RSCM was, according to the founders, supposed to become the embodiment of the idea of conciliarity, of sobornost', inherited from Russian religious philosophy and widely discussed and theorized by Slavophiles. Any form of work within RSCM was, according to Zenkovsky, to be based on "this living and effective principle".⁴ More concretely, this principle manifested itself in the fact that all decisions have to be taken in a collegial manner and that the responsibility for the movement was carried by a group of people chosen by all the members. According to Zenkovsky, this principle does not mean that, within this group, the opinion of the majority or the 'arithmetic average' of the different opinions present should be imposed on all. Rather, the principle consisted in finding a synthesis with which everybody, without exception, could agree. This "mystery of conciliarity" required a real collective asceticism and presupposed, in Zenkovsky's experience, a strong spirit of ecclesial communion, which to his great regret, was only achieved at rare privileged moments, such as during the conferences. Zenkovsky noticed in some of his collaborators a total lack of aptitude for the "psychology of conciliarity", which presupposes a willingness and ability to understand the thinking of others and to seek that "supreme synthesis".

Finally, one of the ways to embody and promote conciliarity for youth movements is the fact that they are opportunities for freedom and dialogue. One of the charismas of youth is to dare to say things, with sincerity and sometimes naivety and innocence. Similarly, youth movements must identify the challenges facing the Church and the world as well as the needs, the problems in the life of the Church. They must try to address and tackle problems. They must serve as a spur to our ecclesial consciousness and to the hierarchy, especially whenever there is a lack of conciliarity. To be able to render this service to the Church, youth movements must be free and independent of church structures.

In conclusion, I have to deplore that there is very often a confusion between youth movements as I tried to define it in the beginning of my

4. Ibid., p. 86.

talk and other so-called youth movements, which are actually rather a youth department of a diocese, under the control of the diocesan bishop or administration. It is clear that, as it has been shown, youth movements – in the sense defined above – have emerged from a surge of conciliarity and have themselves contributed to defending and witnessing this conciliarity within the Church and to combating clericalism, which remains a permanent threat to the life of our churches. I even dare to say that youth movements are “prophetic phenomenon”: as the Church’s entry into the Constantinian era had led to the emergence of monastic communities within the Church, its exit led to the emergence of such movements, that are spaces of freedom and creativity, born to activate and serve the conciliarity.

The Participation of Lay People in the Election of Primates and Bishops

Alexander Rentel

Initial Remarks. As is typical in a conference paper, I begin by offering my thanks for the invitation from Pro Oriente to participate in this international conference. I am grateful also to the organizers, the planners, and the benefactors whose work enables us to have such a meeting. I must admit, traveling to Rome, discussing theological topics gives me a great thrill. We are doing something at our conference that is at once new and thoroughly modern (coming from all over the world talking about contemporary theological problems), yet old and utterly apostolic (gathering from all over the world in order to discuss theological problems). May God inspire us to “speak the truth in love (Eph 4.15)” with one another, but also to have “ears to hear” (cf. Mt 13.16) one another. With these comments, I begin my presentation.

General Comments

At the outset of my reflection on the participation of the laity in the election of primates and bishops within the Orthodox Church, I feel it necessary to indicate that I will address this topic from the perspective of the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church. By so doing, I hope not only to bring out points of data on the specific topic at hand, but also highlight elements of methodology required for proper canonical interpretation on any subject. I will draw data points first from the *corpus canonum* of the Orthodox Church, then from complementary texts, and finally from observations of contemporary experience. I will conclude my paper with broad observations about how the canonical tradition works and what lessons can be brought to bear for the theme of our conference.

First Methodological Point

The first methodological point that I will highlight is the necessity of doing a close reading of the handful of canons that speak to the election of bishops, searching them for key words and phrases, being specially attuned to the rhetoric of the texts¹.¹ At first read, these canons speak very little about popular participation in the election of bishops of any type. Nevertheless, closely reading these canons do uncover hints of a more complex election process that involves not only the clergy, but also the laity.

The Canons that Do Not Speak of Laity. The majority of canons, those that date from the fourth century, that do speak about the election of bishops - and there are many - can be understood to speak about election or ordination, since the word χειροτονία could refer to either. To this point, the evidence for a specific rite of ordination (not election) for bishops at the beginning of the fourth century is not abundant. I note that it is only at the time of the Council in Trullo (AD 691/692) that canons clearly allude to a particular liturgical rite for episcopal ordination. That a specific rite existed prior to Trullo is most likely, but when and where it came into widespread use cannot be determined conclusively. Reading these canons carefully, having the ambiguity of this word in mind, reveals concerns about how many bishops are needed for the election/ordination of a bishop, how consensus is reached for an election and what kind of consensus is needed (majority or unanimity), and the role of the bishop of the metropolis, the metropolitan bishop, in the election/ordination.

Canonical points

That these points were repeated over and again in canons points to either their limited acceptance at first or continued difficulties in the life of the church. Also, these canons are focused on primacy, consensus, and process, because that is what they address. As Laodicea 12 indicates, however, the process is in place in order to discern who has been proven

1. I have in mind here the standard set of canons: Apostolic 1; I Nicea 4, 6; Antioch 16-19; Laodicea 12; Sardica 6; Carthage 13, 49-50; Constantinople 1; II Nicea 3.

to be the best candidate “in word of faith and in conversation of an honest life.” That the laity are not mentioned, however, should not lead us to think that the canonical tradition did not provide a role for them in this process.

The Canons that Do Speak of Laity

One canon in the corpus, Sardica 6, stands out from the rest and does, in fact, speak about some role accorded to the laity in the election of a bishop. Bishop Ossius said:

If it happens in a province in which there are many bishops that one bishop stays away and because of some negligence does not wish to assemble and to consent to the appointment of bishops (καταστάσει τῶν ἐπισκόπων), and the gathering of the people (τὰ δὲ πλήθη συναθροισθέντα) call for the appointment of him whom they desire as bishop, it is necessary first that the single bishop who defaulted be summoned by letter from the exarch of the province, I mean the bishop of the metropolis, that the people (ὅτι ἀξιοῖ τὰ πλήθη) ask that a shepherd be given them. I think that it is good to wait until he comes. But if after the summons by letter he does not arrive nor answers in writing, the people’s wish should be satisfied²...

In order to understand this canon, we must read with all care not the translation, but the original, lest we be led astray and hear “people” in the modern sense, when the canon, in fact speaks not about the people but “the multitude/τὰ πλήθη.” To be sure, “populi” is used in the Latin version of this canon, but here again *populus* in this canon would have been understood in a Roman legal sense, and not a modern one. I make this distinction so that we are not caught up in the idea of a modern liberal democracy, which is not the process used to elect a bishop according to the canonical tradition. What this canon presents is a two-step election process: a request from the people, and an appointment (καταστάσει) of a bishop by the bishops. The phrases “...whom they desire...,” and “...ask that a shepherd...,” and “...the people’s wish

2. Greek text and translation taken from H. Hess, *The Early Development of Canon Law and the Council of Serdica* (Oxford 2002) 228-231.

should be satisfied....” anticipate exactly what will be seen in documents from outside the canonical corpus, but also casts relief on the canons that do not mention “the multitude” in this process. Those canons do not mention the multitude, because they are not addressing that step of the election process. Two points emerge here: canons by themselves are not comprehensive in their scope, thus no canon or set of canons can be read in isolation to others.

Second Methodological Point

A second methodological point begins now in the place where the canons end, and a search is made for evidence of normative practice in a wider range of ecclesiastical and even secular literature. My methodological point is this: the use of texts from outside the corpus of canons is perfectly consistent with the canonical tradition, because the canonical tradition shares principles from the Roman legal tradition. Both of these traditions legitimately search “practice established by customs and usage” to make up for deficiencies in the law. As such, looking at texts from the so-called *Apostolic Constitutions*, or texts from liturgical history, and the *Novella* of Justinian helps us understand the broader context that the canons were written in, and consequently the canons themselves.

Apostolic Constitutions. From the end of the fourth century, Book VIII.4 of the so-called *Apostolic Constitutions* describes the process of the election of a bishop.

Apostolic Constitutions, Book VIII.4: 1. Wherefore we, the twelve apostles of the Lord, who are now together, give you in charge those divine constitutions concerning every ecclesiastical form (τύπου), there being present with us Paul the chosen vessel, our fellow-apostle, and James the bishop, and the rest of the presbyters, and the seven deacons. 2. In the first place, therefore, I, Peter, say that a bishop to be ordained (χειροτονεῖσθαι) is to be, as we have already, all of us, appointed, without blame in all things (ἐν πᾶσιν ἄμιμπτον), a person chosen on merits by the all the people (ἀριστίνδην ὑπὸ παντός τοῦ λαοῦ ἐκλελεγμένον). 3. When he is named and approved, the people assembled together with the presbytery

and bishops who are present, on the Lord's Day, let the principal of the others (ὁ πρόκριτος τῶν λοιπῶν) ask the presbytery and people if this is he whom they desire for their ruler (εἰς ἄρχοντα). 4. And if they give their consent, let him ask further whether he has a good testimony from all men as to his worthiness for so great and glorious an authority; whether all things relating to his piety towards God be right; whether justice towards men has been observed by him; whether the affairs of his family have been well ordered by him; whether he has been without blame in the course of his life. 5. And if all the assembly together do according to truth, and not according to prejudice, witness that he is such a one, let them the third time, as before God the Judge, and Christ, the Holy Ghost being also present, as well as all the holy and ministering spirits, ask again whether he be truly worthy of this ministry, that so in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established (Matthew 18:16). And if they agree the third time that he is worthy, let them all be demanded their vote; and when they all give it willingly, let them be heard. 6. And silence being made, let one of the principal bishops, together with two others, stand near to the altar, the rest of the bishops and presbyters praying silently, and the deacons holding the divine Gospels open upon the head of him that is to be ordained, and say to God thus: [continues with the ordination prayer]³

In this passage, a single-step process is in place that involves the inquiry of the first bishop, “the principal of the others,” of the presbytery and the faithful about “whom they desire as their ruler.” This inquiry focuses in on their testimony as to the candidate’s worthiness. The text then provides a line of questions based on the scripture regarding this testimony that the “principal of the others” is to ask. The process described here, asking for testimony about the worthiness of a candidate, provides further nuance to the canon from Sardica, mentioned above. Asking the bishops for a particular candidate to be their shepherd implies what is spoken of in this text: a knowledge of the candidate and a testimony to his worthiness. Further, the point of this text is consistent

3. Translation adapted <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/07158.htm>. See *Les constitutions apostolique. Tome III: Livres VII et VIII* (M. Metzger, trans.) (Sources Chrétiennes 336, Paris 1987) 140-143.

with the canonical texts. Namely the process is in place in order to find someone “worthy of this ministry.”

Justinian, *Novella* 137. In the sixth century, Justinian provided a *novella* on the election of a bishop, which is, as he himself says, consistent with what I have presented so far.

Justinian, *Novella* 137. IV. Therefore we, conceding the authority of the sacred canons, do promulgate the present law, by which we decree that every time it may be necessary to consecrate a bishop in any city, the clergy and principal citizens of the said city shall assemble, and issue proclamations by which they nominate three persons, and then make oath on the Holy Gospels, in conformity with the Scriptures. This oath, inserted in the proclamations, shall be worded as follows: “That they did not select the three persons whom they have nominated in consideration of any gifts or promises made to them; nor through friendship, nor induced by any affection whatsoever, but for the reason that they knew that the candidates whom they have chosen are steadfast in the Catholic Faith, and of honorable life; that they have passed the age of thirty years, and have neither wives nor children; and that they have had neither concubines nor natural children, nor have any at present; and if any of them formerly had a wife, he had but one, and she was neither a widow, nor separated from her husband, and that his marriage with her was not prohibited, either by the sacred canons, or by secular laws; that neither of the three candidates is charged with the duties of any public office, that none of them is a decurion, a taxeota, or a cohortal, or, if he is, he has, in the capacity of a monk, passed fifteen years in a monastery.” The rules, whose observance we have already ordered, shall be applicable to candidates, in order that, from among the three who are nominated, the one who is the best qualified may be selected by the prelate conferring the ordination. Before this is done, however, the person to be ordained must sign a document containing the declaration of faith as set forth in the sacred formula employed in the celebration of the eucharist, the invocation repeated in baptism, and the other prayers. We also desire that he who receives ordination shall swear upon the Holy Scriptures: “That he has not given, nor promised to give anything whatsoever, either personally, or through the agency of

anyone else; and that, after his ordination, he will not give anything to the prelate whose duty it is to bestow it upon him, or to those who have asked that he be ordained, or to anyone whomsoever on account of the ceremony.” If a bishop should be consecrated in violation of what is above laid down, we decree that he, along with the prelate who dared to consecrate him in contravention of our orders, shall be deprived of the episcopate⁴.

In this text, “the clergy and principal citizens” of the city nominate three candidates for episcopal ordination. Their nomination, this law stresses, is based on no other reason than “they *knew* the candidates whom they have chosen.” The emperor also says that he put this rule in place so that “from among the three who are nominated, the one is best qualified may be selected.” His concern about the selection, I feel, is the ultimate concern of the canonical texts I have adduced up to this point, as well as the text from the *Apostolic Constitutions*.

Concluding Remarks

I will conclude with reflections on my own experience. In my own Church, the Orthodox Church in America, we have attempted to follow a two-step process reminiscent of what is found in the canonical corpus. Our assemblies, diocesan or church-wide, with a mixed composition (bishops, clergy, and faithful) together nominate a candidate for the holy synod to consider and possibly elect canonically. I wish I could say that process has turned out demonstrably better bishops than other methods, but I cannot. The results have been mixed. I emphasize here that I am neither implying nor advocating for a change in this two-step method, but that the results demonstrate my final point: what has emerged from my inquiry is both a set of processes, which, even if not exactly identical, are similar and complementary, and a set of guidelines that are to direct a process that leads to an outcome. This outcome is further determined by decisions, a decision to elect by the synod, and decision to confirm the election by the presiding bishop. No process, however, can guarantee an outcome, and we would be well served not to prioritize a process at

4. https://droitromain.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/Anglica/N137_Scott.htm.

the expense of the outcome. Ultimately, the varied evidence that I have presented demonstrates that it is not this or that process, but a result that these texts are searching for, which leads clearly to the decisions at each step (providing testimony, election, confirmation) as being all important. That these processes are similar, however, demonstrates that the tradition sees that the broad framework that allows for popular participation in the election of a bishop is the best process for the desired outcome. While this broad framework does not determine the outcome, it nevertheless attempts to lead the process to the point when the best decision can be made and a worthy candidate can be chosen.

Women and Orthodox Conciliar Practices

Carrie Frederick Frost

In 2019, I had the good fortune to introduce Metropolitan Kallistos Ware – may his memory be eternal – as the keynote of the inaugural conference of the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA), who spoke on “Synodality and Primacy in the Orthodox Church.” He said, “A synod is a group of persons – primarily bishops, but also including priests and lay participants – who are engaged in a common pilgrimage, who are journeying together on the same path. This idea of a shared journey, implying as it does a sense of movement and exploration, reminds us that synods are not static but dynamic, not repetitive but revelatory.” Furthermore, Ware encouraged us to “envisage [synodality] in wide-ranging terms,” not limited to actual councils, but “understood more broadly as in the diocese, in the parish, and in our personal lives.”¹

“Synodal” and “conciliar” are sometimes used interchangeably in the Orthodox Church but are not quite synonyms. Synodal, as Met. Kallistos presents it, has more to do with ethos; it is bigger, expansive, and perhaps more elusive than conciliar. Conciliar pertains specifically to councils themselves; authoritative Orthodox gatherings that govern and lead the church. By comparing the more expansive “synodal” with the more particular “conciliar,” we see that everything conciliar should ideally be synodal in character; all councils should be infused with a spirit of common pilgrimage of the faithful.

My focus is the matter of women and synodality, and I will specifically speak to the ways in which the expansive sense of synodal is manifested or not when it comes to women and Orthodox conciliar practices.

1. Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, “Synodality and Primacy,” Keynote at the International Orthodox Theological Association, January 11, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WexUpqstG9Q>.

A recent and illustrative case study is the Orthodox 2016 Holy and Great Council, which was convened to address matters of importance in our contemporary world and was composed almost exclusively of (male) Orthodox hierarchs. Women were included in only the most token of manners. To be specific: Four women were named at the last minute as non-voting Special Consultants² with extremely limited opportunities to contribute, and only two out of the ten autocephalous churches that attended the council included women in their official delegations as Special Consultants.³

The eleventh-hour inclusion of these four women of course meant that they were not involved in any pre-conciliar discussions or drafting of documents, which is where most of the work gets done. At the council, these Special Consultant women were lost in a sea of black-robed and bearded men, yet all the issues under review related directly to the lives of women. Met. Kallistos's synodal vision of a "common pilgrimage, [of people] who are journeying together on the same path," was not achieved at the 2016 Council.

There are other, smaller scale case studies of women and the Orthodox conciliar process. Some Orthodox churches (both autocephalous and jurisdictions) include women at their ecclesial assemblies. Recent councils of the Russian Orthodox Church were composed of ten percent women delegates, both nuns and laywomen.⁴ A few American examples: the Orthodox Church in America includes lay

2. Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, "Organization and Working Procedure" Section 3.2. <https://holycouncil.org/procedures>.

3. Cf. "Orthodox Christian Women and God-talk: Reflecting on the Before, During, and After of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church," in *The Reception of the Holy and Great Council: Reflections of Orthodox Christian Women*, ed. Carrie Frederick Frost (New York: Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Department of Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical, and Interfaith Affairs, 2018) 130-137.

4. Nadieszda Kizenko, "Feminized Patriarchy? Orthodoxy and Gender in Post-Soviet Russia," *Signs* 38.3 (2013) 598-601.

delegates, including women, in its All-American Council;⁵ the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in America also allows the same at both its Clergy-Laity Congress and its Archdiocesan Council;⁶ and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA the same at its Sobor.⁷

Even in these contemporary examples of women's participation in the conciliar process of the church, the composition of these gatherings is dominated by male clerics – bishops, priests, and deacons – and to a smaller degree, laymen. Women's participation continues to be both minority and largely token. This extremely limited participation in the conciliar process is at odds with the fact that never before in history have so many Orthodox women been able to offer so much relevant expertise to the conciliar practices of the Orthodox Church. Women in the Orthodox Church today are neither meaningfully included in the “common pilgrimage” of synodality in a larger sense, nor meaningfully included in the conciliar process in the narrower sense.

This exclusion of women is just one example among many of the contradictions between what the Orthodox Church teaches about women and what it practices about women. It would be consistent with our ideals to openly encourage the presence and participation of women in every facet of Church life, *including its synodal character and conciliar expression*. The Church understands women and men as both made in the image and likeness of God and equal in dignity and deification. But the Orthodox Church has not always, in its earthly manifestation, lived up to these ideals. This disparity between teachings and practice is now being acknowledged and addressed in the Orthodox context. For example, *For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church* states that, “While

5. Orthodox Church in America, “All-American Council,” III. <https://www.oca.org/statute/article-iii>.

6. Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, “Regulations, 2019,” Article VI, Section 5. <https://www.goarch.org/documents/32058/3058354/2019+Regulations.pdf>.

7. Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, “XXXII Sobor.” https://www.uocofusa.org/xxiii_sobor.

the Orthodox Church has always held as a matter of doctrine and theology that men and women are equals in personhood, it has not always proved scrupulously faithful to this ideal.”⁸ A reoccurring theme of this conference is the hope that the Catholic Church might learn from the mistakes of the Orthodox Church. I additionally hope that both churches will learn how to admit that the church makes mistakes.

The Orthodox Church is not a democracy; it is not an institution that values equal representation as a stand-alone good. The Church is – ideally – *synodal* in character. In a truly synodal church, women will quite naturally be included in the conciliar process, not by quota or special categories. In a truly synodal church, women will be part of councils as laywomen as well as members of the minor orders: chanter, reader, and sub-deacon. In a truly synodal church, women will be included in councils as members of the ordained order of diaconess.

I make this last statement about deaconesses and a truly synodal church not out of an appeal to fairness, but an appeal to faithfulness, both to Orthodox teachings and history. We have a long-stranding and venerable tradition of offering women the authority, support, and accountability of the church and conferring on them the gifts of the Holy Spirit through ordination to the diaconate. We will be closer to the larger synodal sense of a “common pilgrimage” when we have deaconesses once more. We will be closer to a synodal church when women as deaconesses, as members of the major clergy, are able to offer their perspectives, their gifts to all aspects of the church, including its councils. When the Orthodox Church reinstitutes the role of the ordained diaconess, it will move closer to being fully synodal in character and in council.

I look forward to the day when women and men are more truly “engaged in a common pilgrimage... journeying together on the same path,” manifesting the synodal character of the Orthodox Church in its conciliar practices and otherwise.

8. For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2020), §29 and goarch.org/social-ethos.

Women in the Church: An Example of Synodality in Orthodoxy

Adrian Crăciun

Recently, the Orthodox Church raised the question of the presence and participation of women in the liturgical, educational, and pastoral life of the Church. This was discussed locally but at a conciliar level, and with notable exceptions, the issue is still substantially ignored. This is evident in the documents of the recent Pan-Orthodox Council in Crete (2016). They reaffirmed the synodical spirit of Orthodoxy, in other words, its conciliar ethos. The presence of women in the Church seems however a scheduled omission.

The government of the Church is reserved to men as is the possibility of being ordained as deacon, priest, and bishop. Access to the sacrament of ordination is closely intertwined with all other aspects of Church organization.

In modern context, the rigid notion of governance or synodality should be deepened, and not forgotten in the sphere of conceptuality. It would benefit from turning theological concepts about the status of women in the Church into concrete steps to acknowledge that they are equal members of the Church as their male counterparts and to recognize the essential contribution the women have in the Church. We need a redefined synodality that also answers the issue of the place of women in the Church. A possible start is discussing synodality in the context of the parish, a level which has received less attention in comparison with the other forms of church organization but where women do make an essential contribution to the theological, liturgical and governance aspects of a community. Women are underrepresented in positions of responsibility in many church contexts, though they often find their mission expressed in different forms of pastoral care. As a form of conciliar administration, the Parish Council, elected and instituted by the Parish General Assembly, watches over the daily running of the community. Often the manager of the administration of the parish is a

woman. In the parish's life, women may be involved in the upkeep of church property, but they sometimes work as catechists, icon painters, and choirmasters; they are as effective as men in teaching the faith in their individual roles in the parish.¹

In this context two questions could guide the brief investigation: are women at all levels sufficiently integrated into the tissue of the conciliarity of the Church? Are they represented on occasions when ecclesial thought is elaborated in response to the spiritual, ethical, and institutional problems of the Church of our time?²

This paper reflects on the issue of women and conciliarity beginning from a short discussion of a few historical facts relevant to this topic. Second, it reviews a number of "study cases" examining the conciliar attitude toward laics and women in the life of several local Churches. The paper continues with discussing various models of synodality in the life of the Church which inherently include the presence of women. This essay is a short reflection on the presence of women

1. In their vision statement the Women in the Orthodox Church Group recall that: Women-apostles, martyrs, saints, nuns, deaconesses, prophets, teachers, mothers, and grandmothers have played an important, active, and courageous role in the Orthodox Church throughout its history. They spoke publicly and resisted the powers and authorities of the world; they proclaimed the Gospel; they supported local communities in various ways, including spiritually and economically; and they influenced the historical route of Christianity in the world. [...] Today their role extends throughout the Orthodox domain. Women, either alone or in equal partnership with male catechists, work in religious education. They sing in the choir, serve as choir directors, parish educators, and parish leaders. They are members of the parish and diocesan councils, and, in some cases, members of the diocesan assembly that elects the bishop. Orthodox women scholars teach at secular universities as well as Orthodox seminaries and are involved in preparing male seminarians for the priesthood. They serve on ecumenical commissions, and represent Orthodoxy in a wide range of public, sacred, and secular capacities. <https://iota-web.org/women-orthodox-church-group/>

2. These questions are already addressed by Elisabeth Behr-Sigel in her book written by the end of the 1980's, *Le ministère de la femme dans l'Église*, Cerf, Paris, 1987, p. 231.

in the synodal structures of the Church. It may serve as a departing point for deeper historical, canonical and theological analysis.

Some short historical references

The history of the Eastern Church councils does not go at length on other matters than the theological debates and the participation and implication of different influential bishops and occasionally of prominent priest theologians. The agency of high-ranking women is well documented in the history of Byzantium, and this offers an important insight also in relation to the place of women in the Church. An extraordinary example is the empress Irina who called the Ecumenical Council of 787.³ Although this Council has little to do with women, the female agency is essential in clarifying a dogmatic issue like the veneration of Icons. In similar circumstances, empress Theodora⁴ plays a fundamental role in re-establishing the veneration of the Icons after the death of her husband the iconoclastic emperor Theophilos. This is to say that women have essentially influenced the synodal process of the Byzantine Church.

3. Ostrogorsky George, *History of the Byzantine State*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1956; J.R. Martindale, *Prosopography of the Byzantine Empire*, 2001; Herrin Judith, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium*, Phoenix Press, London 2001; Barbe Dominique, *Irène de Byzance: La femme empereur*, Paris, 1990.

4. Lynda Garland, *Theodora, restorer of Orthodoxy*, in: *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium AD 527-1204*, Routledge, London, 1999, p. 95-108; Judith Herrin, *Unrivalled Influence: Women and Empire in Byzantium*, Princeton University Press, Oxford, 2013; Alexandra Karagianni, *Female Monarchs in the Medieval Byzantine Court: Prejudice, Disbelief and Calumnies*, in: Elena Woodacre (ed.) *Queenship in the Mediterranean: Negotiating the Role of the Queen in the Medieval and Early Modern Eras*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013; Alexander Kazhdan ed., *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*: Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991.

Deaconesses – a token of synodality

The institution of the deaconesses is an example in history that illustrates the role played by women in the conciliar life of the Church, whether on a liturgical or charitable level. The subject is presently found under scholarly research with satisfactory results both in the oriental and occidental theology.⁵

In the Orthodox Churches, deaconesses served in the areas of liturgy, pastoral care, catechesis, education, mission, and care for sick, bereaved, and needy women of all faiths. They were also in charge of educating the church's virgins and of supporting widows. It was their duty to maintain decorum and order during the religious service. They also helped with the baptismal liturgy. Similarly, they brought the Eucharist to the sick women who could not attend the Liturgy as well as they served in the funeral rituals of women.⁶

5. See the reach volume dedicated to the theme: *Deaconesses, the Ordination of Women and Orthodox Theology*, edited by Petros Vassiliadis, Niki Papageorgiou and Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle, 2017. See also K.K. Fitzgerald, *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church*, Brookline, 1998; V.A. Karras, *Female Deacons in the Byzantine Church*, dans *Church History*. 2004, Vol. 73. p. 272-316; M. Metzger, *Le diaconat féminin dans l'histoire*, dans *Mother, Nun? Deaconess: Images of Women according to Eastern Canon Law*, ed. by E. Synek, Egling, 2000, p. 144-166; K. Romaniuk, *Was Phoebe on Romans 16.1 a Deaconess?* Dans *ZNW* 81. 1990, p. 132-134; R.F. Taft, *Women at Church in Byzantium: where, when and why?* dans *DOP* 52. 1998, p. 27-87; J. Ysebaert, *The Deaconesses in the Western Church of Late Antiquity and their Origin*, dans *Eulogia: Mélanges offerts à A. Bastiansen*. ed. by G.J.M. Bartelink, Steenbrugge, 1991, p. 421-436.

6. Ancient sources as the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and the *Constitutiones Apostolorum*, make references to the involvement of women in these different rites. See Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *The Didascalia Apostolorum: An English Version*, *Studia Traditionis Theologiae, Explorations in Early and Medieval Theology*, Brepols Publishers, 2009; Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 85-87; Gregory

Up to the 12th century, the female diaconate was in use in the ancient Church, mainly in Syria and Byzantium.⁷ A description of the ordination rite of deaconesses, attributed to the Byzantine theologian Matthew Blastaras (14th century) was translated by Sergei Hackel.⁸ The text places emphasis on “the dignity” but also on other specificities or limits of the deaconess’s ministry. It is not to be confused with that of the bishop-presbyter and remains subordinate to him in the sense of the trinitarian taxis.⁹ In the invocations of this *Euchologion*, the bishop, with his hand on the head of the woman being ordained prays:

O Lord God, who dost not reject women who offer themselves in accordance with the divine will to minister in thy holy places, but admitst them into the rank of ministers (*leiturgoî*), give the grace of thy Holy Spirit even to this thy handmaid, who desires to offer herself to thee and to fulfil the grace of thy ministry....¹⁰

W. Woolfenden, *Daily liturgical prayer: origins and theology*, Ashgate Publishing, 2004. p. 27; *Apostolical constitutions*, in: *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, Vol. 1. Concept Publishing Company, 2005, p. 119; *Les Constitutions apostoliques II*, 329. ed. by Marcel Metzger, Cerf, Paris, 1986; *Les Constitutions apostoliques III*, Collection Sources chrétiennes 336. ed. by Marcel Metzger, Cerf, Paris, 1987, see especially books II, III, and VIII, with information regarding the deaconesses.

7. Historical aspects and canonical dimensions were presented by Evangelos Theodorou in his doctoral thesis *Hè “Cheirotonia”, hè “Cheirothesia” tôn Diakonissôn*, Athens, 1954. See also the book by Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerlad, *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church: Called to Holiness and Ministry*, Brookline, MA, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998. On the same subject see, P.H. Lafontaine, *Les conditions positives de l’accession aux ordres*, Ottawa, 1963, as well as R. Gryson, *Le Ministère des femmes dans l’Église ancienne*, Gembloux, 1972.

8. Sergei Hackel, *The Byzantine Deaconess: a forgotten ordination rite*, in: *Sobornost Series 7*, no. 7. 1978, p. 595-596.

9. Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, *Le ministère de la femme dans l’Église*, p. 233.

10. Sergei Hackel, *The Byzantine Deaconess*, p. 596.

It seems that along with these texts there is no gender-specific distinction between a higher or lower level of ordination. This situation is reflected in the thinking of several Orthodox theologians.¹¹

Since the 1980s, the Orthodox Churches discussed the reinstatement of women's diaconate. The Ecumenical Patriarchate organized a Pan-Orthodox Conference in Rhodes in 1988¹² to talk about the position of women in the Church and whether women can be ordained. This conference followed the inter-Orthodox symposium that was held in Boston in 1985¹³ and at which the restoration of the institution of the deaconess was discussed. The need to renew the women's diaconate was emphasized here since it had never been formally abolished, but only ignored for centuries.¹⁴

11. According to Evangelos Theodorou, to take an example, the epiclesis is a part of the ordination forms, and the invocation of divine grace in the ordination prayer clearly suggests sacramental ordination. The diaconate, which includes women's diaconate, belongs to the "higher ordo," which includes the bishop and presbyter, in line with the Orthodox theological understanding of these ordination forms. See Evangelos Theodorou, *L'institution des diaconesses dans l'Église orthodoxe et la possibilité de sa restauration*, in: *Contacts* 41. 146, 1989, p. 124-144.

12. The conference's conclusions can be found in published paper: *Conclusions of the Inter-Orthodox Consultation on the Place of the Woman in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women*, Rhodes, Greece, 30 Oct. – 7 Nov. 1988, Minneapolis, Light and Life, 1990. The acts of the conference were published in *The Place of the Woman in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women: Interorthodox Symposium*, Rhodos, Greece, 30 October-7 November 1988, ed. by Gennadios Limouris, Katerini, Greece, Tertius Publications, 1992.

13. On the reception of the document from an Orthodox perspective concerning the Inter-Orthodox symposium on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Boston, USA, 11-18 June 1985, see *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism. Statements, Messages and Reports of the Ecumenical Movement, 1902-1992*, ed. by Gennadios Limouris, WCC Publications, 1994.

14. Ecumenical dialogue in general could have an influence in the reestablishment of women's diaconate. Though, despite its implication in this

In these last decades, deaconesses have been ordained in several Orthodox churches. The Patriarch of Jerusalem ordained a woman as a deaconess. The Patriarch Theodoros II of the Democratic Republic of the Congo also ordained a woman as a “missionary deaconess” during a service held in Kolwezi in February 2017.¹⁵ These celebrations continue the Orthodox tradition of ordaining deaconesses going back to the early Church and the late Byzantine Empire. A synodal decision to dissolve the women’s diaconate institution has never been approved.

Before an overview of the synodal structures in contemporary local Orthodox Churches, this paper presents the examples of two local Churches that introduced a revolutionary element in their status and functioning protocols regarding the status of the lay persons.

The synod of the Metropol of Transylvania and the Council of Moscow

In the 19th century, the synod of the Orthodox Church in Transylvania opened to the large participation of the laypersons in the synodal dynamics. The synod of the Metropol of Transylvania (1863) was the first one to give weight to the presence of laity in the synodal process: two-thirds would be laypeople.¹⁶ Thanks to the metropolitan Andrei Șaguna, the Orthodox Church of Transylvania was the first in the Orthodox area to demonstrate autonomy from the State and the first to have the laity hold a majority position in the synodal leadership of the Church. It is

dialogue, the Orthodox Church opposes the ordination of women to the priestly ministry. See on this topic Élisabeth Behr-Sigel, *L’ordination de femmes : Un point chaud du dialogue œcuménique*, in *Orthodoxes Forum* 16. 2002, p. 193-202.

15. The information regarding these celebrations remains quite scant and documentation related to them is lacking even in the online environment.

16. Keith Hitchins, *Ortodoxie și naționalitate - Andrei Șaguna și românii din Transilvania, 1846-1873*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 1995; Gheorghe Tulbure, *Mitropolitul Șaguna: opera literară, scrisori pastorale, circulări școlare, diverse*, Editura Tipografia Arhidiecezană, 1938.

unlikely that any women were part of this system, but this sets an important precedent: the synodal decision is not restricted to ordained bishops or priests. Laypeople of good standing may also lead the Church in its pastoral and administrative decisions.

Another historical proof that it is possible to have the participation of the laity in all conciliar levels is given by the Council of Moscow (1917-1918). This synod seriously considered the status of women in the Church and introduced the principle of conciliarity at all levels of Church life. This represents one of the most distinctive features of the council. Lay participation would be established not only in the local council and in the assemblies (particularly those for the election of a patriarch or bishop) but also in all the different degrees of Church administration.¹⁷

The document “On Women’s Participation in the Life of the Church” was presented and well received at the 133rd Conciliar Session, which was held on July 24, 1918. It promoted the participation of women in the church’s judicial, administrative, and economic affairs as well as the right of women to become readers. Nonetheless, with respect to the rights of women, the final resolution dated September July 20, 1918, resulted in a significant reduction due to the intervention of the bishops and the Council’s Editorial Department.¹⁸

The council did not want to exclude *a priori* any argument, not even the most innovative as the role of the laity or the place of women in the Church, facing up these questions with a significant vitality. But, far from making concrete reforms, the council treated these new questions with moderation. The most progressive voices of the synod called for an

17. Hyacinthe Destivelle, *The Moscow Council (1917-1918). The creation of the conciliar institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church*, ed. by Michael Plekon and Vitaly Permiakov, translated by Jerry Ryan, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2015, p. 189.

18. *Sobranie opredelenii i postanovlenii Sviashchennogo Sobora pravoslavnoi Rossiiskoi tserkvi 1917-1918 gg.* Vyp. IV. Moscow, Sobor. 1994, p. 47, cited by Nadezhda Beliakova, *Women in the Church*, p. 56.

adaptation of ecclesiastical discipline as to what concerns women's participation of in the Church's life. The council examined these petitions at length in a commission for ecclesiastical discipline and discussed them in plenary meetings but remained prudent in its decisions. The decree gave women extensive legal rights on the local level but remained restrained concerning their liturgical role and access to the sanctuary and did not assimilate them to the clergy.¹⁹ In the different institutions of the parish, the administration chapter is dedicated to the starosta, the real manager of the administration of the parish, elected for three years by the Parish Assembly and it could be a woman.²⁰

The Council of Moscow took care of the synodal system at the parish level. As a sign of a conciliar administration, the Parish Assembly, which is convened to discuss all that pertains to the parish, meets at least twice a year, and gathers all the parishioners – women included – over twenty-five years old as inscribed in the registers or, if it is a question of large parishes, a delegation of parishioners. The assembly elects a Parish Council, which carries out its decisions regarding the administration issues and the management of the property of the parish, unit that watches over the daily running of the parish.²¹

19. "According to the new parish statutes, they could participate in the parish assemblies, in the parish council, and be elected as church warden (starosta). But the definition also authorized women to participate in the assemblies of the deanery and of the diocese. Women can hold position in certain diocesan institutions (education, social work, mission, economy). Moreover, the parish statutes explicitly envisaged recruiting "educated female parishioners" to direct the parish education program (especially the libraries). But women were not allowed to occupy posts on the councils of the deanery or diocese, nor could they be employed in legal and administrative institutions. 'In special cases', however, they can be psaltists but without becoming part of the clergy. The decisions of the council might seem regressive if one considers the perspectives envisaged in the discussions. Nonetheless, by the scope and liberty of its debates and by the novelty—however modest—of its decisions in this domain, the council responded in a particularly courageous manner to some of the preoccupations of its times while maintaining a constant reference to tradition". (Destivelle, *The Moscow Council*, p. 133).

20. *Ibidem*, p. 105.

21. *Ibidem*, p. 105-106.

A brief overview on modern local Churches' synodal systems

The synodal system was the topic of an international colloquium in Fribourg, Switzerland in 2017. Expert theologians and specialists in Canon Law from 14 countries gathered to present the synodal statuses of their respective Orthodox Churches. Of interest, is that different Church systems give various importance to the lay members of the community and to the role of women in the Church. It is commonly held that lay persons should be part of the General Assemblies as elected representatives of the dioceses and local communities, such as parish councils.

The 19th and 20th centuries, autocephalous national churches are revealing multiple and diverse manners of conceiving the presidency, the local ecclesiastical authority and the synodal system. For the historical patriarchates (Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Constantinople) and the Church of Cyprus, the election systems were conditioned by historical circumstances. More recently, in the modern era, the election systems of the patriarch composed of bishops and lay people were successively created and then abandoned. These systems were conceived for the participation of the members of the Synod, and of an electoral body composed of clergy and lay people in different percentage, involving so, more, or lesser implication and influence of either hierarchs or lay people.²²

Any of the Church statutes described, considering either the oldest ones as Jerusalem, Antioch or Alexandria, or those having newer organizational structure and considerable number of believers, as Russian or Romanian, do not specify the contribution of women to the conciliary system. The majority have stipulated in their organigrams, a precise place for the hierarchy and clergy including a certain percentage for the lay believers that have deliberative competences and right of veto. Women are not mentioned in these statutes. It is remarkable that after the fall of the Iron Curtain, several Holy Synods of national Churches as

22. The Patriarch in some Churches is elected by the Synod, in others by respective clerical-lay assemblies, or finally by the assembly of metropolitans that elects the Primate and the metropolitans.

Georgia and Romania did forbid the presence of lay people – man or women – in the procedures of electing bishops or the patriarch.

Overall, one exception is particularly evocative, the Orthodox Church of Albania. There are several reasons for this exception. The Church of Albania had no ecclesial structure before the fall of the communist system. The aim was to constitute a living Church body specific to the Albanian historical context and not the functioning of a safe organized hierarchical institution. This situation was also possibly due to the fact that for the miraculous growth of this Church, the presence of women would be obvious in a way that it could not be overlooked or anyhow neglected. The synodal system has of course correspondences with the other orthodox systems but it refers specifically to women on several cases occurrences. Laypeople including men, women and youth, participate in the governing bodies that administer the life of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania on the local, regional and national levels. In the case of the Archdiocesan and Metropolitan Councils for example, the article 33 of the Charter of the Orthodox Church of Albania stipulates: “The Ecclesiastical Council consists of the Archbishop or of the Metropolitan as President, five clergy and five laity, with the equal representation of men, women and youth. The members are elected every four years, according to the General Regulations of Administration”. The triad men, women and youth, appear several times in the articles 28, 33, 42, 43.²³

One other exceptional example comes from the Orthodox Church of Georgia, which is documented in various forms. There are photos showing a traditional well-dressed woman who raises the right hand along with the clergy present to vote; she is also shown inserting her vote

23. The presentation of Nathan Hoppe representative of the Church of Albania during this colloquium, quoting the Orthodox autocephalous Church of Albania: Charter of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, perfectly “rendered visible” this evolution.

paper in the urn at the election of the Patriarch of Georgia, event that was filmed on December 23rd, 1977.²⁴

Synodality at the parish level

The necessity of the parish synodality resides in the making manifest that decisions are not taken solely by the parish priest and that the life of the church is an exchange of gifts. Each member taking part in the parish life contributes and receives from the others. There is a diversity of charisms in the Church and parish synodality is essential to foster reciprocal sharing of gifts. It enables participation from each person for the common good in accordance with one's unique abilities.²⁵ In this context, many women committed to the same ministry work as men, taking part in a range of parish activities, whether they are focused on charitable giving, catechism, and Christian education in general, or other types of spiritual activities.

In everyday community life, women play an important role as catechists – and have a strong place in the teaching of the faith through this mission – choirmasters, or parish presidents. Among the lay people elected by the Parish General Assembly of the faithful, many are women. As was the case for the directives given by the Council of Moscow in 1917-1918, nowadays the assembly chooses a Parish Council, which is responsible for managing the parish property and for administering the affairs of the church and parish. All major pastoral decisions are considered and voted on by the council. This one elects an office and often women are presidents of the office, called *starosta*²⁶ (the old one) “the church warden”, and that in many of the synodal orthodox local

24. Ketevan Barbakadze by her name, was a delegate of Mtskheta-Tbilisi Diocese. According to the regulation, which was in effect from 1917-1994, the delegates of the eparchies also participated with the right to vote in the church councils. In 1995 this regulation was abolished by the Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II.

<https://tabula.ge/en/news/678099-44-clis-cin-ilia-meore-patriarkad-kalma;>
[https://www.facebook.com/eridaberi/videos/319743966687318/?app=fbl.](https://www.facebook.com/eridaberi/videos/319743966687318/?app=fbl)

25. Dominique Barnérias, Luc Forestier et Isabelle Morel, *Petit Manuel de Synodalité*, Salvator, 2021, p. 43-44.

26. Monique Hébrard, *Les femmes dans l'Église*, Centurion – Cerf, 1984, p. 209.

traditions. It is a classic instance of synodal or conciliar administration, where the parish assembly treats on the daily running of the parish. Generally, women have extensive legal rights on the local level but have moderate participation concerning the liturgical celebrations.

Priests' wives and synodality

Another special "instance" of synodality at the parish level is the wife of the priest who shares some of his responsibilities. Her presence in the life of celebrating the orthodox community has both a practical role and spiritual character. Taking the example of the icon of *Déisis*, Olivier Clement says that the Church "never unilaterally virilized her approach to mystery".²⁷ Another French theologian, Elisabeth Behr Sigel, recalls that "the existence of a married clergy ensures that women are not excluded from the domain of the sacred".²⁸ The Church offers a profound theology of marriage.

The priest's wife has a special status in the parish community. Church statutes do not give to the wife of the parish priest any distinct role from a liturgical or statutory role, she has no obligations nor accountabilities by law. In this context, an important aspect of synodality could be considered the status with which the priest's wife is invested by the community. Nonetheless, the wives of the priest choosing to get involved have a special place in the life of the parish. Some of them can provide discrete emotional support for the priest and the parishioners. Others choose to provide psycho-pedagogical support to parish members or even assume some management role in the parish affairs. She can assume tasks that underline her role in the pastoral work of the Church.

27. Olivier Clément, *Liminaire*, in : *Contacts* 100, 1977, p. 255.

28. Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *Le ministère de la femme dans l'Église*, p. 229. See also by the same author, *The Ordination of Women: An Ecumenical Problem*, in: *Theology* 97, 1994, p. 9-26.

In addition to the socio-anthropological importance of her position in the life of an Orthodox community, the role of the priest's wife has several symbolic values. The most prominent is the nuptial symbolism, which indicates that the couple is in principle, given the mission of being a testimony of the mystery of the union of Christ and the Church. The spousal spirituality finds its roots in the Pauline theology.²⁹ In fact, the Apostle Paul presents the Church and each member of her Body as a Bride "betrothed" to Christ the Lord, to be with Him in one Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 6:15-16; 2 Cor 11:2). This also sheds some light on the synodal process lived out by the married couple, a journey together – *syn odos* – in the presence of the Lord who blesses the loving union of the spouses.

Nuns and the synodal dynamics of the monastic life

Besides the parish level, there is at least one other ecclesial level where we find synodality, the monasteries. These ecclesial realities live synodality in leading a common life. Nuns, along with the leader *staritsa*, have a quite singular practice of personal and communitarian ecclesial life, which sheds light on ecclesial synodality. The importance of female monasticism, which contributed to the elevation of the position of women in the Church, is to be underlined.³⁰ The spiritual power of nuns in monastic life in general and their influence toward the history of the

29. The Christian couple is situated - according to this apostolic perspective - on the side of the Church, which has the vocation to be indefectibly united among its members and to its God. In the dynamics of this apostolic thought, "the equality between man and woman is evident in the very symbolism of Christ-Church" (Paul Remy, *Le mariage, signe de l'union du Christ et de l'Église: les ambiguïtés d'une référence symbolique*, in: *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 66, 1982, p. 397-415, here 406).

30. See also the inspired analyses in the Chapter Marriage and monasticism: the two blessable states, in Brian A. Butcher, *Gender and Orthodox theology. Vistas and vantage points*, in: *Orthodox Christianity and Gender Dynamics of Tradition, Culture and Lived Practice*, edited by Helena Kupari and Elina Vuola, Routledge Studies in Religion, New York, 2020, p. 25-46, here 33-36.

Church is incontestable.³¹ Female monasteries have exerted the synodal model of the ecclesial community, shaping personal sanctification narratives and determining the history of different local ecclesial bodies.

The contribution of monastics to the life of the Church is not just based on their commitments; it also depends on the very nature of their fraternal and sororal life, which is governed by the regular organization of their “chapters”, decision-making encounters with their functions governed by rules and regulations. Strong formation and spiritual processes are required for this synodal exercise, enabling all members to participate in the continuing spiritual growing of the community. In most cases, the rule of continuous prayer is foundation, and in the center of the life of the monastery resides the synodal process of the Eucharist.

Women and their participation to the liturgy

Beyond any discussion related to the ordination of women, their participation to the synodality expressed in the liturgy and most of all in the celebration of the Eucharist should not be questioned, as should not be the case with lay people in general. Liturgy is indeed the action of all; the work of the people, a sacrifice brought by and in the name of all, dialogue with God, communal listening to and demanding of the Holy Spirit.

Women, as well as priest’s wives, do not belong to the clergy and do not exercise sacramental ministry. Nonetheless, the role of a woman – like that of a non-ordained man – is complex in the liturgical celebration. For participation can be manifested in many ways through one voice and one heart or even in a silent way. The responses, the

31. Nadezhda Beliakova, *Women in the church. Conceptions of Orthodox theologians in early twentieth-century Russia*, in: *Orthodox Christianity and Gender Dynamics of Tradition, Culture and Lived Practice*, edited by Helena Kupari and Elina Vuola, Routledge Studies in Religion, New York, 2020, p. 47-62, here 56-57, 59.

singing, the acclamations, the proclamations, the prayers, the readings and finally the *Amen*, which is constitutive for the liturgical celebration, belong to the people of the faithful co-celebrating with the priest³² The *Axios* exclamations of the believers at the ordination of a deacon, priest or bishop, are signs of participation to the celebrative community. The laity, both women and men, can administer baptism in an exceptional case (for a child in danger of death, for example), having themselves already had the sacramental experience of baptism, of the sacraments of initiation, thus of Chrismation as well as of the Eucharist.

The liturgical gestures and prayers performed by the priest are offered by the whole Church. The Eucharistic offering is an act of the entire Church. Through participation in the offering³³ and active participation through Christ, the laity are concelebrants of the liturgy. What articulates the liturgical and the Eucharistic celebrations, is the plural used by the presiding celebrants, the plural of the majority of the prayers addressed to the Father. This is a sign of synodality. The “we” is characteristic and fundamental of the Christian liturgy, reflecting and concretizing every synodal process in the Church.

In summary, the liturgical role of the woman coincides with that of every baptized person. The discussion opens the doors to two constitutive and structuring realities of liturgical life: the universal priesthood³⁴ and the active participation in the liturgy. Modern theology

32. Lambert Beauduin, *Concélébration eucharistique*, dans QLP 7. 1922, p. 275-285 ; QLP 8. 1922-1923, p. 23-34 ; Idem, *La concélébration*, dans MD 7. 1946, p. 7-26.

33. Liturgie, participation au sacrifice du Christ, spiritualité, dans *Liturgie, Spiritualité, Cultures, Conférences Saint-Serge*, 29^e semaine d'études liturgiques, Paris, 29 juin-2 juillet 1982, éd. par Achille Maria Triacca et Alessandro Pistoia, Roma, CLV-Edizioni Liturgiche, BEL.S 29. 1983, p. 277-297.

34. For a theology of the lay sacerdoce see Nicholas Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Vitaly Permiakov, ed. by Michael Plekon, Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 2007; Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel and Victoria Steadman, foreword by Olivier Clément,

emphasizes the active liturgical participation as a reflection of the “royal priesthood”, of the “universal sacerdoce”. The Christian priesthood is founded on Christ as the High Priest who eternally offers the liturgy to the Father and the communication of this religious identity to the lay men and women who actively participate in the liturgy.³⁵ In this way they can minister as priests of God. More recent theology makes a “reconfiguration” in the theology of the priesthood, where Christ is the high priest who eternally offers the liturgy to God and presides over an assembly of royal priests, whose exercise of the priesthood is manifested in active and conscious participation in the liturgy.³⁶ But this theological foundation and liturgical ritualization are reciprocal: committed

Crestwood, NY, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995; Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism*, Crestwood, NY, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974; See also Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for the Theology of the Laity*, trans. Donald Attwater, Westminster, MD, Newman Press, 1957, 1963 reprint; Yves Congar, *Sur la trilogie: prophète-roi-prêtre*, in: *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 67. 1983, p. 97-115. Also see David Power, *Priesthood Revisited: Mission and Ministries in the Royal Priesthood*, in: *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Priesthood*, ed. by Susan Wood, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 2003, p. 97-120; Zeni Fox, *Laity, Ministry, and Secular Character*, in *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood*, ed. by Susan Wood, p. 121-51; and Donald J. Goergen, *Priest, Prophet, King: The Ministry of Jesus Christ*, in: *The Theology of Priesthood*, ed. by Donald Goergen and Ann Garrido, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 2000, p. 187-210. Also see the analysis by Susan Wood, *Sacramental Orders*, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 2000, p. 11-19.

35. Gabriel Pivarnik, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Liturgical Participation*, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 2012.

36. The notion of active participation of believers to the liturgy received the due importance through the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* art. 30 and 14.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html; see also the studies of Kimberly Belcher, *Efficacious Engagement: Sacramental Participation in the Trinitarian Mystery*, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 2011 and Mark Searle, *Called to Participate: Theological, Ritual, and Social Perspectives*, ed. by Barbara Searle and Anne Y. Koester, Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 2006.

participation in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church enables the faithful to internalize and externalize their priesthood in Christ.

Conclusions

Participation is not just an abstract concept and the liturgy as manifestation of the Church a simple spectacle. For participation can be expressed by so many ways. This is what makes the Church a science of relations where no member is to be excluded, where no prepared and competent person should be discounted from any level of conciliar organization. Synodality is the business of all the baptized. The synodal processes says something about the God in whom we believe, a God who reveals himself by entering dialogue with human persons as with partners, respecting different dynamics of dialogue. Synodality first seeks to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches, to all involved in the life of the Church, to men and women.

Beyond the sterile discussions about inviolable tradition and modern theology, theologians should combat resistances against the multiplication in our communities of diverse charismatic ministries, and oppose elements that exclude and deprive the ecclesial communion of richness and of talent from whom she could benefit.

1.3. MISSION: WALKING TOGETHER IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

KEYNOTE

The Relevance of Synodality for a Missionary Orthodox Church

John Njoroge

Introduction

This article focuses on the relevance of synodality for a missionary Orthodox Church. The article consolidates teachings and practices of orthodox missions as presented during the symposium “*Listening to the East- Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Eastern Orthodox Church*” held in Rome from 2nd-5th November 2022. Today, the Orthodox Church is experiencing the need and vocational call for synodality in her mission in the world than ever before. Despite the fact that we the Orthodox are self-defined as the Church of the Seven Ecumenical Council; a conciliar church of local councils, both autonomous and autocephalous, we have to confess in truth and love (Eph 4:15) that we affirm synodality in theory, and too little in praxis. The conference in Rome provided us with the opportunity to reaffirm the need for often synodical gatherings for the Orthodox Church.

The Term Synodality in Orthodoxy

Synodality is derived from the Greek noun *synodos* = συν “together” + ὁδός “way”, “journey”, meaning journeying together. Within the Orthodox Church, this term describes the process of collegial collaboration and discernment in decision making especially by councils of bishops, but also includes priests and lay participants¹. The collegiality

1. Kallistos Ware, Synodality and Primacy in the Orthodox Church; Keynote Address at the IOTA Inaugural Conference, 9-12 January 2019 in Iasi, Romania available at <https://orthochristian.com/118652.html>.

of the inclusive decision-making processes, or journeying together, implies that synods are dynamic; giving the sense of relevance to current issues facing the church. Therefore, synodality and any given church councils' decisions, bring the body of Christ (church) to mission and give witness to the changing world the newness of the unchanging orthodox faith.

It is of paramount importance to understand synodality from a broader perspective beyond that of the proceedings of given councils, whether ecumenical, national, or local. To this regard however, and especially in our modern times, synodality can be extended throughout the Church at every level, in the diocese, in the parish, and in our personal lives, implying the willingness and ability of openness to each other, dialoging and communion².

The Orthodox Church is a synodical church, beginning immediately at the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:5-29), the seven ecumenical councils (from the council of Nicaea 325 to Nicaea 787 AD), national and local councils, up to the Holy and Great Council (Crete 2016) of our modern times. The spirit of synodality i.e., "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28), means to have collective discernments, democratic and/ or sometimes a consensus on issues pertaining the church for the salvation of all, and this cannot be separated from the mission of the church in the modern world, "for God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). This being the very nature of the church, the Nicaea council termed the church as *Apostolic*... meaning: the apostolicity of the church does not only denote the historical continuity and unbroken lineage of bishops to the apostles and the apostles to Christ, thus forming the so-called apostolic succession, but rather the apostolicity here means and emphasizes a collegiality of persons with a missional function. Missional function denotes the original apostolate of Christ's teachings and His '*calling and sending*' the twelve, the seventy, and all of us today to proclaim the good news. The twelve forms the inward layers of the teachings (*didascalias*) of the church and even today they remain in the church as the pillars of

2. Ibid.

the church; “and the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb,” (Rev 21:14).

The Apostolicity, Ecclesiology and Mission of the Church

Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos states that apostolicity of the church implies having an “apostolic fire and zeal to preach the gospel ‘to every creature’ (Mk 16:15), because it nurtures its members so that they may become ‘witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ (Acts 1:8).” This new understanding of the apostolicity of the church as an actual missionary endeavor of the church, highlights a significant approach to mission and its purpose in the world today. This approach reminds the Orthodox Christians that they are called to participate fully in witnessing the gospel to all peoples, regardless of race, ethnicity, colour, or even gender, its (πάντα τα ἔθνη) (Matt 28:19).

There is no demarcation between apostolicity (mission of the church) and ecclesiology in the Orthodox theology. This is explicitly understandable within the circles of the Orthodox liturgical worship. This connects the liturgy with the mission bearing in mind that mission is the very nature of the church and so it is “ecclesial-centric”. This conditions how one would comprehend mission outside an Orthodox environment but also enriches how an Orthodox would mission to a place where Orthodox Christians are minorities like Africa, Asia Latin America and now, the Middle east.

The relationship between the apostolicity and ecclesiology denotes that the church is not an instrument of mission like it is perceived by many people in Africa because they have been influenced by protestant theology; however, the church is missiological in nature (Apostolic). Therefore, engaging in mission in Africa or elsewhere in the world requires a profound understanding of the relationship between apostolicity and ecclesiology.

According to the theology of Fr Alexander Schmemmann, it would be correct to say that the fullness of the church conditions, as well as determines, the relationship between the mission and the church. The church according to Fr Schmemmann is a

...God-created and God-given reality, the presence of Christ's new life, the manifestation of the new "aeon" of the Holy Spirit. An Orthodox in his contemplation of the church sees it as the divine gift before he thinks of the church as a human response to this gift. One can rightly describe the church as an eschatological reality for its essential function is to manifest and to actualize in this world the *eschaton*, the ultimate reality of salvation and redemption.³

This realistic definition of the church provides an authentic conclusion that the church, although in the world, is per excellent a 'mystery'. This means the church exists as a sacramental reality sustained by grace in all its structures and functions including the synods. The nature of this grace is not in segments (for the Holy Spirit is not divided) but it is a 'whole' in 'fullness' that gives the church fullness in its structures: sacraments, liturgy, ministry, koinonia, witness and mission in the world.⁴ This fullness is not only an experience of a local church or a community gathered around its bishop, but it is an ecclesiological extension to other communities in communion. Unity and communion among the orthodox local churches (either autonomous or autocephalous) demonstrates the trinitarian unity. This marks one of the most fundamental theological aspects about the church in the Orthodox theology, giving a distinct value to the understanding of how 'a local church' is in context and its communion with other local churches. Communion and unity with others (among local churches) is made possible by synodality.

The locality of a church has presently been a big concern to the so-called '*missionary churches*' where Orthodox Churches are doing mission today. This is becoming a concern especially for integration of the gospel with the culture of the people and letting the whole concept of the church serve the dialogue with cultural context(s). This may sound extraordinary to the Orthodox Christians who understand and identify

3. A. Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission; Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West*, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary press, 1997, p.210.

4. J. Behr, *The Trinitarian Being of the Church*, St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly 48:1 (2003) pp. 67-88.

Orthodoxy with nationalism rather than with mission and evangelism of the incarnate Christ. Mission and evangelism of Apostle Paul is a distinct example where he disagrees with apostle Peter on what to be done to the gentile converts, for St Peter interpreted becoming a Christian as following Jewish law while for St Paul, it was having faith in Christ (Acts 15:1-29). These two diverse understandings of mission resulted in the calling of the first council to make decisions and agree on apostolic missions to the gentiles.

Furthermore, the Alexandrian catechetical school, the Cappadocian fathers, and others formulated and gave Christian theology a Hellenic-cultural foundation. This was necessary in order for Christianity to take roots within the Greco-Roman context which was different from the Jewish one. Greek Fathers of the Golden Age, following the pastoral needs of the time, conditioned by their high rhetoric from Athens and classical Greek cultural enlightenment, formulated for example, the doctrine of trinity, whose sole purpose was to explain the monotheistic God of Israel in way that is comprehensible to their flock which had been converted from the polytheistic cultural-religious background of the Greek gods.⁵

According to John Zizioulas' concept of a local church, it would be correct to put Christ and the Eucharist as the determining factors of a local church and its mission.⁶ What did Christ mean when He said '*will be in their midst*' (Mt 18:20)? He meant that a gathered community would witness His omnipresence through His saving events as they took root in a local context within all the natural orders, social, and cultural systems that characterizes the way of life of the gathered community. Therefore, it is in these systems that the message of the Gospel would be incarnated just as He (Christ) is incarnate. Henceforth, the church becomes local if it absorbs and uses all its localness; meaning all the characteristics of its cultural context without imposing on itself

5. Golden age mainly denotes the period between the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) to the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) when the Christian literature blossomed in defining the doctrines of the church.

6. J. Zizioulas, *Being As Communion; Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002, p. 254.

something alien or foreign. This is where the incarnation of Jesus Christ becomes ideal to the missional concept within orthodoxy. It would be nearly impossible for Jesus to proclaim the good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to free the oppressed, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Is 61:1-2, quoted in Lk 4:20) if He was not incarnate and lived an ordinary life lived by the ordinary Galileans. The "*Word becoming flesh*" (Jn 1:14) i.e. by taking up human nature Christ stamped the authenticity of His message, His ministry and His church by getting rooted to the way of life of all people in their diverse contexts.

This has brought into a living reality the apostolicity of the 'logos' in the life of the church. This takes different dimensions denoting the logos; the word we read, proclaim, and live as believers in an ecclesial community (church). This defines the church as apostolic in proclaiming the kingdom of God, both by words of the gospel and the good works/philanthropic diakonia (Jas 2:14-20) of its members. The church has just one 'apostolicity', because the Kingdom of God is one and this is why the holy apostles were not commissioned to proclaim a set of given religious beliefs and customs, doctrines and moral orders, but to proclaim the good news (*ευαγγελιον*) which is the coming of the kingdom of God. It is worth noting, the mission of the church is not intended only for a particular people, place or time, but for everyone, everything, and everywhere (Jn 4:21). Therefore, the apostolicity of the church here becomes missional to witness this reality to all people in all nations (*πάντα τα εθνη*) (Mt 28:16-20). This applies to all aspects of human life including social, economic, political, relationships and environmental care.

Making disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19) calls for canonical order or synodality among the orthodox churches that brings forth the authenticity of the whole missiological functions of the church. All starts with the apostolicity of the church, which in agreement with metropolitan Zizioulas, the apostolicity of the church does not mean only the historical continuity and unbroken lineage of bishops to the apostles and the apostles to Christ, but the apostolic succession, rather the 'apostolicity' here, means and emphasizes a collegiality of persons with

an eschatological function.⁷ Eschatological function denotes the original apostolate of Christ's teachings and His '*calling and sending*' the twelve to proclaim the good news. This "calling and sending" of the apostles is the missional mandate of the church today.

Apostolicity, Liturgy and Mission

The Orthodox Eucharistic worship has a well-connected missional structure and purpose.⁸ The Divine Liturgy is celebrated as an event aiming to send the participants on a mission; to witness and share with others what they have experienced in the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the faithful. The Orthodox understanding of worship is not only an expression representing Christ's saving ministry, death, resurrection and ascension but it is also a place where the members of the church participate in the living anticipation of the kingdom of God. As a community of believers, they are entitled to fully participate in God's economy of salvation in the world which is to be told to others. This is why the priest at the end of the Divine Liturgy dismisses the congregation by saying, "*Let us go forth in peace.*"⁹ Fr Ion Bria interprets this dismissal as a

Sending off every believer to mission in the world where he or she lives and works, and whole community into the world, to witness by what they are that the kingdom is coming. Christians who have heard the word and received the bread of life should henceforth be living prophetic signs of the kingdom.¹⁰

The dismissal is an indicator that those who have participated in the worship are prepared for mission. This is connected to the theological ethos of a worshipping community whereby the act of gathering and the idea of Eucharist are set within the framework of a communion (*koinonia*). Koinonia is not only between the living and the dead but also

7. J. Zizioulas, *Being as communion*, p. 173.

8. J. Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today*, Minneapolis, Light and Life Publishing Company, 1986, pp. 86-102.

9. Nicholas Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, London: S.P.C.K, 1960.

10. I. Bria, *Go Forth in Peace; Orthodox Perspectives in Mission*, Geneva: WCC Mission Series, 1986, p. 38.

with the saints and the heavenly powers. This communion that *per excellence* reflects the Trinitarian communion makes Eucharistic liturgy be the springboard for mission where everyone and everything is called into being.

Within the Eucharistic worship two major missional events take place to prepare participants to *go forth in peace* and witness. First, if we are convinced that liturgy is a missional event where a true divine revelation becomes a reality, then the participants do *per excellence* witness a living anticipation of the kingdom. Second, as we participate and become perfected as individuals through Holy Communion, the whole community of believers is transformed into an authentic image of the kingdom of God. Through this transformation however, the whole creation through the church is also transformed. Here the church becomes the “*uncreated*” light placed on a lamp stand to shine before all (Mat 5:16). Therefore, it is this light Christians are sent to witness to all people for Christ said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). The light here is interpreted as a continuous transformation to life in dignity and flourishing. Just as the light drives away the darkness and enlightens a darkened place, so does the light of Christ enlighten our spiritual consciousness making us more aware of the worthiness of life in the world and giving us hope for the eschaton. Spiritual consciousness makes individual members of the church continue discovering charismatic gifts received from the sacrament of Chrismation and the power to utilize these gifts in the diaconal life in the mission of the church.

During the liturgical worship, we do not simply hear the words of ‘*anamnesis*’ but we participate in the very action of forgiveness of sins, sanctification and transformation of our very being (souls & bodies) into the ‘body of Christ’ through the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the ‘*epiclesis*’, when the priest prays:

“Once again, we offer to you this spiritual worship without shedding of blood, and we ask you, pray and entreat you: send down your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here present.”¹¹

It is at this point the liturgy becomes *per excellence* an icon of the kingdom of God which through its saving powers transforms the world into a new creation, a creation that is reconciled with the Triune God.¹² This transformation takes place in the “Movement of Ascension” where the creation is called into the throne of God, into the kingdom. However, the movement does not end there; it takes a turn to descend into the world to put in place the “*liturgy after the liturgy*,”¹³ i.e. to witness to the world, the love of God. Within this movement of ‘Ascending’ and ‘Descending’ the Eucharist brings forth the relationship between the church as a whole and church in mission.¹⁴ Here the mission of the Orthodox Church should not be understood as a mere proclamation of Christ’s salvation to the world, but a true revelation and calling into full participation in Christ’s salvation through the Holy Spirit.

Adhering to the whole concept of Christ’s salvation to the world is not only responding to the “order” of the Great Commissions (Mtt 28:16-20 & Mk 16:14-20) but is also a continuous vocational and missional calling. This calling positions the church in an unceasing mission that is not limited to one nation or one peoples, race or gender, but is to all, who are united as one flock of one shepherd.¹⁵ Christ

11. See The liturgy of St John Chrysostom, where the priest consecrates the bread and wine to body and blood of Christ.

12. Γιαννουλατος Αναστάσιος, *Ιεραποστολή στα Ίχνη του χριστού, θεολογικές μελέτες και ομιλίες, ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΗΣ ΔΙΑΚΟΝΙΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΟΣ*, 2007, p. 167-168.

13. I. Bria, *Liturgy after the Liturgy; Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*. WCC Pub., Geneva, 1996.

14. Π. Γεωργιος Μπασιουδης, *Η Δύναμη Της Λατρείας « Η Συμβολή του Π. Αλεξανδρου Σμεμαν στη Λειτουργική Θεολογία »*, Athens: Enploeditions, 2008, p. 139.

15. Βαντσου Κ. Χριστός, *Ιεραποστολική, Θεσσαλονίκη*, 1999, p. 31.

speaking to His disciples also noted that “He has also other flock which is outside this flock” (Jn 10:16) and therefore it is the mission of the church to bring those outside the church into the church, to reach out to the margins through witness, inter-religious dialogue, and philanthropic diakonia.¹⁶

The Orthodox church, especially now in the 21st century, has to acknowledge the necessity of adopting an inclusive mission paradigm based on the pastoral needs and church tradition as well responding to the world’s emerging issues. Although the church is not changing, for Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8), the society in which the church is called and sent to witness the Gospel of Christ is drastically changing. This calls upon the church to rethink its ways of doing mission work. The way of doing that is going back to the very power that maintains, inspires, empowers, and guides it into the truth. The Gospel of John states:

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth: for he will not speak for his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that will come,” (Jn 16:12-14).

Characterizing the Orthodox Church as “Apostolic church”, would mean that it is not static but it is dynamic, for *apostle* means the *one who has been called and sent*. The calling of a community of believers together and sending it to the world is based on the kenotic energy of the Holy Spirit which always *blow where it wills* (John 3:8). Therefore, the mission becomes kenotic in its character and form. This can be understood in two folds; one is vertical which is theological or Divine in nature, and the second is horizontal which is anthropological in its nature, just as Christ has two natures. This reflects the two main commandments; where Christ said love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your

16. See J. Njoroge, Patristic Approaches to Diakonia – Diakonia in the Ancient Mediterranean Region, in International Handbook of Ecumenical Diakonia: Contextual Theologies and Practices of Diakonia and Christian Social Services - Resources for Study and Intercultural Learning. Regnum Books International, Oxford, 2018. Available at <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1v08zwm.25>.

soul and with all your strength and all with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself (Lk 10:27). Reflecting closely on these two folds, the incarnational model of mission gets its dynamic and realistic identity in regard to the relationship between God and humankind, i.e. Gospel and culture. For a perfect relationship between God and His creation, and God's people with fellow creatures, the Holy Spirit is at a dynamic work and desires to strengthen and sanctify those who participate in church mission.

The kenotic dynamic of the Holy Spirit guides the church as it expands unlimitedly, culturally and geographically to all people. Within its expansion, the church will not be able to avoid meeting the cultural, social, economic and political challenges of today's world. Incarnationally, the church has to immerse into the depths of these realities and give hope to those experiencing injustices of this world. Critically, those experiencing any form of injustice devalue or even lose their identities, and human dignity sinks into an attitude of self-depreciation. This attitude according to Charles Taylor

makes a person or group of people suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining, demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm; can be a form of oppression, imprisoning one in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being.¹⁷

Despite the fact that the church is an eschatological reality, it is called to evangelize in difficult situations, where people are experiencing economic injustices, political divisions, racial intolerances, sexual exploitations, religious completions and divisions. Those experiencing or those who have experienced any sort of injustice and exploitation, may it be economic, political or religious, are locked in a cycle of victimhood and aggression. Inability to break this cycle has continued making our societies remain locked within cycles of anger and revenge, wars and conflicts, for example the wars in Ukraine, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo among other places. Therefore, the church must echo

17. Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "the Politics of Recognition"*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton UP, 1992, p. 25.

out its evangelical and prophetic voice, for the sake of humanity and the whole creation of God.

The apostolicity of the church in the world today also means engaging the reconciliatory love of God. Reconciliatory love of God heals human brokenness and this is why the orthodox church is a “hospital” where healing of both the soul and the body as well as forgiveness of sin takes place sacramentally.¹⁸ The agape (love of God) and the ministry of healing restores humans’ patterns of life which are broken by illness, social-economic injustices, religious fundamentalism, radicalization and human egoism. This is achieved through reconciliation that promotes restorative justice, truth, peace, forgiveness and consequently brings healing depending upon the nature of the breach.

The whole process of reconciliation which has forgiveness as an ingredient becomes a powerful psychotherapeutic tool in orthodox missions. Interestingly, studies in interpersonal relations, marriages and families, as well as in private and social behaviors, show how important forgiveness is in healing. The power of reconciliation promotes learning on how to forgive oneself and achieve self-acceptance which sets a starting point for what Stanley Harakas characterizes as “*the making of what one has into something other*” or, finding oneself to be a new person by virtue of the exchange of another.¹⁹

Synodality and Mission in the Modern Times

The life and mission of the Eastern Orthodox Church in the modern world entails different missional dimensions. These dimensions include: (1). The comprehension of the catholicity (universality) primacy and apostolicity of the church at the local, national and global levels, (2). Ecclesiological, sacramental/Eucharistic union among churches, (3). Synodical and even geo-political unity including the churches in the diaspora and the mission churches in Africa and Asia. Vocationally, this calls the church leadership to be synodically conscious in order to

18. See the Orthodox sacrament of Holy Unction.

19. Stanley S. Harakas, Forgiveness and Reconciliation. An Orthodox Perspective, in *The Orthodox Church in a Pluralistic World*, an Ecumenical Conversation, Geneva/Brookline: WCC pub., Holy Cross Press, 2004, p. 114.

address mission issues of our modern times. This alludes to more and more synodical gatherings, where openly and sincerely, delegates (participants) will address and respond to the issues of our times.

When modern challenges are addressed and responded to, we demonstrate as a church that our charismatic gifts (*charismata*) are at work. Failure to respond to these issues on time, *in one heart, mind and faith* (Phil 2:2), is an indicator of disunity and lack of conciliarity. Lack of smooth functioning of the ecclesiological principle of conciliarity among the orthodox churches, is a threat to an impactful future and mission of the church in the world. The impactful life and mission of the Orthodox Church can be achieved by recalling the relevancy of the synodical spirit and enthusiasm of the early church. The relevancy of synodality for an apostolic church can be marked not only by looking at the success of the church during the apostolic and patristic times (during the ecumenical & local councils), but more importantly, at the unity of the church today in witnessing the message of the gospel (*εὐαγγέλιον*) to a hopeless and discriminative world.

The relevancy of synodality for an apostolic church, enables the church to have unified official decrees on matters of faith, making it easily possible for members to participate in the “*liturgy after the liturgy*”. The concept of the *liturgy after the liturgy* connects the mission of the church to the Eucharistic celebration. This implies that our participation in the work of God - *Mission Dei*²⁰ - here in the world has a unique identity and calling. To this regard, the mission of the church becomes not only philanthropic, providing charities to the needy in our society, but also contains a deep-rooted spiritual praxis. Through the liturgy, the church uniquely expresses her faith and her life as a community of worshippers who *go therefore to making disciples* (Mtt 28:19-20).

The *calling and the sending* of individual members of a congregation to participate in mission and evangelism is indeed a collective duty both at the ecumenical level as well as at the national and local levels respectively. This brings forth the relevancy of synodality right from the

20. J. D. Bosch, Transformation of mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, Orbis Books, New York, 1991.

local church to the universal church. It is important to note that the church is catholic (universal) and constituted to respond to the needs of believers at the local level through contextualization of the message of the gospel, evangelism, and witnessing. It is within universality and the local setting of churches where we are able to actualize and carry out missionary work in the world today.

According to Metropolitan John Zizioulas, the concept of a local church in the context of synodality means being a witness to the omnipresence of Christ and His saving grace as it takes root in a local context within all the natural orders: political, economic, social, and cultural systems. In this way, it would characterize the way of life of a given community.²¹ Therefore, it is in these systems that the message of the Gospel is incarnated just as He (Christ) is incarnate. Henceforth, the church becomes truly local if it absorbs and uses all its local simplicity; meaning all the characteristics of its context without imposing on itself something alien or foreign. This is where the incarnation of Jesus Christ becomes an ideal model for the missional life of the church. It would be nearly impossible *for Jesus to proclaim the good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to free the oppressed and proclaim the year of the lord's favor* (Is 61:1-2, quoted in Lk 4:20) if He was not incarnate and lived among human beings. The “becoming human” for Jesus has so far stamped the authenticity and the beginning of His message, His ministry and His Church in relating to the way of life of the people.

The local-ness of the church plays a critical role in the mission of the same church through the processes of incarnation or (inculturation). According to *Laurenti Magesa*, inculturation is a process whereby faith already embodied in one culture encounters another culture.²² The aim of this encounter is to have the faith become part and parcel of a given “new culture”. As far as the Eastern Orthodox Church is concerned, the

21. Zizioulas, *Being as communion*, p. 254.

22. L. Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation; Transforming the church in Africa*, Orbis Books: New York, 2004, p. 5.

orthodox faith is already spreading beyond the traditional orthodox cultures (Hellenic, Syriac, Slavonic, Ethiopian and Coptic) into Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Alaska and Americas where the orthodox theology and ethos have to be embodied in these “new” cultural contexts.²³ This raises important question on how orthodoxy will be embodied into these “new” cultural contexts. This calls for synodality in the universal church to determine the limits of inculturation. For example, the rapid growing orthodox faith in Africa creates a dialogical platform between the orthodox theological ethos and African religious realities, particularities and complexities, i.e. dancing & drumming during the liturgy, strong connections & commemoration of ancestors, spiritualism as well as introduction of Africa philosophies such as the “*UBUNTU*” – “I am because you are”. Other examples include the recent re-introduction of deaconesses by the patriarchate of Alexandria, the creation of the Russian Orthodox Church exarchate in Africa, the Orthodox Church in Diaspora, active philanthropic Diakonia, and witnessing and advocating for social justice and peace within humanitarian and climate crises.

To address all these issues requires synodality. This implies that synodical decrees on missions would determine the future of orthodoxy for generations to come not only for the orthodox but also for entire humanity. This was well underlined in the Holy and Great council of Crete’s official document on mission which states:

The Holy and Great Council of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church constitutes an authentic witness to faith in Christ, the God- man, the Only-begotten Son and Word of God who, through His Incarnation, through all His work on earth, through His Sacrifice on the Cross and through His Resurrection, revealed the Triune God as infinite love. Therefore, with one voice and one heart we address this message of “the hope that is in us” (cf. 1 Pet 3.15) not only to the sons and daughters of our most holy Church, but also to every human being.²⁴

23. J. Njoroge, *Towards An African Orthodoxy: A Call for Inculturation*. Ortodoksia Vol.56 (2016), Light Press: Kaarina, Finland.

24. Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church Crete 2016; available at <https://www.holycouncil.org/encyclical-holy-council>.

Further, the council affirmed:

In fulfilling the church's salvific mission in the world, the Orthodox Church actively cares for all people in need, including the hungry, the poor, the sick, the disabled, the elderly, the persecuted, those in captivity and prison, the homeless, the orphans, the victims of destruction and military conflict, those affected by human trafficking and modern forms of slavery. The Orthodox Church's efforts to confront destitution and social injustice are an expression of her faith and the service to the Lord, Who identifies Himself with every person and especially with those in need: Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me (Mt 25:40). This multidimensional social service enables the Church to cooperate with various relevant social institutions.²⁵

Although the council in Crete had its challenges right from the beginning preparations and participations to the many agendas of discussion, as well as the acceptance and rejection of its resolutions by the entire orthodox fraternity, it serves as an indicator of the possibility of holding future councils. This possibility gives future hope for the continuity of the life and mission of the Eastern Orthodox Church today.

Conclusion

The relevance of synodality for a missionary Orthodox Church is not about issuing synodical statements, a demonstration of ecclesial or even geo-political primacy of local churches, autonomous or even autocephalous churches, nor neither that of one primate over another. It is about putting into practice the resolutions of a synod for the sake of the salvation of the entire creation of God. The missional nature of the church is practical not theoretical, and this involves active evangelism as well as witnessing to the good news (*euangelion*) in the present time and

25. See the official Documents of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church on the Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World, section "F" on Mission as a Witness of Love through Service, available at: <https://www.holycouncil.org/-/mission-orthodox-church-todays-world>. The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church was held from 19th to 26th June 2016 in Crete, Greece.

for the sake of future generations to come. This apostolic calling is up to the second coming of Christ (*parousia*).

Active evangelism goes beyond the borders of our orthodox orientations and familiarities to even people of other faiths, who in today's reality are our neighbors. We are living in a world of dynamic competitiveness ranging from ideologies, theologies, religiosities, science, technologies, consumerism, climate crisis and disrespect to human life, dignity and flourishing. To this regard, the prophetic voice of God needs to be heard and obeyed in order to transform, reconcile, and heal every broken person and relationship into a new meaningful communion with God, families, fellow human beings and creation as a whole (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

The relevance of synodality for a missionary Orthodox Church is the ability to unite in the search for a genuinely missional Orthodox theological approach in developing mutual harmony between the gospel and culture, faith, and societal context. Such perspectives would purposefully bring churches together through a unified theological discourse, ethos, methodology and consensus over the missional challenges experienced in the mission field.

Finally, the relevance of synodality for a missionary Orthodox Church is to create a space where believers, parishes, dioceses, as well as mission-oriented organizations, to get inspired and motivated to engage in active mission and evangelistic activities in their home countries and abroad. This is not only engaging in prayer, financial support, catechism, building of church buildings and philanthropic Diakonia, but also means to be in solidarity and in exchange of God-given contextual experiences aiming at enriching and complementing one another for the mission of God (*mission Dei*). Synodality in a mission context promotes solidarity among churches to witness to the world as Christians united as the Father, the Son and Holy spirit are one, for the world to believe (John 17:20-21).

RESPONSES

Journeying Together

Kateřina Kočandrle Bauer

Listening to the talks and discussions about synodality at the conference I have realized that we struggle here between two approaches to defining and living both synodality and the church itself. I define these two approaches as the metaphysical and the existential: the former is more idealistic and conceptual; the latter is more realistic, and already incarnated in the historical, social, and cultural setting. The struggle between these two approaches creates a tension because none of the available concepts or models fulfils our expectations in lived reality. So even for the term synodality itself, we use different expressions with different emphases to help us grasp its meaning: ‘sobornost’, ‘conciliarity’, ‘solidarity’, ‘apostolicity’, and so on. Behind all of these concepts and approaches there lies a common denominator: our desire for life in unity amid the scattered and fragmented nature of ecclesial life.

In order to carry out our mission as witnesses, we must, as Father John emphasized, speak a language that we understand ourselves and translate that language into one that the people to whom we are witnessing also understand. The question of synodality is therefore a hermeneutical question regarding how and to what extent we understand ourselves as a synod and as a church, and how we mediate that understanding to others both inside and outside the church milieu.

My response to Father John’s paper will therefore explore the (Greek) etymology of the word ‘synodality’ as meaning ‘journeying together’, which he mentions at the beginning of his paper. This may appear a simple choice and too obvious a starting point, but the reasons for that choice go deep. Journeying together is an image, or rather a

metaphor, with a long tradition within Christianity.¹ It is, furthermore, an image or metaphor that is widely understood and not highly culturally conditioned and is therefore a helpful starting point for approaching synodality and its role in mission. What is more, a ‘living metaphor’ not only touches our emotional and aesthetic perception but has, as the protestant philosopher Paul Ricœur describes in his theory of metaphor, a ‘constitutive function’.² Elaborating on synodality as a metaphor for ‘journeying together’ helps us not only to imagine such a journey but also to constitute it, to live it. A metaphor, as Ricœur says, brings us closer to a symbolic understanding of the journey, which means not opposing reality but on the contrary, and according to the Greek word ‘σύμβολον’, living a more integrated way of journeying together. We can see an analogy in the essential meaning of icons and an iconic understanding of reality, whereby the fullness of meaning is mediated only through openness to the other.³ In the same way, metaphor, in Ricœur’s view, does not provide the fullness of meaning but rather opens the way for interpretation.⁴

There are four important aspects to this metaphor of journeying together: first, walking together means all of us walking, not just one part of us; second, we need to respect our own pace and the pace of others; third, we are required to pay attention to where we are journeying and to consider other people, the inner and outer landscapes, and other

1. Kateřina Kočandrle Bauer, *Orthodox Spirituality in Democratic Pluralities*, in Hans-Peter Grosshans, Pantelis Kalaitzidis (eds.), *Politics, Society and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age*, Brill-Schöningh: Paderborn, 2023, pp. 328-337.

2. Paul Ricœur, *The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling*, « *Critical Inquiry* » 5/1, Special Issue on Metaphor (Autumn, 1978), pp. 143-159.

3. Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*, Routledge: London and New York 2003, pp. 222-226.

4. *ibid*, pp. 161-168.

creatures; finally, we understand journey as an expression of the dynamicity of our lives.

The first aspect, walking together, seems almost impossible as we cannot imagine who exactly those 'all' are who are walking with us. We have in mind concrete people, those we know. Sometimes we imagine those we would like to walk with us, but such an image is not always possible. Walking together as a church means not only the bishops and the church hierarchy but the whole body of the church, all the faithful, the children, the elderly, those with disabilities, the victims of this world, even those who are deceased, the visible and invisible realms.⁵ Here we are reminded of Father Dumitru Staniloae's approach to the invisible world and the co-sobornost of people and angels before God,⁶ and, from Father John's paper, of his description of synodality as the principle or spirit which goes through all levels of the church and perhaps even crosses the borders of the visible church. In reality, thinking and realizing this type of journeying together requires us to make two important moves: to overcome the perception of church hierarchy as implying the ontological superiority of one person over another; and to be aware of the apophatic dimension of unity that serves as a corrective to our tendency to strictly define who journeys with us and who does not.

Our second consideration is paying attention to our own walking and to that of others so that we do not lose them, so that we can help them if needed, and so that we can support those who cannot walk. There is no single way to define who are the slower or faster walkers and who cannot journey for various reasons. This changes through history and according to the context of the particular church. However, regarding this respect for the pace of others and being ready to help those in need, we have again at least two theological considerations. First, to take seriously the anthropological concept of each person being created

5. Father George Kondothra, *Synodal Democracy and the Oriental Orthodox Churches*, in *Politics, Society, and Culture in Orthodox Theology in a Global Age*, pp. 160-169. accessed <https://brill.com/edcollchap-oa/book/9783657793792/BP000016.xml>.

6. Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Vol II, Holy Cross Orthodox Press: Brookline, Massachusetts 2002, p. 115.

according to God's image and likeness and that each person in some way communicates God to us. Here, we are helped by the Council of Crete's document *The Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World* and its emphasis on the spirit of the equality of all. Secondly, to realize and witness solidarity with others. In this respect, the dynamic decisions of synods and gatherings can help to pave the way for the solidarity of the whole church, which means taking seriously those on the margins, those who are not visible. This is no easy task and one that carries the danger of falling into two extreme positions: individualism, where my freedom limits the freedom of others; and dictatorship, which restricts the freedom of all others. Here, journeying together can be seen as the human realization of unity in diversity on the basis of the image of the trinitarian *perichōrēsis*,⁷ a life of love and the mutual indwelling of the persons of Trinity. The protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann has referred to this unity as a dance, as dancing together in dynamicity and mutual giving and receiving.⁸

If we are not simply to become tourists or consumers along the path, journeying together means, thirdly, being attentive not only to each other but also to the context and environment we are walking in. Journeying together as a church means journeying in the dialectic between the mystical-universal-sacramental nature of the church and the church's historical and culturally conditioned nature. These two dimensions are not mutually antagonistic but complementary and are able to correct each other when one or the other dimension is overemphasized.

In some landscapes, journeying together will mean not only the travellers influencing what is around them but also the reverse. This means we need to incorporate a plurality of forms of Orthodox life

7. The term *perichoresis* was used first within the Christological framework by Maximus the Confessor regarding the relationship between the two natures of Christ. Jan Damascus later extended it to describe the life of Trinity.

8. J. Moltmann, *God in Creation. A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, Fortress Press: Minneapolis 1993, pp. 304-307. See also Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God. A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity*, Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky 2000.

within various geo-political contexts without imposing the colonialist tendencies of the 'mother church'. It also means doing some theological work on the relationship between tradition and innovation.

It means differentiating between dogma as adherence to rules or canons without understanding their meaning or considering their historical and cultural context, and dogma as living prayer and liturgy in which the ancient rule of *lex orandi lex credendi* is alive and where belief is integral to our liturgical life. It also means being able to react to the challenges and issues of the contemporary world, especially in times of crisis, and searching for those forms, expressions, and ways of life in the church that bring life. And because the church is both in the world and for the world, Father John insists in his paper that 'collective discernments, democratic and/or sometimes consensus on issues pertaining to the church for the salvation of all cannot be separated from the mission of the church in the modern world.' Witnessing means not only discerning, deciding, and coming to a consensus, but acting. We may see the Eucharist as the focus of liturgical life and the central point of living synodality, as the journey's destination, but there lies a danger here of falling into a kind of ritualism in which true sharing of bread and wine is forgotten.⁹ We should remember, therefore, to also celebrate the liturgy after the liturgy, to experience integrity and unity on the level of social engagement, to love not just with the mind, but as the Orthodox nun Mother Maria Skobtsova reminds us, also with actions.¹⁰

Finally, the metaphor of journeying together invokes a perception of the church as being on the move rather than something static. The self-understanding of the church as being on a journey means the church cannot be understood only as the institution and its structures (however necessary and desirable those structures may be), but also as a body of pilgrims on the way to the kingdom of God, a kingdom that is both now

9. Mother Maria Skobtsova, *Types of Religious Life*, in *Essential Writings*, Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York 2003, pp. 140-185, here p. 148.

10. Mother Maria Skobtsova, *The Mysticism of Human Communion*, in *Essential Writings*, pp. 75-83.

and is to come. This latter, eschatological perspective gives the church its *telos*. As John Behr reminds us, the end is the key to understanding the beginning.¹¹ But between the *arche* and the *telos* we still have the journeying together, here and now, with all the difficulties we face. Being witnesses to the good news means not just bringing the life-giving riches of our tradition but also witnessing to our own mistakes. The weakness and fragility of this journey is part of human existence, as Olivier Clément reminds us,¹² and does not exclude ecclesial life, even the synodal processes and decisions. However, in this awareness of imperfection and fragility, discarding the master-slave dialectic in relationships, mission does not mean unethical proselytism but will be seen more in the categories of openness towards and hospitality to the other.¹³

11. J. Behr, Standing in the Temple: The Liturgical, and Apocalyptic, Context of Theology, conference paper, Contemplative Traditions. Theory & Practice: A Symposium in Honour of Professor Andrew Louth, Sigtuna, December 15, 2019.

12. Olivier Clément, The Song of Tears, Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press. Kindle Edition, p. 64.

13. On this theme, see the works of Tim Noble, such as Mission from the Perspective of the Other. Drawing Together on Holy Ground, Pickwick Publications: Eugene, Origen 2018.

Synodality: The Indispensable Heart of the Missionary Identity of the Orthodox Church

Nathan Hoppe

The topic of this session, *The relevance of synodality for a missionary Orthodox Church*, is extremely broad and it could be approached in many ways. To narrow the topic, it is helpful to define how we are using the words “synodality” and “missionary” in the title. Synodality for the purposes of this pre-synodal process that we are engaged in, has been defined in the Vademecum published last year. The definition given there reads in part, “First and foremost, synodality denotes the particular *style* that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together and gathering in assembly, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. Synodality ought to be expressed in the Church’s ordinary way of living and working.” (1.2) This is a broad definition of Synodality incorporating much more than the traditional definitions focusing on gatherings of bishops. The same document emphasizes evangelism in its definition of mission, “The Church exists to evangelize. We can never be centered on ourselves. Our mission is to witness the love of God in the midst of the whole human family.” (1.4) It could be said that this is a narrow definition of mission, since mission is often defined in an all-encompassing manner that includes virtually everything that happens in the life of the church.

Approaching our subject from the perspective of these two definitions, we find that synodality is the indispensable heart of the missionary identity of the Orthodox Church. A word should perhaps be said about the fact that the proclamation of the gospel is indeed central to Orthodox Christian identity. Historical factors have at times hindered Orthodox Christians from practicing their missionary calling and at times some Orthodox may even have come to believe that the Orthodox Church is not a missionary church. The Primates of the Orthodox

Churches responded to this misconception in the message of their 2008 meeting. They said:

Inspired by the teaching and the work of the Apostle Paul, we underscore first and foremost, the importance of the duty of Mission for the life of the Church, and in particular for the ministry of us all, in accordance with the final commandment of the Lord: “you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem, but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The evangelization of God’s people, but also of those who do not believe in Christ, constitutes the supreme duty of the Church. (Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches, October 2008).

Unfortunately, too often there is a disconnect between this clear missionary imperative and actual practice in the lives of Orthodox Christians. We are called to witness the gospel to the world, but often we are not actually transformed by the gospel in our own lives. It is impossible to share what we do not have. In the early Christian centuries before the conversion of the emperor, nonbelievers were attracted to Christ by the extraordinary lives of Christians and the extraordinary witness of their communities. Christians committed themselves to deep intentional life in community. In this process they were transformed, being evermore conformed to the image of Christ as they grew together in His body.

On the first evening of our gathering, Metropolitan Job pointed out that in the Orthodox Church we do synodality well on the regional level, but not so well on the global level and the local level. By regional level here, he is discussing the life of autocephalous or autonomous churches that have functioning synods that govern the churches under the direction of their Primates. The global level refers to the relationships between autocephalous churches, while the local level refers to synodality within the diocese. I would like to suggest that there is a fourth level of life in the church at which our synodality may even be weaker. I am referring to life within the parish. Theologically Christians are not members of the church at large, but of a particular local Eucharistic community. This should be the fundamental level of synodality in the life of the church.

The local Eucharistic community, where people are joined to one another and to Christ through their regular participation in the Eucharist around one altar, is the place where walking together as Christians begins. Too often this is not the experience of Christians in our contemporary church life. Instead, people consider themselves to be members of the church at large and access personal services for their religious needs at whatever distribution point is most convenient for them. The church functions like other service providers.

For every one of us, if we are living the Christian life it should be in a concrete local community of a few dozen, or at most a few hundred, people whose names we know, who we see every week as we celebrate liturgy, to whom we give the kiss of peace, with whom we are formed as Christians, with whom we practice stewardship, and to whom we minister, and with whom we participate in governance of our community. I don't think that this is part of the life of the vast majority of people in our churches. As has already been mentioned, Orthodox Christians often live as religious tourists, visiting different holy sites and participating in different religious rituals according to their personal needs. It is a bit like accessing services at McDonald's or Vodafone. One goes to whatever local service provider is most convenient for him. This is not synodality, it is consumerism. We cannot be transformed in Christ in this way.

If we are committed to a life of synodality we must be committed to intentional Christian formation especially for young people. If we are planning to walk together, we must know where we are going and why. Simply being together is not enough. It is possible to wonder together, as the Israelites did in the wilderness for 40 years. It is even possible to be together and to work together in an evil cause. Unity in itself is not a virtue. People were united at the Tower of Babel for a religious task. The Sanhedrin came together to condemn Jesus. The kings of the east will come together at the end of time to fight against the Lord. It is only when we are together with Christ in our midst that unity is life-giving. In both our traditions we have failed catastrophically in the work of Christian formation. We are dismayed by the statistics of people leaving church, but the reality is that they are leaving because they were never formed as Christians in the church. Tragically, many affiliates may not even know

the names of the four evangelists let alone the first five books of the Old Testament. Even more rare in our communities are people who have actually read one of these books of holy Scripture.

People become unchurched because they are unformed as Christians. As I said, we need to pay particular attention to the pastoral care and Christian formation of young people. There is a very high probability that a 12-year-old person in the church today will no longer attend church 10 years from now. On the other hand, there is a high probability that a person committed to the life of the church in their mid-20s will still be active a decade later. Given this reality, it seems obvious that we should focus ministry resources on young people. In particular, our best and most talented people should be working with children and young adults. Too often children's ministry is considered an entry-level position that people do until they have enough experience to get a real job in church.

For the Orthodox Church to be effective in missions today it must return to the practice of intense intentional cultivation of local Eucharistic communities. Membership in the church cannot be anonymous, it must be tied to a specific community of people where each person is deeply invested in a network of relationships that forms and transforms them. This is synodality at its best. The world will be attracted to Christ when it meets Him in authentic, local Eucharistic communities.

The Orthodox Church also faces major challenges in mission on the macro level of synodality in relationships between churches and bishops. It is of course important that mission work be done in good order and with respect to canonical territory, but too often disputes over canonical territory are some of the greatest obstacles to missions. There are hundreds of millions of people in the world who have no gospel witness available to them. There is no Christian witness in their geographical location, language, and cultural-ethnic group. For them to hear the gospel these barriers need to be crossed. Would it not be appropriate, in the spirit of synodality, for there to be a collaborative effort between all Orthodox churches working to ensure that all people on earth have access to the gospel?

We have been asked to reflect on the synodal process in which we are engaged. First, I would like to say that I applaud the effort to foster

a more synodal way of being in the church. It is critical that every person in the church understand themselves to be an essential part of the body of Christ.

We have spoken a great deal about the definition of synodality, but I believe there are other words that also need to be reflected on. How do we understand evangelism, the gospel, and mission? These words are used a great deal in synodal documents, but their meanings are not clearly defined. In our world today these terms are used in a variety of ways so I think it would be useful to reflect more deeply on what we mean when we use them. Repentance, sin, and the cross are rarely talked about and not meaningfully defined in the documents. As I have noted, simply being together is not a virtue in itself. Being together cannot and must not be the point. If we are together, who are we with, what is our purpose and where are we going? Being together becomes life-giving when we are with Christ and striving to follow him. Of course, the good Shepherd goes out to find every lost sheep, but the goal is not to remain with the lost sheep in the wilderness but to return home to find healing and life. Repentance is life-giving because it is turning to Christ and turning away from the brokenness of sin and death.

I do not know all the documents in the synodal process, but I could find nowhere where they refer to the one place where Jesus called us to walk together with Him.

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:34-38).

Sometimes it seems that we are ashamed of Christ and His teachings. We are so desperate to be relevant to the world that we become like the world. Jesus called those who followed Him to a radical change of life. If we are simply telling the world that the lifestyles it has chosen are blessed by God, then we are deceiving both them and

ourselves. We must listen to and learn from everyone in a spirit of love and humility, but we cannot remake the church in the image of the world in order to make it a place where those who do not wish to repent will be comfortable. When Christ calls us to take up our cross and follow him, He is calling us to true repentance, to die to our old self and live a new life in him. Without dying to our old life, it is impossible for us to have His life. Without repentance it is impossible to find healing.

PRACTICES OF SYNODALITY

Practices of Synodality in the Composition of *For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*

Carrie Frederick Frost

In 2020, *For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church* (FLOW) was published online and in hard copy.¹ This document, which aspires to “serve as a solid foundation for reference and conversation on vital issues and challenges facing the world today” (Preface), was composed by a special commission convened by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and was blessed by his Holy Synod. Much has been written about the *content* of this document, but this paper, by one of the members of the special commission, will examine the *process* of its composition and the ways that process reflected “practices of synodality.” I define “synodality” with the help of +Metropolitan Kallistos Ware – may his memory be eternal – as an ideal quality “extending throughout the Church at every level” which is characterized by a “shared journey” or a “common pilgrimage” of the faithful moving together.²

The impetus for FLOW came in part from the 2016 Orthodox Christian Holy and Great Council, a conciliar meeting of the autocephalous Orthodox churches (several of which did not attend), which attempted to address issues of the contemporary world. Most observers would agree that the 2016 Council was not a spectacular

1. For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church, Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2020, and goarch.org/social-ethos.

2. Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, “Synodality and Primacy,” Keynote at the International Orthodox Theological Association, January 11, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WexUpqstG9Q>.

success in synodal or conciliar practices (which I address in my remarks on “Women and Synodality” at this conference). However, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew understood the continued need, in the spirit of the 2016 Council, to further the efforts of the Orthodox Church to address these issues, and thus he convened the special commission to compose FLOW.

The composition of the commission is notable because it was not comprised of hierarchs (as was the case in the 2016 Council) or even exclusively clergy; instead, it was composed mostly of laity, including two women out of a dozen members. It included a variety of theologians, ethicists, professors (seminary and university), and scholars from Greece and the United States. For Orthodox Church standards, this was a demographically diverse commission, but the church’s standards are too low of a bar. The commission could have been more demographically diverse (on counts of age, background, ethnicity, geography, and gender) and more ideologically diverse, which would have made the commission more synodal in nature. Nevertheless, the commission’s composition illustrates the Ecumenical Patriarch’s interest in using the expertise of his larger flock, not just his hierarchs, for the benefit of the Orthodox Church, as well as his concern with the diverse and pluralistic nature of the faithful under his Patriarchate, most of whom are spread around the globe. With these concerns, an interest is seen in creating a document reflecting the “common pilgrimage” of the synodal spirit of the Church. Likewise, the intended audience of the document was synodal in the expansive sense; it was written for laypeople; hierarchs and clergy; seminarians; monastics; scholars and non-scholars; and so on, and it was written with the complexity of Orthodox life in many different geographical and political settings in mind.

The Ecumenical Patriarch tasked the commission in 2017 to draft a document “on the social doctrine of the Orthodox Church, as this has been reflected and expressed in the tradition through the centuries and by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in contemporary practice” (Preface). The commission subdivided itself into areas of expertise which reflect the final document’s thematic structure: a section on the church in the public sphere, a section on human rights, etc. I personally oversaw the drafting of the “Course of Human Life” section which is concerned with

the span of human life from womb to tomb. We shared our drafts with one another, receiving and incorporating input.

While the commission was initially drafting the sections of the document, the Ecumenical Patriarch solicited and received input from his exarchates, the territorial jurisdictions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Some of the exarchate bishops also solicited input in turn from their own constituencies. The concerns of twenty-five exarchates were then communicated to the special commission and incorporated into the document by the special commission. While much of the input received echoed the initial intentions and priorities of the commission, memorably it was the exarchate bishops who drew the commission's attention to the importance of addressing social media and cell phone technology, with several bishops asking us to address the effects of these technologies on the youth of today. These concerns were then reflected in the document itself. In addition to the input from the exarchates, several theologian bishops within the Ecumenical Patriarchate reviewed drafts of FLOW and their comments were likewise integrated into the document by the special commission. Additionally, the hierarchs of the Holy Synod and, once again, the hierarchs of the Exarchates reviewed the document in October 2019. In January 2020, the Holy Synod evaluated and approved FLOW for publication.

The solicitation of feedback from the exarchates, the Holy Synod, and theologian bishops illustrates a commitment to the synodal spirit of the document as part of a "common pilgrimage"; the commission did not compose the document in a vacuum but instead in conversation with hierarchs and the faithful. Still, this is an area in which the process could have been more synodal in character; a more comprehensive effort could have been made to solicit input from the faithful of the Orthodox Church in a more thorough manner and in a way that the input was not filtered through hierarchs.

The list of special commission members was ultimately published with the document; *For the Life of the World* was not released as an anonymous or church-authored document. When drafting FLOW, the commission sought to remove personalities and preferences from the text, and to instead write from, to, and for the Orthodox Church. To this end, Fr John Chrysavgis, who was the chair of the committee, and David

Bentley Hart took all the drafts and made stylistic and grammatical changes for the whole document to cohesively flow together. Throughout the process of drafting, we knew well that our composition might be changed and that we had little control over the final version, but we did not know if our names would be attached to the document.

Was the inclusion of the names of the commission a synodal practice? On the one hand, it has led to some readers matching certain commission members to certain sections or themes of the document, which may be a distraction from its content. Perhaps an anonymous document would have been more synodal because this personalization would have been avoided, and the content of the document would have thus been received in a more holistic spirit. On the other hand, the presence of our names promotes freedom around the discussion of the document that perhaps would not have come so easily had it been issued with the sole imprimatur of the Orthodox Church. Also, even if an anonymous version had been released with the explanation that it was composed by fairly diverse group of scholars, assumptions might well have been made that the document was mostly bishop-composed with token inclusions from others. So, perhaps the inclusion of names encourages a reception that is more synodal in spirit. A good faith synodal reception of the document was certainly the hope of the commission; as stated in the Preface, the special commission offers *For the Life of the World* “to the church at large as a preliminary step toward a far more expansive theological dialogue and as an aid to spiritual growth for the Orthodox faithful.”

The formulation of such a document was not without controversy. Some members of the Ecumenical Patriarch’s flock – including some hierarchs – were reluctant to address social issues through the composition of a church statement, believing instead that the relationship to the truth offered through the work of the seven Ecumenical Councils as well as through Jesus Christ himself (as encountered in the Eucharist, mediated by Scripture, and reflected through the communion of the saints) provide sufficient means for discernment on social issues – for all people, during all places, at all times – and that statements on social issues are unnecessary. There was also a concern that FLOW would quickly become outdated and possibly

promote conformity to societal trends, rather than allegiance to unchanging truths.

It is true that the creation of such a document is an uncommon occurrence in the Orthodox world today. There are few precedents; the Orthodox Church does not regularly release messages to the faithful or among bishops on social topics, much less include laity in the composition of these rare statements. The only other document in recent times that is comparable in content and form is *Basis of the Social Concept*, released by the Sacred Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000 to give its teachings on "church-state relations and a number of problems socially significant today" (Introduction). In contrast to FLOW, the process of composition of *Basis of the Social Concept* is opaque, and its content is presented in a more authoritative, dogmatic fashion.

Skepticism around the creation of FLOW and its novelty introduced a hiccup in the final stages of its publication in early 2020. Because of the simultaneous drafting of the document with inclusion of input, the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate reviewed multiple versions. When it came time for publication, there were small discrepancies between a draft the Synod approved and the final version of the text. For several days the fate of the document was unclear, but a compromise was found; the publication of the online version includes this notification:

"*For the Life of the World* reflects editorial changes by the Special Commission that incorporate elaborations and amplifications not included in the original document reviewed and approved for publication by the Holy and Sacred Synod."³

It is interesting to me how little comment has been made about this statement in discussions of the document.

Despite the residual reluctance of some, the Ecumenical Patriarch was dedicated to addressing, in his own words, the "complex challenges and problems of today's world ... as well as the favorable potential and positive perspectives of contemporary civilization" in FLOW. This

3. <https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos>.

willingness to engage with our contemporary setting is evidence of the synodal spirit of FLOW. As Metropolitan Kallistos Ware said, the idea of the shared journey of synodality implies “a sense of movement and exploration, reminds us that synods are not static but dynamic, not repetitive but revelatory.” In the commissioning and approval of FLOW, the Ecumenical Patriarch witnessed to the dynamic synodality of the Orthodox Church. The synodal character of *For the Life of the World* was also shown in its release: it was published in over a dozen languages as Orthodox Christians around the world journeyed through Great Lent and Covid-19 in 2020.

I conclude my comments on FLOW and practices of synodality with a discussion of its title, which sums up the aspirations as well as the synodal spirit of the document. It is “for the life of the world”; a phrase which suggests both scripture and liturgy, anchoring FLOW in the life of Jesus Christ and the celebration of our communion with him in the Eucharist. The title of Fr Alexander Schmemmann’s much beloved work of sacramental theology, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, will also come to mind, and FLOW follows in the lineage of Schmemmann in his deep love of Orthodoxy and his hopeful conviction that the church is “for the life of the world.”

The preposition “toward” in the title is deliberate. FLOW is meant to provide a means for the Orthodox Church to consider both social issues that endure and social issues unique to our era, but not an end, not a final word. “Toward” also acknowledges there is more work to be done and includes the hope that FLOW may inspire important conversations. Finally, the phrase “ethos” tells us this document seeks to convey the spirit of the Orthodox Church, which is quite different from issuing doctrine.

The language of FLOW’s title purposefully captures the common pilgrimage, the shared journey to a more complete synodal expression of the Orthodox Church. Both the content of the document and the process of its drafting are imperfect, but the “practices of synodality” evident in the creation of FLOW are hopeful indicators of a new era of synodal realization in the Orthodox Church which more fully reflects our shared journey.

Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches

Peter Bouteneff

I find it significant and admirable that the Roman Catholic Church has chosen to devote careful attention to its Eastern Orthodox brothers and sisters when it comes to such matters as synodality, and that it does so in preparation for its own Senate on that subject. I say with regret that it would be difficult to imagine Orthodox churches listening with such attentiveness to Roman Catholic voices, seeking to learn something from them. I don't know of any Orthodox conferences called "Listening to the West" It is in any case a special honor to be invited in person to participate in this encounter. I come here with some years of experience in the ecumenical movement and – especially relevant to our theme – in the formation and work of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC, which had its main activities just at the turn of the Millennium. I am pleased to be able to reflect on these matters with you now, after two decades.

As is inevitable in addressing and reflecting on the ecumenical movement, we can expect to be at the same time filled with hope and heartbreak. This is the way of union among persons and church bodies with such strong, genuine, passionate identities, formed over so many centuries. Which means also that this is the way of synodality: a combination of expectation and disenchantment, a celebration of identity, of the bringing of gifts, as well as of the challenge of self-emptying, and the realization of our own weaknesses, and of human frailty. But I am getting too philosophical far too early in these remarks.

In reflecting on synodality relative to Orthodox participation in the World Council of Churches, as I have been asked to do, I will consider synodality at three levels. One is that which exists within the Eastern Orthodox Church itself. Another is the synodality demonstrated between Eastern and Oriental Orthodox in the context of the ecumenical movement. And finally, there is the relationship between the

Orthodox and the WCC. I think I am expected to say the most about the last of these three, and so I will do, but I do feel that the intra- and inter-Orthodox realities are vital to our understanding the wider context. Moreover, the WCC is involved in some way at all three of these levels. So let us explore intra-Orthodox, inter-Orthodox, and extra-Orthodox synodality, in that order.

Synodality: Eastern Orthodoxy

The Orthodox Church understands itself to be the Church, the Body of Christ, in continuity with the faith and the ministerial succession of the apostles. As such, it is a family of autocephalous churches in communion with each other and with its first-among-equals see of Constantinople. It is a body with canonical norms that establish the synodal relationships among and between them. Synodality is the key to maintaining the balance between the church's local and universal character. On the one hand, the local churches are essentially self-governing, on the other hand, they do not properly exist without each other. Synodality is also fundamental to our understanding of that delicate relationship between conciliarity and primacy that exists at every level of Church life. As for the Orthodox Church globally, there is a certain diversity of understandings of the nature of Constantinopolitan primacy, but no-one disputes that the Ecumenical Patriarch is first among equals within the wider body of the Orthodox Church. It is with the Ecumenical Patriarch that resides the authority and responsibility of gathering the local autocephalous churches in council. This is a responsibility for synodality at the global level, and also in the so-called diaspora, multi-jurisdictional contexts such as North America and Western Europe.

We can only observe that gatherings of high-level representatives of local Orthodox churches at the official ecclesiastical level have been few and far between. The most visible has been the 2016 Holy and Great Council in Crete, as well as the pan-Orthodox pre-conciliar meetings that preceded it: there were four preparatory meetings over the course of four decades, and then the Council itself. This was not the only mode of gathering the churches, but it was certainly the most momentous and visible. In all, gatherings of the global autocephalous churches are rare. And while the Holy-and-Great-Council process testified to some positive

and healthy characteristics of contemporary Orthodoxy and its synodality, the process, its attendance, and its results also revealed considerable brokenness. Here we consider the churches that weren't invited (such as the Orthodox Church in America, whose odyssey is a long testimony to tensions in conciliarity), the churches that were invited but did not attend, and the less-than-breathtaking final texts of the gathering.

Whatever the many lessons that can be drawn, one is that it is actually far easier to gather the Orthodox under pretexts *other than* official Orthodox Church synodal gatherings. And this has meant that ever since the World Council of Churches came into existence, it has been one of the few contexts where Orthodox actually find themselves in one place. [Orthodox also gather at other inter-church settings, such as the present gathering, and through bodies such as Syndesmos.] As for the WCC, for three decades, *all* the canonical Orthodox Churches were member churches. The churches of Georgia and Bulgaria withdrew in 1998; the rest remain full members. Representatives from virtually all the Orthodox churches come for WCC Assemblies that are convened every eight years. They come for annual Central Committee meetings. They are hierarchs, clergy, and lay delegates, men and women – in fact, a far broader representation of church life than can be found at official Church synods that gather primarily the (celibate male) episcopate. Orthodox who gather under the auspices of the WCC not only participate in the events at hand, but in nearly all cases they gather as an “Orthodox caucus” to deliberate together on matters relevant to their relationships to the Council. Inevitably, some of the ecclesiastical tensions plaguing the Orthodox churches manifest themselves in the WCC context. At the recent Assembly of the WCC in Karlsruhe, Germany, conflicts surrounding the Russian invasion of Ukraine came – albeit only briefly – to the plenary floor. And the longer-simmering tensions between Slavic and Greek churches – mostly territorial disputes and jostling over hierarchical structures – are perennially there as well, whether in the sight of everyone or in backroom meetings.

All of this is to say that the WCC has emerged, willy-nilly, as an instrument that has helped to lubricate the sometimes-clumsy machinery of intra-Orthodox synodality. To be frank, our churches have needed

this assistance, this way of gathering, and I am presenting here a rare acknowledgment of that reality, and an all too rare word of gratitude.

Synodality: Eastern and Oriental

The aftermath of the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451 has left a breach in communion between the (Eastern) Orthodox Church and the non-Chalcedonian Coptic, Syriac, Malankara, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Armenian churches. As representatives from all these churches began to see each other in the context of WCC meetings, a thirst began to develop for renewed relationships, even restored communion. The impulses and energy of some staff members, Nikos Nissiotis and Paul Varghese (later Metr. Paulos Mar Gregorios), helped launch a process that began in the early 1960's, first with four unofficial meetings and later four official meetings of what came to be known as the "Eastern" and "Oriental" Orthodox churches. The significance of these new relationships could hardly be overstated. For one, this entailed the formation of a new "family of churches" – as prior to the 1960's the non-Chalcedonians had not understood themselves as a church family. Once galvanized in this way, part of the dialogue process was to assign this family a name – "Oriental" – deliberately chosen for its virtual synonymy with "Eastern" to indicate a parity of dialogue partners.

By the time of the 1992 Chambésy text, the call for restored communion was clearly established on the understanding of shared Christology:

We have now clearly understood that both families have always loyally maintained the same authentic Orthodox Christological faith, and the unbroken continuity of the apostolic tradition, though they have used Christological terms in different ways. It is this common faith and continuous loyalty to the Apostolic Tradition that should be the basis for our unity and communion.¹

In fact, the results of the dialogue were so dramatic that the Eastern and Oriental churches are still reeling, paralyzed and unable to act on them, preferring the easier, more comfortable status of broken

1. Chambésy statement, §9.

communion to the pastoral and administrative challenges of restoring it. However, both in its representative structures, and at WCC meetings themselves, the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches are one bloc. They are considered together, as one whole. This means that not only is the WCC at the root of the process of inter-Orthodox rapprochement beginning in the 1960's, it is also a kind of workshop for the synodality between these two long-estranged church bodies, now positioned to enact a unity that had eluded them for a millennium and half.

Synodality: The Orthodox and the WCC

Ever since the earliest “separate statements” that Orthodox felt compelled to make at seminal ecumenical gatherings – at least as early as the 1927 conference on Faith and Order – we have come to expect from the Orthodox a combination of warm recognition and disenchantment. We have all felt it ourselves. We are genuinely happy to be here, and to see so much that we recognize of Christ in this wider gathering, but at the same time we see so much that seems foreign to us in the ecumenical forum, and I say “foreign” not necessarily in the sense of a healthy challenge. What we encounter in each other in the wider WCC fellowship is sometimes simply impossible to recognize as being “of the Church”. (I would add that something like this same hot-and-cold ambivalence is characteristic of Roman Catholic relationships with the WCC, even without the full membership of the RCC.) After a number of official statements of concern, articulations of Eastern Orthodox disenchantment came to something of a climax in the so-called Thessaloniki Statement,² just before the 1998 Harare Assembly of the world Council of Churches. That proclamation was roughly contemporary with the withdrawal of two churches from WCC membership: the Church of Georgia and the Church of Bulgaria. Never mind that these two departures were owed almost entirely to threats of internal schism *within* those churches, the message was that they are leaving the WCC, and the Council needs to take heed. All of this amplified the concerns expressed by those gathered in Thessaloniki –

2. <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/thessaloniki-statement>.

what might be informally called a “synodal” gathering of Eastern Orthodox representatives.

Several challenges were voiced that had long accompanied the Orthodox-WCC relationship. Among them are approaches to social and moral decision-making, tensions related to ecumenical worship services, modes of governance. But there was also the long festering and intractable issue of voting and representation. The fundamental problem lay in the fact that, at the time of the Thessaloniki Statement, there were some 337 member churches, of whom around 25 were Orthodox churches (Eastern and Oriental) – numbers which totally failed to represent demographic realities of church membership in the world. Various solutions had been tried, such as the famous “25% rule” that gave the Orthodox a quarter of the vote, but all of them forced the Orthodox into a guaranteed minority.

The Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC was formed at the Eighth Assembly, held in Harare in 1998, partly as a direct response to the Thessaloniki Statement. The Commission’s membership was comprised of by design, 50% Orthodox (Eastern and Oriental) and 50% of representatives from other WCC member churches. The Special Commission produced several landmark recommendations, notably on prayer in ecumenical contexts, as well as study texts on the main challenges of the Orthodox-WCC relationship.³ But the signature recommendation that was adopted by the WCC represented a true change in the landscape: this was the move to consensus decision-making. This represented not only a procedural change for the floor of the Central Committee; it was a change in the ethos of the Council and its work. I have taken all this time to build up to this because of its relevance to our theme of synodality.

The move to consensus method was in the first instance motivated by the “percentage problem.” Not only the Orthodox, but other church families were sensing that their perennial minority status on the voting floor was unacceptable. The consensus remedy was conceived as a leveling of the playing field for all members. No one’s voice was more or

3. <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/final-report-of-the-special-commission-on-orthodox-participation-in-the-wcc>.

less important than another's. With this last point, it became apparent that consensus was not simply a matter of churches "getting their way." It was a mode not only of decision making but of deliberation, of how to work together. Furthermore, the Orthodox periodically argued that it was a more "Orthodox" way of being together, invoking church councils that – allegedly, at least – operated by consensus and not by simple voting.

The WCC's adoption of consensus method, though originating most clearly from the Special Commission, in fact was commensurate with other processes taking place within the Council during those same years in the 1990's. These culminated in a document called the "Common Understanding and Vision" of the WCC – a far-reaching text also adopted at Harare, into which great energy and resources were poured over an eight-year period. One of the main points of the CUV text,⁴ perhaps especially for us Orthodox, was its effective reaffirmation that the WCC was not itself anything akin to a church. The CUV reminds us that the WCC is in fact nothing more (and nothing less) than an *instrument of the churches*.⁵ It has no identity of its own. There is therefore no "WCC position" or "WCC point of view" on church or political matters. The Council is neither an acting agent nor a speaking subject. It is the churches, through the WCC, that act, affirm, and advocate. With this in mind, it is all the more apt that the churches, in and through the WCC, do their work and make their decisions through consensus method.

The initial period upon adopting consensus methodology was not easy, and one may say that its adoption remains incomplete. Ironically, the Orthodox themselves were slow to come on board with it. The expectation of many Orthodox was that consensus method was essentially just a way to ensure that they would never be implicated in,

4. <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/common-understanding-and-vision-of-the-wcc-cuv>.

5. "The essence of the Council is the relationship of the churches to one another. The Council is the fellowship of churches ... it has a structure and organization in order to serve as an instrument for the churches ... but the WCC is not to be identified with this structure..." (CUV 3.5.2.).

for example, a WCC majority decision to ordain women. (Never mind that such a vote could never have taken place, under the Council's procedural rules.) More broadly, consensus felt like a guarantee against being disenfranchised. As it became clear, however, that the consensus method meant not only being listened to, but also the responsibility to listen with great care and attention, to every voice, it became somewhat less attractive. Many Protestant members of the WCC had their own misgivings about consensus, feeling that the consensus method dulled the so-called "prophetic voice" of the Council. But the Council was not ever supposed to have *its own* voice, whether "prophetic" or commonplace, apart from the voices of the member churches. Together.

Over time, the churches in the WCC gradually came to see that consensus method is more than simply deciding things only by unanimity. Consensus method would indeed limit what could be said, perhaps even sharply. But consensus method infuses the entire process of work, all the way until a decision is brought up for final say. All along, as things are being said, as propositions are being tested, the room is being "felt" for its receptivity or displeasure with a proposal. This is done using different colored cards that are held up by delegates, whereby the moderators are able almost literally to "read the room" for the warmth or coolness of its reception of the ideas on the floor. All of this relies very much on the delicate skills of the moderator, and on bringing the delegates on board with the process, which is anything but easy.

The challenges of consensus method are real and are felt universally. Again, raising the experience at Karlsruhe and in the months leading up to that Assembly, the WCC's voice in the face of the Russian invasion of Ukraine was limited, partly because of the consensus method. The Council's churches could not unilaterally or univocally condemn the invasion and despite considerable pressure, the Council was not ready to seek the ejection of the Russian Orthodox Church from its membership. The Acting General Secretary did address himself to the Patriarch of Moscow, person to person, first in writing and then face-to-face. These encounters were significant, but they represented the limit of what could be done in any association with the WCC. To have done more would have violated what the WCC now in fact is by its own definitions. Likewise, hearing the voice of Ukrainian churches on the floor of the

plenary sessions at Karlsruhe was immensely meaningful – it was a voice that may have gone unheard on the global church scene. However, it was like a breath in the wind. Here too, to have done more would have gone outside the bounds of the WCC as a consensus body. But consensus method includes the respectful hearing of all voices, and the recording of opinions that do not carry the whole fellowship.

There is more to be said about consensus method,⁶ as well as about the continued shift away from perceiving the WCC as an ecclesiastical body or really a subject of identity. But we can quickly see some of the implications for synodality, both in its positive dimensions – building and experiencing bonds of fellowship through deep listening – and its challenges – experiencing the limits of what can and cannot be said. Both impulses within the Council came with the close involvement of Orthodox member churches. Crucially however, neither of these is a “signature Orthodox feature,” or something that the Orthodox advocated for on their own. Rather, there were significant constituents within the mainline Protestant and Anglican membership that experienced the same problems with the previous WCC and welcomed consensus method as a solution. When it came time to explicate and educate the Council about consensus method, we relied a great deal, in fact, on the experience of Quaker communities.

To sum up, we have taken note of the WCC’s role in gathering the Orthodox outside their own formal and sometimes rusty mechanisms. We have recognized also the WCC’s role in fostering a dramatic rapprochement between Eastern Orthodox and non-Chalcedonian churches. And finally, we have heard a narrative of the kinds of roles Orthodox have played in fostering an increased synodality within the WCC. The relationship has therefore gone in two directions. The Orthodox churches do not make a habit of recognizing the role that the WCC has played in bringing them into relationship with each other – we

6. See an interim report drafted soon after the adoption of the consensus method: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/interim-report-on-consensus-procedures>. Also see the excellent article by Fr Alexander Rentel, On Consensus: A Canonical Appraisal, online at <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2016/05/17/on-consensus-a-canonical-appraisal>.

are not well versed in admitting that we benefit or learn from the world outside our canonical borders. But the role of the WCC is indisputable. Equally beyond dispute is the role the Orthodox have played in shaping a WCC whose processes and self-understanding are both more realistic, and in many ways more synodal.

WORKSHOPS

Mission and Synodality in Different Contexts: The Case of the Romanian Orthodox Church

Cristian Sonea

Introduction

Orthodox ecclesiology developed by Romanian theologians, underline several modes of manifestation of synodality which are organically related and distinct from each other. These models include the synodality of the bishops, expressed and manifested in the Episcopal Synod, the primatial hierarchical coordination, extended synodality of the bishops together with the priests and deacons, and all the faithful. The synodality of the whole Church, in which bishops, priests and deacons are gathered with the whole community of the lay faithful, is the maximum extended synodality. During the Holy Liturgy, the bishop serves the Holy Sacrifice surrounded by priests and deacons amid the people. The synodality of the bishops, expressed in their concelebration of the Holy Eucharist, is therefore meaningful and effective only in relation to the general communion of all the members of the Church.¹

1. See Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. II, Ediția a doua, București: Ed. IBMBOR, 1997; Dumitru Stăniloae, *Sobornicitatea deschisă*, «Ortodoxia», 23.2 (1971), 165-180; Dumitru Stăniloae, *Natura sinodicității*, «Studii Teologice», 29.9-10 (1977), 605-614; Patriciu Vlaicu, *Sinodalitatea și primatul: expresii ale comuniunii și coresponsabilității ecleziale*, in Patriciu Vlaicu and Răzvan Perșa (eds.), *Tradiția canonică și misiunea Bisericii*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2018, pp. 49-73; Nathanael Neacșu, *Sinodalitatea*

In addition to these manifestations of synodality, His Beatitude Daniel, the Patriarch of Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC), emphasized the need to have a constant concern to understand and realize unity of the Church, both in the theological and spiritual areas, as well as in the pastoral and missionary aspects. In expressing the unity of the Orthodox faith, sacramental life, and canonical discipline, synodality serves as a *canonical norm* and practice in the life of the local Orthodox Churches.²

To apply those models, the Statute of the Romanian Orthodox Church (SROC) gives a special attention to synodality, giving increased responsibility to the Holy Synod, the Permanent Synod, and the Metropolitan Synods. At the same time, it provides a broader framework for cooperation between clergy and laity in the National Church Assembly, the diocesan assembly, and in the parishes. The statute also offers a rich framework for the active presence of the Church in society, using new means of communication, with the aim of intensifying her liturgical, pastoral, cultural, and philanthropic mission in society.

1. Episcopal Synodality

Patriciu Vlaicu shows that Eastern Christianity prefers the concept of episcopal synodality, through which the power received by ordination is manifested not in a personal name, but in the name of the Church's pastoral care. Thus, local churches mandate their bishops to represent them in the Synod, and where the bishop is present, the Church is pastorally present through him.³ According to Nathanael Neacșu, this

episcopală, întâistătătorul și adunarea credincioșilor, «Revista Teologică», 2, 2017, pp. 64-76.

2. Daniel, Patriarhul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, Unitatea Bisericii este dar al lui Dumnezeu și coresponsabilitate a clerului și credincioșilor laici <https://www.eparhiaortodoxaoradea.ro/stiri/unitatea-bisericii-este-dar-al-lui-dumnezeu-si-coresponsabilitate-a-clerului-si-credinciosilor-laici>.

3. Patriciu Vlaicu, Sinodalitatea și primatul: expresii ale comuniunii și coresponsabilității ecleziale, Sinodalitatea și primatul: expresii ale comuniunii și

episcopal synodality has as its basis the model of perichoretic existence and communion of the Holy Trinity and involves all levels of synodality in this. Based on this Trinitarian principle, it's said that synodal persons should manifest themselves in a synod, taking as a model the relationships that exist between the Persons of the Holy Trinity. And added that, according to the "relations" that exist within the Holy Trinity between the Hypostases, the Being, and the Works of the Holy Trinity, synodal persons should act together in the same way at the synodal level. Therefore, the nature of synodality and the work they are called to do, as synodal members in the Church is framed by the Trinitarian model.⁴

In the first article of SROC the ROC is defined as "the community of Orthodox Christians [...] who confess God in the Holy Trinity"⁵ and participate in the life of the Church through the same Holy Sacraments, liturgical services, and canonical regulations, emphasizing the communion of the autocephalous ROC with the Universal Orthodox Church.⁶ In accordance with the Trinitarian model, the Church must reveal at all her levels, and especially at the synodal level, structures of communion that reflect the Trinitarian and personal way of existence of humankind. Following Dumitru Stăniloae, the synodality of the bishops represents the communion of the persons who must fulfill a special ministry in the Church; namely, preaching the Gospel, sanctifying the faithful, and pastoral leadership towards perfection in God.⁷

Episcopal synodality is the guarantee of the communion and catholicity of the Church. This is true both in the context of an autocephalous church and at the universal level through the Ecumenical

coresponsabilității ecleziale, in Patriciu Vlaicu and Răzvan Perșa (eds.) *Tradiția canonică și misiunea Bisericii*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2018, pp. 49-73, here p. 55.

4. Nathanael Neacșu, *Sinodalitatea episcopală, înfățișătorul și adunarea credincioșilor*, «*Revista Teologică*», 2, 2017, pp. 64-76, here p. 66.

5. *Statutul pentru organizarea și funcționarea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2022, art. 1.

6. *Statut BOR*, art. 2.

7. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Temeiurile teologice ale ierarhiei și sinodalității*, «*Studii Teologice*», XXII.3-4 (1970), 164-76, here p. 170.

Synods. Just as synodality is expressed locally, so episcopal synodality is expressed catholicly. In this way we encounter the full meaning of the Church both at the local level and at the universal level. This synodal functioning of the Church has consequences for the missionary work of the Church. The local manifestation of the Church can give rise to contextual decisions motivated by specific missionary challenges. These decisions are applicable at the local level but have universal validity.

Thus, while maintaining dogmatic, canonical, and liturgical unity with the other autocephalous churches, local churches are free to organize their own internal life.

2. Primal hierarchical coordination

In the Orthodox Tradition it has been established that the principles of primacy are based on synodality rather than divine law. The primate's role is not to lead episcopal communion and synodality but to serve as its guarantor and servant in communion with the entire ecclesial body. The primate of an episcopal synodality does not hold a hierarchical ruling position over the synod's members. The pastoral principle of hierarchical obedience, which applies at the bishopric level, does not function within the episcopal synod. Instead, the apostolic principle of episcopal conciliarity governs the synod's functioning. The local or ecumenical primacy only makes sense in relation to the synod, not as a power above the synod. The primate is a servant of the synod's unity, not its leader, and can only be seen as the principle of synodal unity, not its creator or generator.⁸ As P. Vlaicu said, in the episcopal synodality, the bishops are brothers and refer to the Primate as a brother, recognizing him as a vector of unity and harmony.⁹ A "monarchy" of primacy is acceptable if it does not supersede the synodality and the co-ministerial equality shared with the other bishops. If, at the local and regional level,

8. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Temeiurile teologice ale ierarhiei și sinodalității*, cit., p. 171.

9. Patriciu Vlaicu, *Sinodalitatea și primatul: expresii ale comuniunii și coresponsabilității ecleziale*, cit., p. 55.

P. Vlaicu said, the bishop and the synod, together with the metropolitan or patriarch, are the authorities, it is natural that, at the universal level, there should be institutions that are expressions of unity and co-responsibility. The fact that Christ is the unseen Head of the Church does not justify the refusal to personify the criteria of unity. For this reason, the Orthodox Church believes that it can integrate the primacy concept if it is understood from the perspective of synodality.¹⁰ The primate's role is to guarantee and support the personal character and personal manifestation of each member of the episcopal synod in unity and communion with the entire body of the Church.

Following this principle, the Patriarch of ROC is one of the central executive organisms of the ROC who ensures the application of the decisions taken by the deliberative body, the Holy Synod.¹¹

3. General synodality

To serve the Church, episcopal synodality cannot exist in isolation from the community of believers. Although the Synod has supreme authority, it does not function as a separate power. To be effective in preaching, sanctifying and pastoral work, episcopal synodality must involve not only the higher hierarchy but also priests and deacons. This is because, in addition to the hierarchical order, there is a charismatic communion among all members of the Body of Christ within the Church. Therefore, the Synod of Bishops and the Primate, in all that they do, must maintain charismatic communion with the assembly of the faithful.¹²

An illustration of this is the missionary structures at parish level in the ROC. According to the SROC, each parish has a parish committee (apart from the parish council) whose members are elected by the parish assembly according to the different charisms of its members. This

10. Ibid., p. 53.

11. Statut BOR, arts. 9, 3(a).

12. Nathanael Neacșu, *Sinodalitatea episcopală, înțâistătorul și adunarea credincioșilor*, cit., p. 66.

committee has 5 ministries, each of which is led by a coordinator appointed by the leadership office: a. social ministry; b. missionary ministry; c. cultural ministry; d. youth ministry; e. administrative and economic ministry.¹³

Therefore, episcopal synodality cannot be conceived outside the ecclesial communion of the faithful of all the members of a local church. In Orthodox theological consciousness, the Church's *pleroma* is fully expressed through the episcopal synodality, the highest ecclesial authority in the body of the Church. According to D. Stăniloae,

the entire Church is a permanent Synod, a communion, a convergence, and a permanent cooperation of all its members, because this is the only state in which its spiritual goods can be kept and valorized.¹⁴

Hence, this "general synodality" implies complementarity, which differentiates the Orthodox sense of the term "catholic" from the Western one, understood, according to D. Stăniloae, in Roman-Catholicism as *universality* or by the Anglicans as *doctrinarian integrity*. In D. Stăniloae theology this is sobornicity, that refers to the idea that all members of the Church actively participate in the spiritual blessings of Christ, fostering a sense of full communion and functioning as the body of Christ. In other words, sobornicity represents the active involvement of all believers in the spiritual life of the Church, contributing to the Church's organic nature as the body of Christ. Thus, the Orthodox sense does not exclude, but includes the other two senses, for "this communion would enrich each of us all the more so as it comprises more members, if possible, all the Christians and all the people."¹⁵ According to D. Stăniloae, sobornicity expresses better than catholicity the full sense of the active participation of all Christians, in full communion, in

13. Statut BOR, art. 67.

14. Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. II, cit., p. 186.

15. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Coordonatele ecumenismului din punct de vedere ortodox*, « Ortodoxia », 19.4 (1967), pp. 495-540, here p. 516.

the truth and life brought by Christ. Sobornicity has three aspects: the extensive sense of the gathering of many, the intensive sense of their consultation in all matters of concern to all, and the integrity of doctrine.¹⁶

In another study, where sobornicity is equated with synodicity¹⁷ and linked to apostolicity, D. Stăniloae notes that the basis of this synodicity is humanity, which has a common nature but is made up of diverse individuals. This is illustrated by the creation of man in the image of God and the call to be like Him. This diversity extends to families and nations. However, unity is found in Christ and in the Church, where everyone comes together in communion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. D. Stăniloae wanted to emphasize the concrete, practical dimension of the term and not the theoretical one: “Sobornicity must in fact be a living of the faith in a vivid communion; it is Christian universality in shape of communion (*koinonia*).”¹⁸ The use of the term “universality” is intentional and carries significant meaning. It encompasses not only the doctrine itself, but also the way in which it is lived out. Sobornicity refers to the full unity of the Christian faith as lived out by a universal and open community of Christians. It is not limited to a narrow interpretation but is a mission for all Christians. It involves the coming together of all individuals, with each Christian bringing his or her unique understanding of divine revelation and humanity as revealed by God. This allows individual perspectives to be shared and for each to have a deeper understanding of the beliefs of others.

In this sense, for D. Stăniloae collective discernment is a central aspect of synodality within the Church. In this understanding, synodality is not just a matter of organizational structure or decision-making processes, but rather a spiritual reality. The role of the synod is to facilitate the expression of the Church’s collective discernment and to help guide the faithful towards a deeper understanding of God’s will.

16. Stăniloae, *Coordonatele ecumenismului din punct de vedere ortodox*, cit., pp. 516-517.

17. Stăniloae, *Natura sinodicității*, cit., pp. 605-606.

18. Stăniloae, *Sobornicitatea deschisă*, cit., p. 172.

This unity allows for collective discernment, where the Church as a whole, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can discern the will of God.

4. Synodality as a canonical norm

According to Patriarch Daniel, synodality is a permanent canonical norm at the local level, that must be a continuous practice at the pan-Orthodox or universal level. This practice should not be limited to exceptional or crisis situations but should be maintained and constantly reaffirmed to preserve ecclesial communion and the pastoral and missionary co-responsibility of Orthodoxy in the contemporary world.¹⁹

Talking about the necessity for a Holy and Great Synod, Patriarch Daniel recalls that synodality *is a canonical rule* of ecclesial life in all autocephalous Orthodox Churches. And he continues stating that today, synodality must be established as a universal rule in the Orthodox Church, with ordinary synodal meetings every five, seven or ten years. The Council of Crete should not be seen as an eschatological event, but rather as an historical event that helps to develop the practice of synodality at the pan-Orthodox level. The Pan-Orthodox Synod should be followed by further stages to address issues where consensus has not yet been reached, or new issues affecting the Church and society.²⁰ The call for ordinary synodal meetings every five, seven or ten years indicates a commitment to a regular and structured practice of synodality. This would provide an opportunity for the Church to address current issues affecting the Church and society in a collaborative and consultative way, rather than relying on ad hoc measures. The Holy and Great Synod is seen as an important step in the development of the practice of synodality at the pan-Orthodox level, but it is not seen as an end. Rather, it is seen as a beginning, to be followed by further stages to address issues where

19. Daniel, Patriarhul Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, *Unitatea Bisericii este dar al lui Dumnezeu și coresponsabilitate a clerului și credincioșilor laici*, cit.

20. Aurelian Iftimiu, Patriarhul României: „Sinodalitatea trebuie să fie o normă la nivel panortodox, nu doar local” (video), *Basilica.ro*, 2016 <https://basilica.ro/patriarhul-romaniei-sinodalitate-norma-nivel-panortodox-nu-local/>.

consensus has not yet been reached, or where new issues affecting the Church and society arise.

The issues identified by Patriarch Daniel as requiring attention are diverse and reflect the challenges facing the Church and society in today's world. Family life, the secularization of parishes and monasteries, migrations due to military conflict or economic crisis, and solidarity with persecuted Christians are all areas that require ongoing attention and discussion. By participating in regular synodal meetings, the Orthodox Church can ensure that these issues are addressed in a collaborative and consultative manner, with the aim of furthering the Church's pastoral and social mission in the world.

Conclusion

Romanian contemporary theology, and the Statute for the Organization and Functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church, present *synodality* as collective discernment that is formulating a missionary answer to the nowadays challenges. Therefore, synodality is presented as a theological category that includes the bond between created and uncreated, the human and divine realities, where we can observe four specific ministries: 1. episcopal synodality; 2. the primacy within the synodality; 3. the assembly of all faithful or people of God; 4. synodality as a canonical rule of ecclesial life.

The practical implications of following Patriarch Daniel's position on synodality would be to establish a regular and structured practice of synodality at both local and pan-Orthodox levels, to address current issues affecting the Church and society in a collaborative and consultative manner, and to promote the Church's pastoral and social mission in the world.

Overall, the concept of synodality embraced by the ROC presents a vision of the Church as a dynamic and responsive community engaged with the world around her. Practical solutions arising from this vision include greater lay participation, greater collaborative working and coordination between different levels of the Church, and a holistic approach to the mission of the Church.

Synodality as a Model for the Society?

Michel Nseir

Over the last few days, we have explored the concept of synodality from different perspectives: Communion, Participation, and Mission. Each of these dimensions has provided insights into how synodality could be a model for our life in the world.

In this workshop, we are asked to discuss and explore the possibility of synodality as a model for society. In my introductory remarks and reflections, I will challenge us to see where the experience of synodality in the Church and community can serve as a model for society, and where values in modern societies can “adjust” or “challenge” the way synodality is experienced and lived in the Church.

Before we begin, I want to introduce the Eucharistic liturgy as a basis for our understanding of synodality and its relation to society. I have always been intrigued by a passage in the Byzantine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, where the bishop and the community remember, “this saving commandment and all that has been done for our sake: the Cross, the tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the enthronement at the right hand, and the second and glorious coming again”. How can we remember an event, i.e. the second and glorious coming again, which has not happened yet?

In my theological formation, I learned that in the liturgy, we have a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. God is accompanying his people, the Church, gathered around the Eucharist, and walking with them throughout history. In that sense, synodality is first lived and experienced in the liturgy. Late Metropolitan John Zizioulas, a prominent Orthodox theologian, argues that in the celebration of the St John Chrysostom liturgy, the Church does not merely recall historical events but rather makes them present through the power of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the Church’s liturgical celebration is not simply a memory of the past but a participation in the ongoing saving work of Christ in the present.

This is why we do not remember the event of the second and glorious coming as a future reality that is yet to occur, but rather as a present reality that is already realized in Christ's Resurrection and Ascension. The Church believes that Christ's Resurrection and Ascension inaugurated the "last days" of human history, in which the world has already been transformed and redeemed by Christ's victory over sin and death. Thus, the Church's celebration of the second coming is not a mere anticipation of a future event, but a participation in the present reality of Christ's kingdom. In other words, this could mean that with Christ being resurrected from death, there is a dialectical relation between the "already" and "not yet".

Hence, the liturgy after the liturgy; the sending to the world, our mission in the world, is to witness to the world the beauty of what we have experienced in our journey together with God in his Kingdom. However, at the same time, when we "go back" from the "world" to God's Kingdom in the Eucharistic experience, we do not only "lay aside all earthly cares" but we also bring our experiences in the world and our concerns. The "already" and "not yet" are in dialogue in our Eucharistic celebration, in our walking together, in our witnessing together, and in our living together in our different societies.

Considered from this Mission perspective, we will try to see, in our discussions, where the experience of synodality in the Church/community could serve as a model for society and where values in modern societies can "adjust" or "challenge" the way synodality is experienced.

Diversity and Unity

Synodality recognizes the importance of managing diversity within the Church. As a community of diverse individuals united in faith and mission, the Church should strive to incorporate tools and institutions that promote diversity management, as is the case in many modern societies. However, many churches still operate hierarchically, limiting synodality to a concertation between bishops in local synod meetings.

Human Dignity

The promotion of human dignity is another value that synodality upholds. At the core of the Church's social teachings is the concept that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God, imbuing them with inherent dignity and worth. Synodality recognizes and promotes this dignity through the practice of walking together in the Holy Spirit. Every member of the community deserves to have their voice heard and their dignity respected. Unfortunately, many churches fail to uphold this concept, and many individuals are excluded based on their gender, race, sexual identity, and other factors.

Human Fraternity and Togetherness

Synodality also promotes the concept of human fraternity and togetherness. The Church recognizes the importance of community and the need to live in harmony with one another. The practice of synodality invites us to live in a spirit of togetherness, where every member is valued and has a role to play in the community. We are all interconnected, and the practice of synodality serves as a way to promote this interconnectedness.

Role of Women/Youth – Equal Dignity

The position of women and youth in the Church is a critical issue that synodality seeks to address. The Church must recognize the importance of involving young people in all levels of church leadership, in accordance with the talents bestowed upon them by the Holy Spirit. Our youth aspire to live their faith in harmony with the values of equality, sharing, and solidarity upheld by modern and post-modern societies. However, they often encounter a disconnect between these values and a culture of exclusion, lack of listening, and absence of consultation in the everyday life of the Church. This underscores the need to actively involve young people in all levels of church leadership. Similarly, the position of women in the Church requires a radical shift in mentality and practice, one that truly values the unique dignity of women, their inherent worth in the eyes of God, and the full equality of women and men (Gen 1:27).

Authority and Authoritarianism

The concept of authority, which has developed over centuries, has become authoritarianism. The Church's synodality seeks to deconstruct this concept and promote a more decentralized approach to authority, which involves participatory decision-making and decision-taking processes that give voice to all members of the community. In contrast, authoritarianism seeks to concentrate power in the hands of a few. The practice of synodality can serve as a model for society's approach to authority, but only if churches reintegrate participatory decision-making and decision-taking processes into their practices.

In conclusion, as Christians, we face several challenges that require us to re-examine our current practices in our churches and communities. Many societies embrace values that, unfortunately, are not always evident in our churches. If we hope to promote our concept of synodality as a model for building just, inclusive, and peaceful societies, we must begin by reflecting on and reinventing the profound meaning of our Eucharistic experience.

Synodality and Mission: An Orthodox Stocktaking¹

Ioan Moga

Introduction

Talking about mission and synodality could be labelled as a typical modernizing compilation. On the one hand, we have the magic word “synodality”, which is currently sweeping through all the corridors of the ecclesial media like a fresh wind, and on the other hand, we have a major problem with the internal mission of the churches (one keyword among many: the stalled new evangelization).

Nothing could be more natural than to link the question of mission with the great project of a synodal revival. This link is also embodied in the title of the document “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”, approved by the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on April 24, 2021, with the approval of the Pope.

But the appearance of a new invention is deceptive. Synodality and mission do not belong together only since “synodality” has become a trendy term. They have belonged together since the early Christian church began to act self-confidently. For the so-called Apostolic Council (Acts 15) is not only paradigmatic for the central importance of synodality for the nature of the church, but also for the epochal, missionary upheaval that the early church accomplished by opening up to the Gentiles. What we should not forget, however, is that for a long

1. This text is the English translation of the article “Synodalität und Mission. Eine orthodoxe Bestandsaufnahme”, published in: D. W. Winkler, R. Cerny-Werner (eds.), *Synodalität als Möglichkeitsraum. Erfahrungen – Herausforderungen – Perspektiven*, „Salzburger Theologische Studien” 71, Innsbruck 2023. The editors are grateful for the permission to publish the English translation in this volume.

time, in Western (especially Roman Catholic) theology, the so-called Apostolic Council was denied the importance for the later synodal activity of the Church. Away from the eternal dispute over the proper terminology for this event (whether apostolic convention, apostolic council, meeting, Jerusalem conference, Jerusalem meeting), we discover with astonishment that until the 1970s, an apostolic origin of the synodal system was questioned on the part of Roman Catholic theology. Thus, the Augustinian Eastern Church historian Hermengild M. Biedermann wrote as late as 1967, with regard to the early church synods, that it was hardly possible to prove an apostolic origin “in this ecclesiastical institution”² and that establishing a connection between the “so-called Apostolic Council” and the “later understanding of the ecclesiastical synods” would represent a “hardly justifiable straining” of the New Testament text.³ Even the Augsburg church historian Joseph A. Fischer claimed as late as 1975 that the so-called Apostolic Council did not provide anything synodal in the later sense.⁴

Fortunately, these opinions are now considered outdated. The document of the International Theological Commission of 2018

2. Cf. H. Biedermann, *Zur Frage der Synode in der orthodoxen Theologie*, in „Ostkirchliche Studien“ 16/2-3 (1967), pp. 113-131. For this discussion, cf. the contribution of T. Nikolaou, *Die synodale Verfassung und die Ökumenischen Konzile der Kirche*, in *Orthodoxes Forum* 5/1-2 (1991), pp. 207-221.

3. Cf. H. Biedermann, *Zur Frage der Synode in der orthodoxen Theologie*, p. 113.

4. Cf. J. Fischer, *Das sogenannte Apostelkonzil*, in G. Schwaiger (ed.), *Konzil und Papst. Historische Beiträge zur Frage der höchsten Gewalt in der Kirche*, Festschrift for H. Tüchle, München-Paderborn-Wien 1975, pp. 1-17, here pp. 7-8: “The so-called Apostolic Council was not yet a synod and not a council in the later sense. [...] because of the lack of a somehow superior convocation and supreme leadership of the assembly, the Jerusalem meeting cannot yet be addressed as a synod proper. Nor can it be called an apostolic assembly in a clear, unified sense.”

At the same time, Fischer admits that the “Jerusalem meeting” would have a “presynodal character” (*ibid.*, 9).

(“Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church”) speaks literally of the “Council of Jerusalem” and stresses that “one can see here the emergence of a synodal event...”; “this event should be understood as a paradigmatic figure of synods held by the Church throughout the centuries”⁵.

I do not want to address here the sometimes tremendous changes that have taken place in the theological-historical discourse of one church or another regarding synodality. I only want to state one thing as a preamble: synodality and mission have belonged directly together since the beginning of the Christian church.

Synods existed in the early church to solve problems, according to manual knowledge. One would add today: some synods not only solved problems, but also created new problems. But behind this problem-solving paradigm (for the purpose of preserving or restoring the unity of the church), there was always also a missionary ethos. An example: at the “Council of Reconciliation” between Rome and Constantinople in 879-880, the Council Fathers emphasized that the decisions of faith of the seven Ecumenical Councils were “proclamations”. In turn, their own synodal contribution is also understood as proclamation: “by thinking about these things in this way and proclaiming them...”; “...and proclaiming them to all with a penetrating voice, taking nothing away,

5. Internationale Theologische Kommission, *Die Synodalität in Leben und Sendung der Kirche*, in „Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls” 215, Bonn 2018, p. 21. In connection with Acts 15, the New Testament scholar T. Söding also speaks of an apostolic council (without quotation marks) and pays tribute above all to its paradigmatic significance for a theology and practice of synodality: “The apostolic council is a model; it is also the basis of all synodal processes and decisions in the church.” T. Söding, *Beraten und entscheiden. Synodale Prozesse im Fokus des Urchristentums*, in M. Graulich, J. Rahner (eds.), *Synodalität in der Katholischen Kirche. Die Studie der Internationalen Theologischen Kommission im Diskurs*, Freiburg i.Br. 2020, pp. 42-94, here p. 69.

adding nothing, exchanging nothing, falsifying nothing”.⁶ Synodal decisions were thus understood as expressions of evangelization, not only because of their content, but also because of their conciliar, i.e., pneumatically inspired, frame of origin. We usually perceive the ecclesiastical-political, apologetic, and theological-political aspects of the history of councils from an ecclesiastical-historical point of view. But this is also true: synods were carried by a genuinely missionary ethos, not least because they were animated by a basic soteriological intention.

Finally, synodality and mission belong together, not only from the historical-phenomenological point of view, but also from the point of view of an experience-centered theology of the Church, as it was developed especially in the Eastern Church. I do not go into this theology of the Church, but it made up the basic tenor of the Orthodox voices in the ecumenical movement of the 20th century. Nor can I address here the more qualitative understanding of mission that is traditionally proper to Orthodoxy.⁷ Suffice it to mention John Zizioulas, with his interpretation of the church as a relational community event (*koinonia*): according to Zizioulas, not only is the identity of the church relational, but so is the structure of the church. The authority in the Church, indeed the mission (in) the Church are all relational.⁸ Here, relational is a synonym for synodal. Mission can only be understood as relational, dialogical,

6. Cf. Horos of the 7. Session of the Synod of Constantinople 879–880, on March 13, 880, Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem, *Tomos Charas / TOMOS XAPAΣ*, introduction and commentary by K. Siamakis, Thessaloniki 1985, pp. 382–386.

7. For a concise but nuanced introduction in this regard, cf. I. Bria (ed.), *Martyria/Mission. The Witness of the Orthodox Churches Today*, Geneva 1980, pp. 3–11.

8. J. Zizioulas, *The Church as Communion*, Keynote lecture at the World Council of Churches Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela 1993, in “St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly” 38/1 (1994), pp. 3–16, here 12–13: “Mission in the Church is relational [...] Theology must seek ways of relating the Gospel to the existential needs of the world and to whatever is human. Instead of throwing the Bible or the dogmas of the Church into the face of the world, it would be best to seek first to feel and understand what every human being longs for deep in their being, and then see how the Gospel and doctrine can make sense to that longing.”

synodal, because the gospel is relational to the existential needs of the world and of being human.

To explore all the facets (and dark sides) of this quite exciting relationship in the history of the church and theology, would be a topic for an entire series of lectures. In the brief framework of this article, I can – against the background of my Orthodox theological tradition – only briefly outline three topics:

1. How is pastoral-missionary synodality lived out in the Orthodox churches today?
2. With regard to the current congestion and conflicts in the Orthodox Church (see Ukraine conflict), but also in view of a very tenacious opening of the Orthodox Church to modernity, the question arises: does the Orthodox Church – from a missionary perspective – suffer from too much or too little synodality?
3. Last but not least, the ecumenical perspective: Is there room for common (i.e. ecumenical) synodal activity, so that the witness of the Christian faith gains missionary credibility?

1. The Orthodox practice of pastoral-missionary synodality today

The traditional talk about the “synodal constitution” of the Orthodox Church corresponds to a functioning reality on the level of the respective autocephalous churches.⁹ Even if today’s Eastern Church experts notice a certain incising primacy and centralization tendency in the sphere of the individual Orthodox Churches, the basic finding remains a synodal one.¹⁰ What does this look like in concrete terms? Interestingly, one encounters a great diversity of forms of synodal structuring. In questions of composition, regularity, competence, but also in terms of lay

9. Cf. P. Evdokimov, *Orthodoxy*, New York 2011, p. 165; T. Nikolaou, *Glaube und forsche. Ausgewählte Studien zur griechischen Patristik und byzantinischen Geistesgeschichte*, St Ottilien 2012, pp. 173 and 215.

10. Cf. J. Oeldemann, *Die Synodalität in der Orthodoxen Kirche*, in “*Catholica*” 70 (2016), p. 147.

participation – in all these questions there is a great *diversity* in the individual Orthodox churches, which has grown historically and culturally. In addition, there is a certain *dynamism*: synodal structures change again and again in the individual autocephalous churches.¹¹

The question arises how to explain this diversity and this dynamism, especially in the context of a Church known for its traditionalism. The answer is simpler than thought: the pastoral-missionary reality. The missionary challenges shape the synodal forms, and these forms are to be understood as variations of a basic synodal reality of the early Church (and therefore indispensable from the Orthodox point of view). An example: in the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Transylvania of the 19th century, the Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan Andrei of Saguna had enforced a strong participation of the laity in the decision-making and executive bodies of the parishes and the diocese.¹² This was not only modern, but highly necessary from a missionary point of view, because only through this co-responsibilization of the laity, he was able to re-establish the badly battered Romanian Orthodoxy in Transylvania at the local level.¹³

11. A more detailed account of these thoughts can be found in I. Moga, *Neue Bewegung auf einer alten Baustelle? Die synodale Praxis in der Orthodoxen Kirche auf dem Prüfstand*, in P. M. Zulehner, P. Neuner, A. Hennesperger (eds.), *Synodalisierung. Eine Zerreißprobe für die katholische Weltkirche? Expertinnen und Experten aus aller Welt beziehen Stellung*, Ostfildern 2022, pp. 305-320.

12. Cf. J. Schneider, *Der Hermannstädter Metropolit Andrei von Saguna: Reform und Erneuerung der orthodoxen Kirche in Siebenbürgen und Ungarn 1848*, Köln 2005, pp. 200-203.

13. Cf. the church historian P. Brusanowski: In fact, Bishop Saguna was aware that there was only one way to renew Romanian Transylvanian Orthodoxy: the participation of the laity in the Church organization, at all levels. In the context of the Orthodox church constitutions of his time, this was a novelty. P. Brusanowski, *Die Adaption westlicher Staatskirchenmodelle in der Orthodoxie*, in “Europäische Geschichte Online”, 2021, <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/brusanowskip-2021-de>.

What is the situation today in the Romanian Orthodox Church? Saguna's legacy lives on in a weakened form.¹⁴ But in a pan-Orthodox comparison, the Romanian Patriarchate is still the Orthodox Church in which the laity are most strongly and consistently represented; namely, in a ratio of two-thirds to one-third clergy in the local, regional, and central governing advisory and executive bodies of the Church. At the parish level, there is usually a parish assembly (all mature members of a parish; meets annually) and a parish council (executive body of the parish, consisting of up to twelve elected lay people and the clergy of the parish); the pastor is thus not an autocrat, but leads the parish as chairman of synodal bodies. Things get more exciting at the diocesan level. The deliberative body for all administrative, cultural, and economic matters is the Eparchial assembly: it consists of 20 lay people elected by lay electoral bodies and ten clergy elected by clerical electoral bodies. It meets annually. The executive enforcement body is the Eparchial Council (nine members, six of whom are lay, plus the bishop) and between meetings of the Eparchial Council, the Standing Committee of the Eparchial Council (but no lay here). In practice, however, the Standing Committee plays the more important role, but the laity would have a majority, at least in theory, and thus a strong opportunity to help shape the direction of the diocese.

Similarly, at the central level of the Patriarchate, the impression that only the Holy Synod (or even the Patriarch alone) decides everything is completely false, from the perspective of the Statute. Deliberative decision-making bodies are the Holy Synod (all bishops in office, meeting at least twice a year), the Standing Synod (the Patriarch, the Metropolitans, and three other bishops), and the Church National Assembly (here there are 3 representatives per diocese, 2 lay and 1 cleric; plus the diocesan bishops). That is, while the Holy Synod, as the highest

14. For the current Statute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, cf. Statutul pentru organizarea și funcționarea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2008, republished 2020; <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/222799?isFormaDeBaza=True>. For the historical background, cf. P. Brusanowski, Rumänisch-orthodoxe Kirchenordnungen (1786-2008). Siebenbürgen-Bukowina-Rumänien, „Schriften zur Landeskunde Siebenbürgens” 33, Köln-Weimar-Wien 2011.

authority, is purely episcopal and responsible for dogmatic, liturgical, and canonical unity, for all administrative, social, cultural, and economic issues the Church National Assembly is available as the central decision-making body; here we have parity between laity and clergy. This Church National Assembly meets once a year and approves, among other things, the budget, this including the annual balance sheet of the Bible and Mission Institute and all church institutions with missionary activity. The laity thus have a large say in the shaping of mission, because the missionary orientation of a church is known to depend not only on the various charisms and theological perspectives, but also on the financing of the respective focal points (media, book market, other missionary projects).

The executive bodies provided for by the Romanian Orthodox Church Statute are the Patriarch, the Church National Council (with 12 members: half of them lay, 1 per metropolis) and the Standing Church National Council. As with the diocese, the Standing Committee, which meets weekly and is involved in all decisions made by the Patriarch, plays a greater role than the Church Council itself, which meets only twice a year. In the Church Council, half of the members are lay people, and there are no lay people in the Standing Committee – but in purely formal terms, the Standing Committee is only an instance between meetings of the Church National Council. That is, even at the very highest level, lay people would have an opportunity to shape things, not only in the deliberative domain, but also in the executive one. This is quite interesting.

What does it look like in practice? The structures and processes provided for by the statute are meticulously observed, and this is to be commended. But one cannot speak of a self-confident lay counterpoint in the decision-making processes everywhere. This would rather be anchored in the cultural sphere: a strong will for harmony characterizes church-active laity and clergy alike. From the point of view of the statute, the structures and the mechanisms are there; but how to fill them with life is always a question of social, geographical, and historical contexts. The institution of the parish council, for example, is much more strongly perceived, emphasized, and claimed by Orthodox parishioners from Transylvania than, say, in eastern Romania.

Concluding this first chapter, I can say: yes, synodality is a possibility space¹⁵. But this possibility space is not a hypothetical one. There are real, structural synodal possibilities, which Orthodoxy certainly has, at the level of autocephalous churches; the question remains how they are lived. And there are desired synodal possibilities – especially in the Roman Catholic Church today. So, one could certainly combine the synodal-structural forms and competence values of the Eastern Church with the synodal, participatory impetus of today's Roman Catholics in the West. Both would have something to gain: the one, to be inspired by existing church structures as tested spaces of possibility. The others, to gain the insight that synodal forms could be filled with more participatory life, with more power.

This exchange of gifts is quite remarkable, because traditionally the West stood for structural expertise and the East for the pneumatic. However, for the topic of synodality, the East offers proven spaces of structural possibilities, while the Roman Catholic West has a participatory impetus.

2. Does the Orthodox Church – from the missionary point of view – suffer from too much or too little synodality?

The answer to this question is easy for me: it is not too much or too little synodality that prevents the Orthodox Church today (on the universal level, but not only) from gaining more missionary credibility, but an often lethargic synodality. A re-vitalized synodality is the answer – at least for the Orthodox sphere on the world level. The magic formula constantly repeated in ecumenical circles that the Orthodox need more primacy because they already have too much synodality is just a formula. It only shows the goal, but not the way to get there.

Here, I think “homeopathically”: the same is to be treated by the same. Synodal diseases can be cured only through synodality. Because in reality, at the universal (pan-Orthodox) level, synodality in the Orthodox

15. The lecture series in Salzburg where this text was first presented was called “Together on the road. Synodality as a Space of Possibility”: <https://www.plus.ac.at/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/20220228-Plakat-TZZ-Synoden.pdf>.

Church has not assumed regularity, has not found institutional forms of self-commitment, as it has at the level of autocephalous churches. That is, it still has to prove itself. Only then will primatial functions be implicitly developed further. Just as at the level of autocephalous churches, the respective head is not simply a *primus inter pares* in terms of functions, but enjoys certain prerogatives that guarantee the functioning of the entire ecclesiastical system in various situations.

Thus, the Orthodox Church needs regulated (i.e., regularly held) synodal structures also at the universal level. There is a need for a pastoral-missionary and institutionalized ethos of Orthodox unity in the world of the 21st century. Hardly any bishop would think of boycotting the sessions of the Holy Synod within an autocephalous Orthodox Church. Because he knows: if he wants to move something, he must participate in this instance. On the pan-Orthodox level, this awareness does not exist¹⁶. The ecclesiastical conflict in Ukraine could have been solved by a pan-Orthodox synod even before the war began. Of course, the ecclesiastical conflict between Moscow and Constantinople is to be solved synodally – and only synodally.

My thesis: the Orthodox will only get out of the current impasse through an even more lively and above all binding synodality – not otherwise. Synodality is not a what, but a how. There is no way around this how. But one can – figuratively speaking – fall asleep on this path, suffer an accident, or even cause one. One can even turn the path into a ski jump and thereby abuse it: the forms are synodal, but the goals are already fixed in advance. There are many forms of alienation from synodality. But there are also correctives.

What is the best corrective towards a functioning, self-committing synodality? It is the mission, the awareness of the mission, the awareness of being on a mission. It is not an invented mission; it is a mission brought about by Christ and to be answered for before Christ. Why does the Orthodox Church struggle with synodality on a universal level? Because – according to my thesis – the missionary perspective is not present enough on the universal level in contrast to, for example, the regional level (of the autocephalous churches). The Orthodox conception of

16. Cf. I. Moga, *Neue Bewegung auf einer alten Baustelle?*, cit., p. 316.

mission is still – except for the diaspora – strongly coloured by internal culture. Thus, one speaks of a Greek, a Russian, a Romanian, etc. Orthodoxy. Therefore, Orthodoxy hardly feels missionary pressure from a universal perspective. This is, of course, a shortcoming, even if at the same time this contextuality also brings strengths. One thing is certain: the Orthodox Church will only be able to strengthen its synodal structures on a pan-Orthodox level if it is carried by a stronger awareness of a missionary responsibility across traditional cultural boundaries.

The chance for more lived (i.e., for a vital pan-Orthodox) synodality and for a more multiculturally supported mission is currently the diaspora. For the traditional recipes in Romania or Serbia, or those newly tested in the last decades, cannot automatically be imported into the pastoral work in Austria or in North America. The constantly growing Orthodox diaspora in the West is the great synodal and internal missionary opportunity for the Orthodox Church in the 21st century.

3. Are there spaces for joint synodal action?

Yes. We have these spaces in the various ecumenical bodies: the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches, local and regional working communities of various Christian churches. In all these bodies, ecumenical work would be impossible without attentive listening and (sometimes laborious) consensus-building processes.

But from a missionary point of view, such ecumenical spaces are not enough. The reasons are multiple: first, most ecumenical bodies (with the exception of ecumenical parish circles and parish partnerships) have little contact with the pastoral-missionary life dynamics of the respective church; second, they necessarily start from fixed ecclesial, denominational identities (principle of representation), which still need to be demarcated from one another (connected with this is the difficult question of conversion); third, mission always flows into a liturgical-communal confessional frame of a certain tradition, regardless of mission-relevant, ecumenical determinations of Christian identity (e.g., in social-ethical questions).

However, a greater, unexploited potential remains for the practical-theological area of an ecumenism of life. Here, too, synodality has a role

and relevance that is hardly addressed in the usual discourse. For before it becomes an ecclesial quantity, synodality is an anthropological reality and challenge – so the Romanian Orthodox theologian Dumitru Stăniloae already stated in the 1970s.¹⁷ The basic communicative reality of being human (being-in-relation) is what constitutes the anthropological basis of any form of synodality. Monologue statements, self-assurance, self-satisfaction, self-love – these can be confessional attitudes in the worst case, but this contradicts the anthropological ground of any synodality. On the other side, no ecumenical scene of unity helps if people become more and more isolated in the respective communities and in society.

A lived ecumenical practice of synodality today must therefore start more strongly from this human basis (or as Stăniloae says: “natural synodicity”). In a plural society, no synodal-theological discourses are of any help if the concrete Christians (of different denominations and cultures) hardly know each other, hardly communicate, hardly know anything about one another. A living Christian network – as outlined by the Orthodox American author Rob Dreher in his book “The Benedict Option” – cannot function without communication, without synodal openness to the other.¹⁸ Communication, participation, and implication are therefore necessary expressions of a synodal consciousness that start with the human being, not only within the Church, but also within the whole of Christianity.¹⁹

Conclusion: Regardless of the respective church experience and expertise in structural synodality, we as Christians are only then credible with regard to our mission, when we are constantly *syn-odos*, as people on the way together, in the sign of Jesus Christ’s being human and God.

17. Cf. D. Stăniloae, *Natura sinodicității*, in „Studii teologice” 29/9-10 (1977), pp. 605-615. Cf. also I. Moga, *Synodalität zwischen Desiderat und Wirklichkeit. Ein orthodoxer Beitrag*, in „Communio” 43/3 (2014), pp. 148-155.

18. R. Dreher, *Die Benedikt-Option. Eine Strategie für Christen in einer nachchristlichen Gesellschaft*, Kießlegg, 2018.

19. On this experiential aspect of synodality (though only for the intra-Catholic sphere) cf. S. Kießig, *Synodalität und Empirie: Ein erfahrungsbezogener Spannungsbogen und pastorale Erkenntnis*, in M. Graulich, J. Rahner (eds.), *Synodalität in der Katholischen Kirche*, cit., pp. 299-317.

The Apostolic Council was not the only synodal event in the Acts of the Apostles. Every missionary encounter described there proceeds from this mystery of a new way – the way in Christ – that can only be walked together.

We have much to learn from one another in this area of a mission understood synodally.

SYNTHESIS PAPER BY CATHOLIC LISTENERS

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Some preliminary remarks

During the conference, there was an open-minded and even self-critical atmosphere at the side of the Orthodox as well as of the Catholic participants. There was a will to learn from each other and to establish exchanges. Since the group was not too large, friendly and collegial contacts could be established during the breaks in such a way that at the end almost all participants had met each other personally.

Some general aspects can be observed concerning the content of the conference.

- It was clear for all the participants that synodality has a theological, and more precisely, ecclesiological importance for our Churches; it is not just an instrument for organizing assemblies and making decisions.
- The Orthodox speakers often knew very well some of the important Catholic documents and quoted them: the speech of Pope Francis at the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, pronounced on October 17, 2015; the document of the International Theological Commission on "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church" from 2018; and the preparatory document of the Secretariat of the Synod "For a synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission" from September 2021. References were made as well to documents of the international joint commission for theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.
- The Orthodox and the Catholic Churches share a lot of questions and preoccupations; for instance, the participation of all the

faithful, including clergy, religious and laypeople, and the participation and role of youth and women in the Church, with (among others) the specific question on ministries for women and the female diaconate.

- Several Orthodox participants observed that synodality is not always functioning ideally in their own Church and highlighted that a renewal and partial reform of traditional forms is needed. Synodality seems to function well on the regional level, but not on the level of the local Church, where it is almost non-existent, nor on the level of the universal Church. For this last one, reference was made to the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, gathered in Crete in 2016.
- With regard to the terminology, different terms are used, such as synodality, conciliarity, sobornost, collegiality. The differences between them are not always very clear. Synodality is used in a general way as a principle, but also in the sense of a concrete and ongoing practice of shared responsibility on several levels of Church life. Some speakers underscored the fact that synodality implies – in the spirit of many Orthodox – an assembly of Bishops, and a form of gathering that easily can be found at a regional level (autocephalous Church). Sobornost seems more in relationship with a shared responsibility of all the faithful (see below for the theological foundation).
- It has to be underpinned that these general preliminary observations cannot be applied in the same sense to all the Orthodox jurisdictions, since many differences exist among them, insofar as it concerns the functioning of synodality in Church life.
- In what follows, some striking elements of the Orthodox talks will be presented first, followed by some observations and questions of the Catholic listeners.

Communion: Walking together in the Holy Spirit

- In spite of the different models of the realization of synodality in the various Orthodox jurisdictions, there is consensus concerning the theological content of synodality.

- Synodality is an organic expression of *koinonia*. The Church is on its pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of God. Synodality is basically the way we walk alongside God and our fellow humans on the journey to salvation. This explains at the same time that synodality, just like the Church, has to be situated in the eschatological tension between the already and not yet. Synodality is not static, but dynamic, which implies that the participants in a synod must be open to new things. There is a synodal ontology: like the Church and the Eucharist, synodality is at once an event and an institution.
- In this section, several speakers mentioned the two main perspectives or accents concerning the theological foundation of synodality that are highlighted in contemporary theology: the eucharistic ecclesiology on the one hand, and the sobornost ecclesiology on the other hand.
- The last one considers the Church as a living body made up of cells that share a life in freedom and love. It emphasizes a state of communion in the Holy Spirit transcending space and time. This spiritual unity or synodality of the whole Church is not limited to councils. The Church that gathers, unites and reconciles, is the Church that is called synodal/conciliar (Bulgakov). The exercise of sobornicity implies being enriched by the experience of others, and to render to the Church that by which one has been enriched. In this sense, the Church itself is as a great and perpetual synod in which all Christians participate. An important contribution of this perspective is the accent put on the communion through synodality of the whole People of God.
- The eucharistic ecclesiology establishes a link between the Church and the Eucharist – respectively, the mystical and the sacramental Body of Christ – underscoring the fact that the eucharistic synaxis is the foundation of every assembly in the Church. Gathering to celebrate the Eucharist is the primary event of the expression of synodality in the Church. This implies that synodality expresses itself sacramentally or eucharistically. Eucharistic ecclesiology puts the local Church in the center of its reflections: each local Church realizes the fullness of Christ and His presence. Synodality expresses this full local catholicity within the full universal

catholicity as full Churches in communion. Thus, the Orthodox ecclesiology of communion is a synodal ecclesiology grounded on the *communio Ecclesiarum*, on the plurality of local Churches in communion. The local Church is closely linked to the catholicity of the Church expressing unity in diversity.

- The bishop who presides over the Eucharist guarantees its authenticity. Synodality is a manifestation of the episcopal pastoral ministry in the Church, because it expresses and actualizes both the bishop's unique ministry of communion within his diocese, and his sacred mission of ensuring the communion of the local Church with the others in the unity of the whole Church. The bishop in synod “embodies” or represents the local Church.
- The synodality of the episcopate is distinct from – but must always be considered in complementarity with – the general sobornicity of the Church. At the same time, the synodal system is an indispensable condition of the Church's sobornicity, because through it “the catholicity of the local Church is guaranteed and protected”, as Fr Sorin Șelaru put it in his keynote speech. Both perspectives are complementary: the sobornost ecclesiology being a baptismal ecclesiology accentuating the People of God, and the Eucharistic ecclesiology emphasizing the episcopal ministry in the local Church.

Participation: Walking together with the whole People of God

- Fundamentally, the Church is understood on the model of the Holy Trinity: “a community of persons in a perichoretic relationship, united by mutual love and one that works together in harmonious consensus. It is a unity strengthened with diversity and a diversity imbued with unity”, as Teva Regule said in her keynote speech. The baptized are incorporated in the Body of Christ, and in this way, are connected to Christ and to each other.
- Synodal processes of participation can be identified in several fields of Church life. The liturgy, for instance, is a communal work of Christ and the faithful. Christians encounter God as a community in self-offering and dialogue, and are called to participate in

reconciling all human beings and creation with the Triune God. Participating in the Eucharist implies sharing in the life of God.

- Another synodal process can be found in Church governance, especially in the form of synods. The Russian word ‘sobornost’ signifies a spiritual harmony based on freedom and unity in love – a cooperation between the faithful in an organic fellowship and communion. The dialogical nature of the Trinity is a model for Church governance. “Dialogue also requires mutual participation, responsibility and accountability; it is constitutive of the process of mutual discernment and decision-making”, as Teva Regule said in her keynote.
- A third synodal process concerns ministry. According to St Paul, all the baptized are endowed with gifts of the Holy Spirit for the common good. This should have consequences especially for the tasks that women exercise in the Church – tasks that, historically, have been accomplished by deaconesses, and today are assumed by women without ordination.
- Etymologically, in the classical pre-Christian tradition, the words ‘*ecclesia*’ and ‘synod’ are close to each other: both designate an assembly. The intrinsic link between both brought some theologians (H. Küng and A. Schmemmann) to the statement that the Church itself is a council.
- The Church copied procedures of debating and decision-making, as well as juridical procedures, from the Roman society and institutions. Characteristic was the fact that all the participants had an equal right to speak and to vote – the idea being that the participants have to speak on behalf of their people, implying that the bishops represent their dioceses and are accountable to their faithful.
- “Among the latest alarming tendencies in the Orthodox synodality is the reduction of lay participation in the church’s decision-making”, as Fr Cyril Hovorun said in his response. This can be observed in the Russian Church. However, in the communities in the so-called diaspora, clergy and laity take part in the deliberations and the decisions. This active participation, however, does not

extend to doctrinal matters. In some dioceses in the USA, clergy and laity participate directly in the election of their bishops, in other dioceses, they submit names of candidates to the Synod of Bishops of the Mother Church.

Mission: Walking together in the contemporary World

- Mission concerns “the liturgy after the liturgy”. Participation in the mission of the Church is a collective duty of the universal and local Church. It has to be the topic of discussion in synods. Synods have the task to see to the contextualization of the message of the Gospel in such a way that it reflects the catholicity of the Church. For this reason, a strong link between local or national synods and patriarchal synods is needed. The mission of the Church is not just issuing synodal statements, but also putting into practice the resolutions of the synods.
- The mission of the Church as walking in and together with the world implies several attitudes. “First, walking together means all of us, not just one part of us; secondly, it means respecting one’s own pace but also the pace of others; thirdly, it means paying attention to where and with whom we are journeying (the other people; the inner and outer landscapes); and lastly, it is an expression of dynamicity”, as Kateřina Bauer said in her response. Walking in unity requires paying attention to our own walking with that of others, in order to not lose them, and so be able to help and support them if necessary. It concerns solidarity of the whole Church, taking seriously those on the margins. Synodality as a principle at all levels of the Church demands paying attention to the historical, cultural, and social context of the Church, living the dialectic of the universal-eschatological meaning of the Church and its being historically conditioned.
- It implies several challenges for synodal collaboration and decision-making:
 - (i) being able to create an open space for a true dialogue in which both speaking and listening are involved and where each voice is respected;

- (ii) recognizing the connection between the mystical, sacramental, and eucharistic nature of the Church and its historical conditioning; and thus, consequently,
 - (iii) being able to respond to the challenges and issues of the contemporary world with love, wisdom and through theological, moral, and spiritual discernment.
- Journeying signifies dynamism: the Church is not just an institution. It is on the move as pilgrims on the way to the Kingdom of God that both is and is to come.

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS OF CATHOLIC LISTENERS

In general

1. Some orthodox theologians, such as the late Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, make a distinction between synodal and conciliar assemblies. The last ones gather Church authorities who govern and lead the Church. The first ones are more expansive, involving the entire life of the Church. If this is not always visible in the terminology, we should at least be aware of such a difference.¹
2. Looking back into history, we can observe that the gathering synods or councils often treated a major question; i.e., circumcision of converts (Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15), the Easter date, the readmission of Lapsi, the title of the Virgin Mary, etc. The Synods of Bishops of the Catholic Church since 1967 treated broad-ranging topics. This probably also has to do with the fact that the Synods of Bishops are mainly consultative. However, the reception and the

1. The term Synod in the Eastern Churches (Catholic and non-Catholic) is often reserved to assemblies composed of only bishops. However, the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church as a whole, that will be held in October 2023, includes non-ordained people as well. Besides that, they even will have the right to vote.

putting into practice of the statements and the post-synodal apostolic exhortations probably is not optimal.

3. Synodality is not functioning ideally in the Orthodox Church (see the Holy and Great Council of Crete in 2016; see the role of lay people), we should not be naïve about its potentiality and the difficulties to put it into practice. From the experience of the Orthodox Churches, we particularly learn that synodal structures are not enough to implement true synodality. It is also about cultural mindset and spiritual attitudes. On-going education to create a greater awareness of these conditions and to change them in case of necessity would be most welcome.

With regard to theological aspects

4. Catholics who think and speak about synodality often have immediately in mind synodal structures in the Church from a governmental aspect. For Orthodox, synodality is about living here on earth the Trinitarian life. The Orthodox speakers showed us the synodal dimension of liturgy – more precisely, the Eucharist. In which way could we strengthen the relationship between Eucharist and synodality? How could we deepen and reinforce the consciousness of the faithful concerning the Eucharist as life-giving (source), while expressing already the Kingdom of God that is to come (summit), in a way that involves the whole community of the faithful? How can we express that both are at once institution and event?
5. A Eucharistic ecclesiology underscores, in a stronger way, the role of the local Church, especially as the portion of the people of God gathered by and adhering to its bishop. How could we establish a more appropriate balance between a baptismal theology (stressing the community of the children of God) and the equality of all the faithful (with their graces and charisms), juxtaposed with a more important accent on a eucharistic ecclesiology highlighting the Eucharist as a common realization of the bishop/priest and the whole community of the faithful, including even those in the margins? Would it help to consider bishops, first of all, as heads of

eucharistic assemblies, underpinning more strongly their role as shepherds than as persons governing their Churches?

6. This 'becoming equipped' for synodical participation through the liturgy calls to mind the theme of *sensus fidei* or *sensus fidelium*. The Orthodox emphasis upon the relation between synodality and the Eucharist suggests that it is regular sharing in the liturgy that provides the setting in which such dispositions can be fostered.
7. How about the liturgy after the liturgy, or stated otherwise, the ethical dimension of liturgy, in a synodal perspective? There is an interaction between liturgy and ethics/daily life. An appropriate interaction should exist between liturgy and daily life. The faithful are sent out after the liturgy to put into practice their faith, and in the liturgy, they bring with them their experiences and solicitude for other faithful and the world. How can we avoid one-sidedness, stressing mainly the liturgical aspects, or the other way around, activities of solidarity and charity in the world? Would it be possible to reconcile, in a more appropriate way, social aspects of the mission of the Church (with its mystical, sacramental, and eucharistic nature), in a synodal and inclusive perspective, adapted to the needs and preoccupations of each faithful/human being? Synodality is about building up communities.
8. The Church as communion, expressing itself through synodality at different levels, and with regard to its mission, requires more in-depth reflections about contextualization/inculturation of the message of the Gospel. What should the relationship be between the universal Church (with its necessary unity of doctrine and liturgy) and that of the local Church, adapting doctrine and liturgy to local contexts in order to make them life-giving?
9. In a synodal ontology, truth is not static, but is dynamic. It cannot be objectified as a system of ideas apart from the community. The epiclesis of communion implies that everything exists only as a result of free communion. Reception is a central notion. Synods and councils are relational-charismatic realities. Christians question themselves continuously and subject their judgments and engagements to the testing scrutiny of an awareness rooted in the relation to the Holy Spirit.

From theology to governmental structures in the Church

10. Underscoring the role of the local Church also leads to the following questions. According to Catholic theology, bishops are the interface between their local Church and the universal Church as members of the College of Bishops. In which way do bishops represent their faithful in assemblies of the whole Catholic Church? How do they prepare their participation by involving their flock? How do they express that they are accountable to their faithful? Do titular bishops represent just themselves? How do we reconcile this with a theology of the local Church? “Further reflection [is needed] about whether laity could represent their local Church to another Church, highlighting the relation between the possibility of representing one’s Church and the essential relation between such representation and presiding at the Eucharist,” as Bishop Maxim said in his keynote speech.
11. Bishop Maxim also mentioned: “Synodality and primacy imply and need each other, but, as one presenter remarked, primacy should not be founded on a universalistic ecclesiology.” How should we highlight – in a more appropriate way – the role of primacy as a charismatic ministry within the communion of Churches, and as fundament and sign of unity and love? In which way can the communion of Churches be considered in a more relational and dynamic perspective?
12. The Orthodox Church experiences a crisis concerning synodality. These difficulties raise the question that is also of importance for the Catholic Church: how to cope with divergencies, and how to make people adhere to views and decisions in unity, in spite of these divergencies?
13. How to attribute more importance to the contributions of the faithful who are not bishops? On a doctrinal level: could the *sensus fidei/fidelium* come to the fore in synodal assemblies? If yes, in which way? On the level of government and discipline: how to give more space and importance to the contributions of all the faithful in these matters, reconciling this with the authority of bishops or other ordained persons to take decisions?

14. This also has to do with procedures of decision-making in the Church. From a theological perspective, more weight could be given to a pneumatological view on these kinds of procedures. What consequences should the action of the Holy Spirit have with regard to procedures of decision-making and taking, and how to articulate both?
15. It is important to keep in mind that consensus does not mean unanimity – it does not imply a vote of acceptance of all the members of a synod or council. In this perspective, a procedure that is practiced in the World Council of Churches could be interesting; namely, to discuss as long as necessary, in order to obtain the maximum consensus possible – even if some cannot adhere to the topic in a positive way – while not being an obstacle, and expressing that the person does not fully agree, but is able to live with it. It would need a differentiated way of voting, not just “yes”, “no”, or an abstention, but a fourth mode has to be added. It would not be a “*placet iuxta modum*” because there would not be modifications. This procedure would be possible in instances where the members are on an equal level.
16. Other forms of voting procedures are found in some Orthodox dioceses in the USA concerning the election of bishops. If a candidate receives two-thirds of the votes in the first round, he is elected outright. If no candidate receives two-thirds of the votes, then the names of the top two candidates are forwarded to the Episcopal Synod for election, as Teva Regule pointed out. This is an example of consecutive rounds of voting by differently composed organisms. Another form of differentiating in the voting procedures can be found in some theological faculties. In certain fields, such as the election of new professors, the votes of the professors present obtain more weight than those of the whole council of the faculty composed not only of professors, but of representatives of the scientific collaborators and students as well. In one ballot, only professors vote, in the next one, all the members of the faculty council (including the professors) vote. The results will be proclaimed only after the second ballot. In both ballots, there must be a majority. More reflection about different modalities

of voting and on the context in which it should be most appropriately put into practice would be helpful.

17. To conclude, just some simple points. When we try to listen to each other, do we really listen in a neutral way, without immediately judging, while trying to take a positive departure? We must keep in mind that this person has an opinion that should be taken seriously because he/she also is a child of God and a member of the Body of Christ. Would it help if we oblige ourselves to reproduce/summarize what we heard? Communication studies teach us that we often focus our attention on things that interest us, but not in a neutral way, on the message that the other person wants to communicate.
18. Another point is the question of time. Pope Francis is of the opinion that time is superior to space. Do we take enough time to let a decision come to maturity? Are we able to postpone it because it is not mature, even if other factors seem urgent and push to take a decision?
19. And finally, an observation about discernment: how can we distinguish the needs of the Church from ideologies? How can we realize a discernment that is not just checking the conformity of proposals with Church doctrine? Some further development of criteria of discernment would be desirable.

SECOND PART

SYNODALITY IN THE ANCIENT ORIENTAL CHURCHES

CONFERENCE PROGRAMS

International Ecumenical Conference

“Listening to the East –

Synodality in the Syriac Orthodox and Church of the East Traditions”

Pontifical University St. Thomas Aquinas, Rome, Nov. 23 – 24, 2022

PROGRAM

*Listeners/ Drafting Committee: Prof. Dr Souraya BECHEALANY, Fr. Frans BOUMEN MAfr.,
Dr Joachim JAKOB, Manuel KUHN, Astrid WIMMER*

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2022

Opening Session

GREETING ADDRESSES AND GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Moderator: Fr. Prof. Dr Hyacinthe DESTIVELLE OP

18:00 *Welcome Addresses and Greetings*

Rector Prof. Dr Thomas Joseph WHITE OP, Angelicum

Cardinal Kurt KOCH, President of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity

Cardinal Mario GRECH, General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops

Ambassador ret. Dr Alfons M. KLOSS, President of PRO ORIENTE Foundation

Keynote Speech:

The Theology of Synodality in the Church of the East

Catholicos Patriarch Mar AWA III.

19:30 Reception

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2022

First Session

UNDERSTANDINGS AND PRACTICES OF SYNODALITY IN THE SYRIAC ORTHODOX AND CHURCH OF THE EAST TRADITIONS

Moderator: Prof. Dr Dietmar W. WINKLER

- 09:00 Morning Prayer
- 09:15 Keynotes and Discussion: Understandings and Practices of Synodality
 - in the Syrian Orthodox Church Mor Polycarpus AYDIN
 - in the Church of the East Mar Paulus BENJAMIN
- 10:30 Coffee Break
- 11:00 Experiences of Synodality –
 Four parallel working groups with inputs from both traditions on:
- Youth Inputs: Mr. Hadi Adnan JABBOUR and Mr. Yousif Oishalim AMRW
 Moderation: Fr. Dr Philip NELPURAPARAMPIL
 - Laity Inputs: Dr Martina ARAS and Mr. Peter Azzo
 Moderation: Dr Ephrem ISHAC
 - Women Inputs: Ms. Salaam SOMI and Dr Nisha M. THOMAS
 Moderation: Dr Viola RAHEB
 - Monastic life/ Clergy Inputs: Fr. Dr Charbel Rizk and Mr. Oughin AZIZYAN
 Moderation: Fr. Dr Saliba ER
- 12:15 Plenary: Reports from the working groups
- 13:00 Lunch

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Second Session

EXPRESSIONS OF SYNODALITY IN ECUMENICAL CONTEXTS

Moderator: Prof. Dr Pablo ARGARATE

- 15:30 Keynotes and Discussion: Synodality in Regional Ecumenical Networks
 Prof. Dr Souraya BECHEALANY
 Ms. Ruth MATHEN
- 17:00 Coffee Break
- 17:30 Lessons learned for the Catholic Church:
 spiritual, canonical, theological, and pastoral perspectives
 Reflections from the Catholic Listeners
- 18:30 Concluding Session
- 19:00 Evening Prayer
- 19:30 Dinner

International Ecumenical Conference

***“Listening to the East –
Synodality in Oriental Orthodox Church Traditions”***

Pontifical University St. Thomas Aquinas, Rome, Nov. 25 – 26, 2022

PROGRAM

*Listeners/ Drafting Committee: Prof. Dr Souraya BECHEALANY, Fr. Frans BOUMEN MAfr.,
Dr Jachim JAKOB, Manuel KUHN, Astrid WIMMER*

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2022

Opening Session

GREETING ADDRESSES AND GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Moderator: Fr. Prof. Dr Hyacinthe DESTIVELLE OP

9:00 Morning Prayer

9:15 *Welcome Addresses and Greetings*

Rector Prof. Dr Thomas Jseph WHITE OP, Angelicum

Cardinal Kurt KOCH, President of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity

Sister Nathalie BECQUART, Undersecretary of the Synod

Ambassador ret. Dr Alfons M. KLOSS, President of PRO ORIENTE Foundation

Keynote Speech:

Theologies of Synodality in Oriental Orthodox Church Traditions

Archbishop Khajag BARSAMIAN

10.30 Coffee Break

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First Session

UNDERSTANDINGS AND PRACTICES OF SYNODALITY IN THE COPTIC AND ETHIOPIAN TRADITIONS

Moderator: Prof. Dr Pablo ARGÁRATE

11:00 Keynotes: Understandings and Practices of Synodality

- in the Coptic Orthodox Church Bishop Anba KYRILLOS
- in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Fr. Daniel Seifemichael FELEKE

13:00 Lunch

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First Session (continued)

15:30 Experiences of Synodality –

Four parallel working groups with inputs from both traditions on:

- Youth Inputs: Mr. Juseph YOUNAN and Fr. Alula Lemma HABTE

Moderation: Dr Jachim JAKOB

- Laity Inputs: Mr. Bishoy SHARKAWY and Dr Nigussu LEGESSE

Moderation: Manuel KUHN

- Women Inputs: Mrs. Odette Riad ABDELMESSEH and Mrs. Elizabeth Amde TEKLEAREGAY

Moderation: Dr Viola RAHEB

- Monastic life Inputs: Fr. Mercurius ELMACARI and Fr. Daniel Seifemichael FELEKE

Moderation: Fr. Dr Philip NELPURAPARAMPIL

16:45 Plenary: Reports from the working groups

17:15 Coffee Break

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Second Session

SYNODALITY WITHIN THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCH COMMUNION

Moderator: Prof. Dr Souraya BECHEALANY

17:45 Understandings and Practices of Synodality within the Oriental Orthodox Church Communion:

Mor Theophilose KURAKOSE (Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church)
 Dr Ani GHAZARYAN DRISSI (Armenian Apostolic Church)

19:15 Evening Prayer

19:30 Dinner

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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2022

Third Session

UNDERSTANDINGS AND PRACTICES OF SYNODALITY IN THE ARMENIAN AND MALANKARA SYRIAC TRADITIONS

Moderator: Assoc. Prof. Dr Aho SHEMUNKASHO

- 9:00 Morning Prayer
- 9:15 Keynotes: Understandings and Practices of Synodality
- in the Armenian Apostolic Church Bishop Armash NALBANDIAN
 - in the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church Fr. Prof. Dr Baby VARGHESE
- 10:30 Coffee Break
- 11:00 Experiences of Synodality –
Four parallel working groups with inputs from both traditions on:
- Youth Inputs: Mr. Garen YOSOLKANIAN and Mr. Bipin MATHEW
Moderation: Dr Ephrem ISHAC
 - Laity Inputs: Prof. Dr Aram MARDIROSSIAN and Dr Tijo IVAN JOHN
Moderation: Dr Nigussu LEGESSE
 - Women Inputs: Dr Diana TSAGHIKYAN and Mrs. Mercy JOHN
Moderation: Ms. Ruth MATHEN
 - Monastic life Inputs: Fr. Garegin HAMBARDZUMYAN and Fr. Bideesh MATHEW
Moderation: Fr. Dr Saliba ER
- 12:15 Plenary: Reports from the working groups
- 13:00 Lunch

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Fourth Session

LEARNINGS

Moderator: Prof. Dr Dietmar W. WINKLER

- 15:30 Learnings from the Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian and Malankara Syriac Traditions: spiritual, canonical, theological, and pastoral perspectives
- Round table with:
- Bishop Anba KYRILLOS
 - Bishop Armash NALBANDIAN
 - Fr. Daniel Seifemichael FELBEKE
 - Fr. Prof. Dr Baby VARGHESE
- 17:00 Coffee Break
- 17:30 Lessons learned for the Catholic Church: spiritual, canonical, theological, and pastoral perspectives
- Reflections from the Catholic Listeners
- 18:30 Concluding Session
- 19:00 Evening Prayer
- 19:30 Dinner

- End of the Conference -

GREETINGS

Cardinal Kurt Koch

Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity

Conference “Synodality in the Syriac Orthodox and Church of the East Traditions”

Your Holiness,
Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, Your Graces,
dear Father Rector, dear Professors, dear students,

Last Saturday, Pope Francis, receiving Your Holiness, made reference to the symposium we are opening tonight. Let me quote the very words of the Holy Father: “Dear Brother, I know that in a few days you will deliver a talk on synodality in the Syriac tradition as part of the symposium “Listening to the East”, organized at the Angelicum, on the synodal experience of the various Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches”. Pope Francis then continued: “The journey of synodality undertaken by the Catholic Church is and must be ecumenical, just as the ecumenical journey is synodal. It is my hope that we can pursue, ever more fraternally and concretely, our own *syn-odos*, our ‘common journey’, by encountering one another, showing concern for one another, sharing our hopes and struggles and above all, as we have done this morning, our prayer and praise of the Lord”.

No better introduction can be made to our conference. Our Churches are engaged in a common journey. Indeed, journeying belongs to the very nature of the Church. As shown in the document on the various images of the Church in both the Syriac and Latin traditions adopted last Saturday by the *Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East*, significant images of the Church evoke this “pilgrim Church”: The

Church is the People of God marching through the desert; the Church is a flock following the good shepherd; the Church is a ship in voyage. All these images illustrate this *syn/odos* in which all Christians are engaged towards the blessed day when the unity between them will be restored.

On this journey, the Catholic Church is willing to listen to the synodal experience of the Syriac Traditions. I am sure that this conference, and in particular the opening lecture of Your Holiness, will contribute significantly to our reflection. On our common journey towards full communion, the Assyrian Church of the East has perhaps a unique vocation, as affirmed Pope Francis last Saturday, sharing a dream: “I dare even to express a dream”, he said, “that the separation with the beloved Assyrian Church of the East, the longest in the history of the Church, can also be, please God, the first to be resolved”.

Expressing my best wishes for this symposium, I would like to express once again my deep appreciation to its academic committee, to the Pro Oriente Foundation and the Institute for Ecumenical Studies. May the Lord abundantly bless all the participants! May our reflections of these days help us to continue our “walking together” towards full communion, accomplishing the will of the Lord.

Conference “Synodality in Oriental Orthodox Church Traditions”

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, Your Graces, dear Sisters, dear Father Rector, dear Professors, dear students,

I am pleased to greet all of you for this last part of the International Ecumenical Conference “Listening to the East”, on synodality in Oriental Orthodox Church Traditions. Three weeks ago, we had the opportunity to listen to the Eastern Orthodox synodal tradition, regarding communion, participation, and mission.

While the Eastern Orthodox ecclesiology is quite well-known in Catholic theological circles, we cannot say the same about the Oriental Orthodox approaches. As far as I know, this conference is the first ecumenical conference on synodality in the Oriental Orthodox traditions. Indeed, we know very little about the understanding and

practices of synodality in the Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian and Malankara Orthodox traditions, as well as about their interactions.

Contrary to those who think that synodality is a new ecclesial reality, the experience of the Oriental Orthodox Churches demonstrates that synodality has been at the core of the ecclesial life of these venerable Churches through the centuries. Furthermore, this synodal life has been preserved even in difficult historical circumstances faced by them in different contexts and periods. We can say that it is precisely this synodal life which helped the Oriental Orthodox Churches to preserve themselves, to flourish, and to be witness to the Gospel.

The Catholic Church is an ancient Church too and is also present in challenging context as yours. Yet Catholics are eager to listen to you in the conviction that your synodal experience is also a gift of the Holy Spirit for them. As Pope Francis affirmed: “If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! [...] Through an exchange of gifts, the Spirit can lead us ever more fully into truth and goodness”. I am sure that this conference will contribute significantly to this exchange of gifts.

In expressing my best wishes for this third part of the symposium, I would like to express once again my deep appreciation to the Pro Oriente Foundation and the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Angelicum for this academic initiative at the service of the whole Church, and my gratitude for the close collaboration with the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, represented here by Sister Nathalie Becquart, Undersecretary.

May the Lord, by the intercession of Saint Catherine of Alexandria we commemorate today, bless abundantly all of you and help us to continue our “walking together” towards full communion.

Cardinal Mario Grech

Secretary General of the Synod

“Enlarge the space of your tent” (Is 54:2). The words of the prophet Isaiah addressed to people in exile evokes their experience of exodus, when they dwelt in tents, and announces the promise of the return to the land, a sign of joy and hope. In order to prepare it is necessary to enlarge the tent. The words of the prophet help the people of God today to focus on what the Lord is calling us through the experience of a lived synodality. They capture the results of the first phase of the synod, which is a phase of listening, and they invite us to imagine the Church similarly as a tent. A tent of meeting and encountering, which accompanied the people on their journey through the desert, called to stretch out, therefore, but also to move. At its centre stands the Tabernacle, that is, the presence of the Lord (Document of the Continental Stage= DCS, 26).

A year ago, Pope Francis opened the Synod entitled “For a Synodal Church: Communion – Participation – Mission”. A week later each diocesan bishop around the world opened the synod in his diocese. Millions of people around the world reacted and participated in one way or the other in the synodal process. The People of God around the world engaged with one major question: How does synodality, which takes place today on different levels (from the local to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with its mission entrusted to her – and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church? (Preparatory Document 2).

People met in parishes and groups, be it in person or online. Soon reports about the experience of becoming and, yes, being a synodal Church were written in the dioceses and submitted to episcopal conferences or equivalent structures in the Eastern Churches. In these bodies the bishops gathered to listen and discern together what the people of God in their territory had experienced and communicated. The process implied that a circularity between the people of God and their shepherds, of prophecy and discernment had been initiated.

The conferences of bishops and equivalent bodies in the Eastern Churches submitted their findings in reports to the General Secretariat for the Synod in Rome. It was with immense gratitude and, yes, with a bit of a surprise and awe, for me personally as well as for the whole team, when we discovered how generous and eager the people of God participated. It is most touching to hear how people have been longing for being listened to. Indeed, a longing for being asked what they believe, feel, experience, encounter, fear, hope for and think. A longing for being listened to!

Over the summer of 2022 112 out of 114 episcopal conference as well as all 15 Eastern Churches submitted their findings alongside numerous other reports that found their way into the Secretariat of the Synod. A group of experts that came from all over the world and that was composed of men and women, bishops, priests, those living a consecrated life as well as lay men and women, prayerfully read and discerned what the people of God experienced in this first phase of listening. It really deeply touched and moved us, that despite the differences in culture and circumstances in which people live, the Holy People of God converge in calling for a profound renewal of the Church. The biblical icon of enlarging the space of the tent captures in an excellent way what people are longing for: They want to open the Church in such a way that – following the example of the Lord – she is truly welcoming, offering a place for all to belong and dwell. The reports reveal a very strong longing for a deep felt and shared communion, for active participation for example in the liturgy while listening to the Word of God and celebrating the Eucharist; they long for a servant leadership and for possibilities to take up their own responsibilities flowing from baptism. They are eager to take up their task in being a Church that is faithfully, joyfully, and effectively missionary. The people of God let us know that they reflect on these aspects, because they rediscover the equality in dignity that all brothers and sisters share due to their baptism. The reports show that their longing for change is not sociologically driven, but deeply sacramentally rooted.

The longing in particular for communion holds an ecumenical dimension. It echoes the prayer of the Lord: “That all may be one” (John 17:21). The people of God express a deep desire to grow in unity

with all baptized. “Many reports emphasize that there is no complete synodality without unity among Christians” (DCS 48). The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one baptism, has, therefore, a special place in the synodal journey (*Vademecum of the Synod* 5.3.7).

Such a dialogue requires, above all, a deep listening and discerning not only to one another, but in particular by listening *together* to what the Holy Spirit has to say, for it is the Holy Spirit who is the architect of the unity of the Church of Christ (UR 2). Vatican II teaches that whatever the Holy Spirit has wrought in the hearts of our brothers and sisters in Christ can be for our own edification (UR 4) and acknowledges with humility that “certain features of the Christian mystery have at times been more effectively emphasized” in other Christian communities (UUS 14). Hence, Pope Francis wrote in *Evangelii gaudium*: “If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us.” (EG 246) The Holy Father then mentioned as an example that “in the dialogue with our Orthodox brothers and sisters, we Catholics have the opportunity to learn more about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and their experience of synodality. Through an exchange of gifts, the Spirit can lead us ever more fully into truth and goodness.” (EG 246) Hence, being ecumenical thus requires to be synodal and being synodal postulates to be ecumenical. Both synodality and ecumenism are processes of “walking together”. One cannot be undertaken and accomplished successfully without the other.

For this reason, I like to thank Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, to have taken the initiative to organize a number of conferences in which we can listen to and learn from our fellow Christians how they understand synodality and how this unfolds in their traditions. We would like to hear which enriching experiences they encounter and which challenges they meet. We ask ourselves: How can synodality be developed in such a way that it contributes to the unity of the Church of Christ?

Earlier this month, we already had a conference with representatives and scholars of the Eastern Orthodox Church. It brought forward insights about which we as Catholics need to deepen our own knowledge such as the connection between the Eucharist and synodality, as well as the theology and praxis of laity participating in different synodal canonical institutions in some Eastern Orthodox traditions. We were also offered an opportunity to understand better the gospel value of finding consensus, which replaced – so it seems at the initiative of the Orthodox Churches – the majority principle in decision making and taking procedures in the World Council of Churches. The first conference was enriching. Hence, with confidence we look forward to the current conference in which we are to listen and learn from those brothers and sisters in Christ who belong to the Syriac Church and the Church of the East Traditions. I thank all who have prepared a paper and who have decided to participate here, be it in person or online.

A conference like this is not possible without those who see to many practical aspects. A special word of thanks is, therefore, due to the President of the Foundation Pro Oriente, His Excellency Dr. Alfons Kloss, as well as the Rector of the Angelicum, Fr. Thomas Joseph White OP, and the Director of the Institute for Ecumenical Studies at the Angelicum, Fr. Hyacinthe Destivelle OP. A special word of gratitude is to be expressed to the group that attended to a program that promises to be enriching for all.

Allow me to close by returning to the words of the prophet: “Enlarge the space of your tent” (Is 54:2). I quote from the Document for the Continental Stage: “Enlarging the tent requires welcoming others into it, making room for their diversity. It thus entails a willingness to die to self out of love, finding oneself again in and through relationship with Christ and one’s neighbor... The fruitfulness of the Church depends on accepting this death, which is not, however, an annihilation, but an experience of emptying oneself in order to be filled by Christ through the Holy Spirit, and thus a process by which we receive richer relationships, deeper ties to God and each other. This is the place of grace, and of transfiguration. For this reason, the apostle Paul recommends, *“Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard*

equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness" (Phil. 2:5-7). It is under this condition that the members of the Church, each and all together, will be able to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in fulfilling the mission assigned by Jesus Christ to his Church: it is a liturgical, Eucharistic act." (DCS 28)

May we have a fruitful conference.

Cardinal Christoph Schönborn

Archbishop of Vienna

Conference “Synodality in the Syriac Orthodox and Church of the East Traditions”

Your Holiness, Your Eminences, Your Graces, Your Excellencies, Esteemed Conference Participants, Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with sincere gratitude, that I am addressing you today, while you are gathered for the opening session of the International Ecumenical Conference “Listening to the East” on Synodality in the Syriac Orthodox and Church of the East Traditions. The Catholic Church has a lot to listen to and to learn from its sister Churches of the Syriac traditions, which are going back to the very early time of Christianity, with its vividness and rich cultural variety, into which the Gospel spread and was proclaimed. After my visit to Syria in last October, upon the invitation of His Holiness Mar Ignatius Aphrem II, I can testify for this richness, with which our dear brothers and sisters are giving witness for the Gospel until today, in partially harshest circumstances, not only in Syria.

Since its establishment by my esteemed predecessor, Cardinal Franz König, in 1964, during the Second Vatican Council, PRO ORIENTE Foundation has been committed to fostering communion between the Eastern and Western churches. It has a longstanding experience on the way to a closer rapprochement between our churches that have been separated for centuries. In 1994, PRO ORIENTE started a special format for the dialogue with the Churches of the Syriac Traditions, which is unique, because it is the only such dialogue forum worldwide that contains members from all Churches of the Syriac Traditions, both from the East and the West, both from Orthodox and Catholic Churches. It is in the spirit of the dialogue that has evolved, by walking and by working together in this forum, and of the connectedness and even friendship between its members, that has developed since then, that I wish this conference to bear fruits.

I am very grateful to our cooperation partner, the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Pontifical University St Thomas Aquinas, the Angelicum, which is hosting the conference. I am certain, that the Angelicum as well as the entire “Eternal City” are going to provide an excellent context and frame for the conference.

In these days, in Rome, the Catholic Church wants to be listening to its brothers and sisters from the Churches of the Syriac Traditions. One of them, who for many years used to be a member of our PRO ORIENTE dialogue commission, until recently, when he was elected Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, is His Holiness Mar Awa III.

I had the honor and pleasure to welcome him in Vienna a few weeks ago, during his Pastoral Visit to Austria. This evening he is going to give the opening keynote lecture for this conference. I thank him and all contributors, for their readiness to accept our invitation, to come to Rome, and to share with us their understandings and experiences of synodality.

May it be the attitude of being listeners that will gather us all together, and thus contribute to a successful conference, united in synodality, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit!

Conference “Synodality in Oriental Orthodox Church Traditions”

Your Eminences, Your Graces, Your Excellencies,
Esteemed Conference Participants, Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with great joy, that I am addressing you today, while you are gathered for the opening session of the International Ecumenical Conference “Listening to the East” on Synodality in Oriental Orthodox Church Traditions. In these traditions, there is a lot that the Catholic Church can listen to and learn, from its sister Churches.

Since the earliest times, the Christian faith was proclaimed and testified for, by the churches that later became known as the Oriental Orthodox Church Communion – from Africa to the Caucasus, and from the Mediterranean far into the Eastern parts of Asia. You, dear sisters and brothers from the Oriental Orthodox Churches, like your ancestors,

have given witness for the Christian faith, under sometimes harshest circumstances, sharing the gospel with one another, walking together, staying in communion with one another. Like that, you have been and still are expressing synodality in many more ways than is widely known.

Since its establishment by my esteemed predecessor, Cardinal Franz König, in 1964, during the Second Vatican Council, PRO ORIENTE Foundation has been committed to fostering communion between the Eastern and Western churches. It has a longstanding experience on the way to a closer rapprochement between our churches that have been separated for so many centuries. Already in 1971, in one of the first PRO ORIENTE dialogue meetings with representatives from the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the later so called “Vienna Christological Formula” has been agreed upon by the Catholic and the Oriental Orthodox participants. It is in the spirit of these dialogue meetings, this walking and working together in friendship, and thus getting more and more connected with one another, that I wish this conference to bear fruits.

I am very grateful to our cooperation partner, the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Angelicum, which is hosting the conference. Surely, the Angelicum and the entire “Eternal City” are going to provide an excellent context and frame for the conference.

In these days, in Rome, the Catholic Church wants to be listening to its brothers and sisters from the Oriental Orthodox Churches. May it be the attitude of being listeners that will gather us all together, in peace, harmony, and unity, and thus contribute to a successful conference, in synodality – under the guidance of the Holy Spirit!

KEYNOTES

Theologies of Synodality in Oriental Orthodox Church Traditions

Archbishop Khajag Barsamian

A group of six churches, with origins in antiquity – the Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Ethiopian, Eritrean and Indian churches – make up the “family” of Christian traditions known as the Oriental Orthodox Churches. In earlier times they have been variously called the Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Ancient Oriental, Lesser Eastern, or Churches of Three Ecumenical Councils. These names were usually given by Europeans in times prior to the founding of the ecumenical movement, to describe the common features of these six churches. But the names were not embraced by the churches themselves.

It was in the context of the World Council of Churches in the 20th century that this family of ancient traditions began to be called *Oriental Orthodox* in order to distinguish them from the *Eastern Orthodox* Churches – and this designation has been widely accepted throughout the worldwide Christian community¹.

The designation is *theologically* meaningful because it distinguishes churches that recognize the first three ecumenical councils (those of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus) but did not accept the fourth Council of Chalcedon and its successors. On this theological basis, all six of these ancient churches are in communion with each other.

The Oriental Orthodox churches have other things in common having to do with ecclesiastical structure, hierarchical independence, and cultural identity. For example, all are national autocephalous churches. The term “autocephaly” (from the Greek meaning “one’s own head”) is

1. Nicholas Lossky, José Miguez Bonino et al., *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 2002, pp. 857-859.

related to the Eastern Orthodox churches and reflects the administrative organization and jurisdiction of a particular church. The word “autocephalous” indicates an independent church that elect its own head or patriarch to organize and administer its body of churches.

In the 6th century, the Christian communities of Egypt, Syria and Armenia were established indisputably as national churches. They were and remain independent among themselves, and maintain a unity on the ground of Faith and Love. They exist in communion, but do not possess a common super-authority which could be effective and acceptable for all parties. Hanging on to the Apostolic tradition and the first three Ecumenical Councils, they retain their orthodox faith and traditions, and continued missionary activities at home and outside their countries.

According to the conviction of the Oriental Orthodox churches, the highest authority of the Universal Church was and is, present and active in the Ecumenical Councils. The central authority of particular churches, by contrast, lies in the hands of the local synod. The heads of the Oriental Orthodox churches – called by the names “catholicos,” “patriarch,” or “pope” – represent the highest executive power in their churches and in administrative and disciplinary matters.

Up to A.D. 451, the Ecumenical Councils were the highest authoritative synods and tribunals deciding the fundamental Christian doctrines and essential canons. In 1965, the Oriental Orthodox Churches met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, as fully equal sister churches, and de facto recognized each other’s autocephaly². The heads and their theologians gathered together, expressed their unity and communion publicly and solemnly, and prepared a program of co-operation in the fields of education, theological research, and ecumenical relations and activities³.

2. Etchmiadzin, Official Review of the Catholicosate of All Armenians 1 (1965), pp. 25-26.

3. Ibid., p. 26.

Basic principles found in democracy – that is, some acknowledgement of deliberation and consent among the broad base of society – are central to the governance of Oriental Orthodox churches. Biblical ideas such as the “Body of Christ” and the “People of God” redefine the body politic of the *demos* (the common people of ancient Greek state) into the royal priesthood of all believers⁴. The national or historical character of these churches must always be borne in mind; they are, in the most fundamental sense, “churches of peoples.” Representing as they each do, the wholeness of the life of their respective people, the Oriental churches perceive the Church not as an *institution* imposed from above, but rather as an *expression* of the total identification of church and people – which, in turn, is the genuine expression of earlier ecclesiology⁵.

The words, music, symbols, and movements of worship are tools for Christian formation and discipleship. For the faithful member of an Oriental Orthodox church, liturgical services and spiritual formation begin in the family and extend to the church. We are incorporated into a caring and nurturing community of faith where prayer occupies a central place. Specific developments of Christian life and witness mold a unique Christian identity, with religious-national characteristics.

I should add that this is also a characteristic of the Orthodox churches generally. The “identity markers” of the Church of Christ – Unity, Holiness, its Catholic or Universal nature, and its Apostolic origin – have the character of a “woven fabric” in the Orthodox tradition, where the consciousness of shared national or historical experiences are integrated seamlessly into the garment⁶.

4. Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, *The Oriental Orthodox Churches, in Search of Ecumenical Vision*, Antelias: Lebanon, 2001, p. 27.

5. Shahe Ananyan, “We believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church: The Armenian Apostolic Perspective”, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* (2016), vol. 16, issue 2, p. 149.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

But for this very reason, it would be almost impossible to find in the Orthodox churches' theological traditions the systematically prepared ecclesiological theories seen in the West. To some extent, even the term "ecclesiology" could be seen as foreign to Orthodox theological thought⁷.

One might cautiously go further and say that the Orthodox tradition has no formal definition of the Church – in the conventional sense of the modern West. The Church is not understood to exist separately from God, humanity, and the world.

The great Orthodox theologian Fr Alexander Schmemmann touches on this in his "Ecclesiological Notes," where he observes that the Orthodox "sources" (the Fathers, the Councils, the Liturgy) present no formal definition of the Church. He explains: "This is not because of any lack of ecclesiological interest and consciousness, but because the Church (in the Orthodox approach to her) does not exist, and therefore cannot be defined, apart from the very content of her life"⁸.

The Church is therefore to be defined in the light of the content of her life, namely in the *history of the people* and the *history of salvation*. The former, with regard to the human response to God's gift, defines the place and the role of the Church in the life of concrete national society; the latter, relying on the iconic expression of Christ's life, gives meaning and life to the institution we are used to calling the 'historical' or 'national' Church⁹.

In summary, let us state that the Church is first of all defined as an assembly of people, who are called by God to live in union with Him and with one another. Therefore, this social-communal nature of the Church is best expressed through the image of "Christ's Body," commonly referred to as the "Mystical Body of Christ".

7. Ibid.

8. A. Schmemmann, Ecclesiological Notes, St Vladimir's Quarterly, 11:1, 1967, pp. 35-39.

9. Shahe Ananyan, op. cit., p. 150.

What is synodality?

The synodal system – in its broad theological sense of *synodos*, that is, “walking together” or “taking the same road” in mutual love and understanding – goes beyond the principles of “adult franchise” and “majority rule” familiar in our modern political domain. In the Church, there is no “age factor” for membership: all baptized children and all believing men and women are members of the Body of Christ, irrespective of their age. Together, they constitute the people of God and are a worshipping community, praising the Triune God *together with* their departed faithful, the heavenly hosts, and the whole Creation, visible and invisible. All clerical orders such as deacons, presbyters, bishops and patriarchs are in this “household of God” and not above it¹⁰.

However, besides the word *synodos*, which is a generally accepted term in the Oriental Orthodox Church tradition, I would also like to mention here another meaning of this term, which is proper to my own Armenian Church tradition. That is the word *joghov* – Armenian for “council,” but also “community,” or even “synagogue.” *Joghov* expresses the conciliar, ecclesiological qualitative of *synodos*, and derives from the Aramaic *zrba*, meaning “crowd” or “flock,” depicting the sum or totality of the people¹¹.

In the canonical and ecclesiological documents of the Armenian Church the word *joghov* is used to describe,

1. The gathering of the Apostles at the Pentecost (Acts 2:1),
2. The praying community (Canons of the Apostles),
3. The Holy Eucharist, and
4. Holy Synods or Church Councils.

10. Lewis J. Patsavos, The Synodal Structure of the Orthodox Church, https://www.goarch.org/church-structure/-/asset_publisher/Le8YlyN21ysF/content/the-synodal-structure-of-the-orthodox-church.

11. Hrachia Acharian, The Armenian Etymological Dictionary (Arm.), vol. II, Yerevan, 1973, pp. 232-233.

Theological Aspects of Synodal Structure

It is a common tradition in some of Oriental churches to perceive church governance as episcopal and congregational (democratic) at the same time. These two ways are so closely intertwined that the ordained ministry has no theological validity outside the community of the People of God who elect and consecrate them. In the liturgical context, the praying community approves the worthiness of the ordained ministry. This crucial reference to the Body of Christ, the People of God, should be maintained throughout the life of the elected and ordained clergy.

Let me say that I will use the word “synodality” in its Armenian sense, which has some minor differences with other Oriental church traditions. In its general meaning, however, it expresses the same theological basis and views. Thus, I would like to point out two main theological dimensions, Pneumatological and Christological, although there are other important dimensions, such as Trinitarian, Anthropological, etc., which are crucial for the understanding of the theological meaning of Synodality in the Oriental Orthodox Church tradition.

The first Christian community arising from the Pentecost experience in Jerusalem (as described in the Acts of the Apostles) relied on the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The early Christians’ mode of life as the Spirit-inspired Christian fellowship set the model for the later Church (Acts 1:12-26; Acts 6:1-15; Acts 15:22; Acts 15:28). In the Synod of Jerusalem, the celebrated phrase “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” became the fundamental principle of synodality in the Church. So, the inspirational character of the first Christian Synod became a crucial and decisive model for the synodal structure of the Church.

The principle of synodality is the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ. Actually, as the “bond of love” [*nexus amoris*] in the life of God as Trinity, the Spirit gives this same love to the Church, and she is built into the communion of Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Corinthians 13,13).

The gift of the Holy Spirit, which is one and the same in all who have been baptized, is manifested in many forms: the equal dignity of the

baptized; the universal call to holiness; the participation of all the faithful in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Jesus Christ; the richness of hierarchical and charismatic gifts; the life and mission of each local Church. The Church's synodal path is shaped and nourished by the Eucharist. It is the centre of the whole of Christian life for the Church both universal and local, as well as for each of the faithful individually. Liturgy, or worship (and the form it takes), is the public, common action of a Christian community, in which the church is both manifested and realized.

This was the conclusion of the late Russian theologian Nicolas Lossky (1870-1965). Another scholar, very close to all our hearts, Prof. Robert Taft, stated it more directly: "The key to the heart of Christian East is Liturgy."¹²

Liturgy is not just texts, rites, and rituals. It is encountering the mystery of God; it is the visible expression of the faith of a community; the incarnation of the Christian message in a particular time, place, culture, and people. Seen in this light, liturgy is deeply implicated in a given church's ecclesiology – and in the ecclesiology of the Church overall. This has profound implications for the Orthodox churches especially.

Among the Eastern churches, everything related to liturgy is part of our theology. Fr John Meyendorff, (a leading theologian of the Orthodox Church of America), generalized this point by asserting: "The Orthodox doctrines of man and of the Church cannot be compartmentalized in neatly separate sections of theological science – 'theology,' 'anthropology,' 'ecclesiology' – but are simply meaningless if approached separately."

In the understanding of the Armenian Church, the "rule of prayer" as the "rule of faith" is a key to elaborating liturgical theology. Prayer and faith go hand in hand: they complement each other and they make the church into the gathering together of the faithful in fellowship and communion. This follows from the liturgical theology of the early church seen in the assembly of believers, where "They devoted themselves to the

12. Robert Taft, Acceptance Speech: Berakah Award, November 2, 2018, Pray TellBlog.

apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). In such Scriptural passages, we see in its most basic form the inter-connection of ecclesiology, the communal reality of the faithful, and liturgy.

The source and summit of synodality are in the celebration of the liturgy and – in a unique way – in our full, conscious and active participation in the Eucharistic synaxis. The Eucharist represents and visibly brings about our membership of the Body of Christ, which we share with each other as Christians (1 Corinthians 12,12). Local Churches are formed around the table of the Eucharist and gather there in the unity of the one Church. The Eucharistic synaxis brings into being the "communion of saints," in which the faithful are made sharers in God's grace in its many forms.

The writings of medieval Armenian theologians (John of Otsun [650-729] and Nerses IV the Gracious [1166-1173]) reflect the ecclesiology found in the liturgical prayers of this tradition and its theological commentaries. The prayers of the Liturgy of Hours reveal some important fundamentals of Armenian ecclesiology. In one of the prayers of the Early Morning Hour (approximately 7-8 a.m.) the Church is described as One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic: "Having arrived altogether at the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, let us extend our prayers to the only begotten Son of God, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ....".

Vespers or Evening Prayer, before starting the central or major prayer, addresses the gathered community: "Let us pray for peace and for the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church."

According to the liturgical commentaries of the 10th century (Khosrov of Andzev [902-964]), these prayers essentially depict the historical-institutional character of the Church. Hence, the gathered community prays for the Church and for her fidelity to the apostolic proclamation (Apostolicity) throughout the world (Catholicity). Yet, from the prevalence of that historical dimension of the Church, we could

never reach the authentic theological expression of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in Armenian ecclesiology¹³.

The Church is also a mystical reality, the heritage of celestial Jerusalem. Her foundations were from the beginning of God's creation. As such, the Church abiding in this world, reflects and expects the fulfilment of the future kingdom to come. In this sense, it is important to mention that the notion of One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church reveals only the mystical and eschatological dimensions in Armenian ecclesiology.

The New Testament view of the fullness of the human person and of the human community is expressed in the image of Christ as the head of the Church which is the body of Christ. In Christ the divine and the human are dynamically united, and the humanity to his own fullness is redeemed in the process of theosis. As the body of Christ, the Church stands for the human community and, by extension, all created reality that can experience God's salvation in Christ. When the apostle Paul envisages the individuals and the whole Church growing into the full measure of the stature of Christ (Eph 4:13) he means that humanity and all Creation can aspire to grow into the infinite dimension of the Word incarnate. Thus, synodality is an expression of the ultimate *koinonia* in and through Christ.

In the Armenian tradition, Catholicity as a major result of Synodality was received as inseparable from Unity. Of the utmost importance for the theological interpretation of these two notions were the famous words of St Paul: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph 4.3-6). Moreover, the unity described by the

13. Xosrov Andzveac'i, Commentary on the Prayers and Daily Services of the Church, Coll. Classical Armenian Authors, vol. X. Antelias, Lebanon, 2009, p. 159.

apostle has to be understood in the sense of the universal pontificate of Christ. As long as Christians are aware of that Christocentric unity, they are all representing the One Catholic Church, under the guidance of the Universal Pontiff, Jesus Christ.¹⁴

Thus, the members of the One Catholic Church, despite their doctrinal, liturgical, canonical, hierarchical etc. differences, are unified by the same call to hope, looking forward to the same Kingdom of heaven, having the same Lord, Jesus Christ, confessing the faith of the first three Ecumenical Councils and being baptized by the same baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ. The One Catholic Church is indeed the Church, celebrating all over the world the same Christian mystery, the Holy Eucharist, being called to the same Christian hope. The insistence on hope, one of the three major Christian virtues, echoes the eschatological reality of the coming of the Kingdom of God. In fact, the One Catholic Church is called by its very nature and mission to fulfil, at the end of time, the new divine creation, the New Heaven and the New Earth, flooding out from both the mystical and historical realities of the Church.

Concluding remarks

To conclude these remarks, and draw some threads together, I would leave you with these three observations:

1. The Oriental Orthodox Churches, due to their ecclesiological doctrine, perceive the Church not as an institution, but rather as an expression of the total identification of church and people which, in turn, is the genuine expression of earlier ecclesiology.
2. The word *synodos* reveals a common understanding of the conciliar thought of the Oriental Church Tradition. Although there are other words which etymologically point out different meanings in some of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, in its theological sense, *synodos* discloses the general understanding of synodality in the Oriental Orthodox tradition.

14. Shahe Ananyan, op. cit., p. 152.

3. Two main theological dimensions, *Pneumatological* and *Christological*, could be selected as usual theological views for the understanding of Synodality in the Oriental Orthodox Tradition. *Inspirational* and *eucharistic* characters of these dimensions are also important models for the theologies of synodality within the framework of the Oriental Orthodox theological tradition.

SYNODALITY WITHIN THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCH COMMUNION – A SYRIAN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE

Mor Theophilose Kuriakose

Introduction

The term synodality¹ expresses the life and mission of the church as a communion of all the people of God who are making their pilgrimage together on earth towards the eternal house of God. The purpose of synodality is to preserve the unity of the body of Christ. It is the sharing of hopes and struggles, and exchanging God-given gifts for mutual strengthening and to give authentic witness in this world. In the traditional ecclesial life, we use the term synod to qualify the gathering of the bishops. In the case of unity and communion, we have to think about the different levels and models of synodality.

The Oriental Orthodox Churches,² a family of self-governing churches with individual identities,³ consider synodality as an inclusive system. It neither creates a centralized group of authorities nor an

1. The terms synodality is derived from two Greek terms συν (zun – “together”) and ὁδός (odos – “way”, “journey”) With a theological lens, synodal also means “waking together,” or “taking the same road.”

2. The Oriental Orthodox churches, known by different appellations, namely Miaphysites, Pre-Chalcedonians, Non- Chalcedonians, and Ancient Oriental, which accept the first three councils, follow a unique Christian tradition alongside Greek and Latin traditions. While keeping a theological intra-unity, Oriental Orthodox churches keep their identity based on their socio-political and cultural backgrounds.

3. Each church in Oriental tradition owns separate ecclesial governance or synodality with apparent similarities. While considering the synodality and administrative regulations (canon laws), these churches owe much to the social conditions, by-laws of scripture, tradition, and sacraments.

autocracy. By the bond in the unity of Apostolic faith, the first three ecumenical synods, and common Christology, these churches hold representative value to the office of Church or synodality.

This paper investigates the general nature of synodality in Oriental Orthodox churches, particularly in the Syrian Orthodox tradition both in the Middle East and India, with a miaphysite theological (Christological) emphasis.

Synodality with Christ Image: Biblical and Ecclesial Perspectives

In his epistles, St Paul explains the fundamental Christological principles of synodality, primacy and conciliarity. Christ, the head of the assembly of the faithful (the body of Christ), presented the symbol of primacy and conciliarity (Ephesians 1:22-23), and Paul orients that “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ... (We) are one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free” (1 Corinthians 12:12). St Paul again clarifies this bold Christological connection to Ephesians in Chapter 4. It reads: “But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:15-16). Here, Paul’s Christological principle demonstrates the function of synodality, which essentially exercises ecclesial life.

St Paul’s imagination of “ecclesia” or “church” reflects the nature of synodality – a union of two mystical identities. These two identities are explained through the concept of ‘rozo ܠܝܫܬܐ,’ or ‘mystery’ – the heavenly and earthly realities. As a heavenly mystery rozo ܠܝܫܬܐ, the Church reveals the divine love and wisdom to the fullness of revelation by leading both Jews and Gentiles to the consummation where “God will be everything to everyone,” (1 Corinthians 15:28) and thereby, to bring humanity to glory. In an earthly reality, ecclesia represents the gathering and fellowship of the faith community. This combination explains God’s mystical interaction in the world.

To narrow down this idea, synodality reveals the physical representation of Christ in the world as His body represents the baptised in Christ and living in communion with the Triune God. It manifests Christ's life and mission here on earth, proclaiming salvation through Jesus Christ⁴ While considering this as one form of ecclesial synodality etymologically, the word church derives from *Kuriakon doma* (house of the Lord) – the church belongs to the Lord. Here, a hierarchical model is created but with the primary interest of salvation for all. Based on these views, synodality epitomes this double movement – Christ and his body as an inclusive and faithful community.

From its earliest form in history, the Antiochian tradition or Syrian Orthodox Church considers this double movement of synodality. It expresses the life and mission of the ecclesia/church as a communion of all the people of God who are making their pilgrimage together on earth towards the eternal house of God through a Bishop (*Episcopos*)⁵ who exercises the authority of Christ, in communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit.⁶ Christologically, this is done on a conciliar method and with

4. Geevarghese Panicker, *The Church in the Syriac Tradition*, Kottayam, SEERI, 2010, p. 12.

5. The Church, gathered for the Eucharistic services under the presidency of the bishop, reveals both the liturgical and ecclesial dimensions of the Synodality. As John. D. Zizioulas explained, “the identification of the eucharistic assembly with the ‘Church of God’ led naturally to the coincidence of the structure of the Church with that of the Eucharist”. See more in John. D. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries*, Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001, p. 59. He asserts that “the unity of the Church in the Eucharist” was its beginning, and it later became “unity in the Bishop”. Ibid. p. 68. There are several orthodox theologians who attempted to explain the perichoretic ministries of primacy, synodality, collegiality, and reception following the line of Eucharistic ecclesiology, e.g., Nicholas Afanasiev.

6. The word *Episcopos* (ἐπίσκοπος) means “one who oversees”.

an inseparable communion or synodality, as explained by Ignatius of Antioch.⁷

Oriental Orthodox Christology: A Model of Practical Synodality

While considering the inseparable communion or synodality, we begin to understand that the eternal nature of the Holy Trinity, expressing the perichoretic mutual indwelling of the three persons, the real synodality, conciliarity and collegiality in the trinitarian life has a coequal, coeternal, and consubstantial status of the Christ with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Confessing this as the fundamental model of synodality, the

7. As noted by John Lawson, this double movement is well explained by Ignatius of Antioch. Ignatius of Antioch testifies an established hierarchical order in Antioch, with a bishop (ἐπίσκοπος) in union with presbyters (πρεσβύτεροι) (cf. Trall., 12.2) and deacons (διάκονοι) who are subject both to him and to the presbytery (τῷ πρεσβυτερίῳ) (cf. Magn. 2.1). John Lawson relates the hierarchy and Synodality of Ignatius of Antioch that, “the guarantee of orthodoxy and the token of Christian love is the sense of disciplined corporate solidarity uniting all the local congregations in every place, of which solidarity the bishop is the symbol and instrument.” See more in; John Lawson, *A Theological and Historical Introduction to the Apostolic Fathers*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961, p.121. Nicholas Afanasiev brings a Eucharistic ecclesiological connection to this position. In Afanasiev’s eucharistic ecclesiology, he considers the laity as the concelebrant of the Eucharistic celebration, and his model provides us with a distinctive vision of an Orthodox notion of collegiality of the laity and the bishop in pastoral ministry. Or in other words, the bishop and the faithful are always together in the Eucharistic community and the bishop always presides over the assembly and offers thanksgiving with and in the presence of the assembled laity. Therefore, it also affirms the unity of the hierarchy with the people as well as the distinction between the presider and the laity. See more in Nicholas E. Denysenko, *Primacy, Synodality, And Collegiality*, in *Orthodoxy: A Liturgical Model*, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 48:1, Winter 2013, p. 22; Nicholas Afanasiev, “The Ministry of Laity in the Church”, in William C. Mills (ed.), *Called to Serve: Readings on Ministry from the Orthodox Church*, Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2010, pp. 8-9.

church is advised to imitate Christ in practice. In St Paul's language, the church is the body of Christ, the result of the incarnation with Christ as its head. For Cyril of Alexandria, this mystery projects the divine and human nature of Christ.

St Cyril's emphasizing the nature of Christ - "One Nature of God the Word Incarnate" – asserts the hypostatic unity of the Godhead and manhood of Christ as one nature without separation, confusion, mingling, or alteration. Severus of Antioch illustrates this Christological affirmation while he refutes Julian of Halicarnassus.⁸ In the modern period, Pope Shenouda III alludes to this function: "Neither did the Divine nature transmute to the human nature nor did the human nature transmute to the Divine nature. The Divine nature did not mix with the human nature nor mingle with it, but it was a unity that led to the Oneness of Nature."⁹

This expression compels us to revisit the "divine and human" composite nature and its application in synodality. As Ignatius of Antioch advises bishops to imitate Christ and this imitation leads to the church's nature, I assume that the fundamental nature of synodality in the Oriental Orthodox church comes from the non-mingling Christological nature that neither over-emphasizes divinity nor excludes humanity. Therefore, in the Oriental Orthodox Synodality, the role of primacy (imitation of divinity) and the involvement of laity (humanity's imitation of Christ) exists without confusion. Differently stated, the synodality of the Oriental Orthodox church does not constrain only the gathering of bishops for some purposes but upholds the voice and the communion of all faithful. It is a symphony of episcopacy and community (laity).

8. Severi Antiulianistica. Translated by A. Sanda, Piscataway, New Jersey, Gorgias Press, 2011.

9. Pope Shenouda III, The Nature of Christ, St Mark Coptic Church, New Jersey, 1984, p. 8. (http://www.copticchurch.net/topics/theology/nature_of_christ.pdf).

Primacy, Bishops, Priest, and Laity in Oriental Orthodox Churches

Generally, in Oriental Orthodox Churches, primacy has an honorary nature. It functions in a collegial and conciliar way based on the understanding that Christ collectively entrusted authority to His Apostles. Each Patriarch or Catholicos embodies this authority according to his tradition and context. For example, the primates of Oriental Orthodox churches meet to discuss critical and joint concerns and estimate future programs. They participate in Eucharistic ecclesiology with full communion. Despite their traditional, cultural, linguistic, and liturgical divergences, they engage in dialogue to discuss their shared ministry.

For example, each Oriental Church in this tradition is led by its primate. Synodality, in this case, cannot exist without primacy but with the highest authority – the *primus* – of the synod (episcopal synod) itself, imaging Christ through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The episcopal synod is the authoritative body to decide the church's faith, liturgy, and discipline matters. On these matters, the primate does not enjoy higher authority than a bishop. Still, as the centre of unity of his church, he is held in special honour. For example, in some Oriental Orthodox traditions, he presides over the consecration of the new bishop and the consecration of the holy Myron (Chrism) is done by the Patriarch/Catholicos. He exercises authority in collegiality with fellow bishops in all essential matters. There is always reciprocity between the Patriarch/Catholicos and the bishop's collegium.

This ecclesial and democratic collegiality goes beyond the administration of the church properties. It is exercised in spiritual matters like electing, examining, and ordaining clerics and bishops. In the West Syriac Malankara tradition, democratic scrutiny and the election is performed in the local parish and diocesan level bodies for candidates for the priesthood and bishops respectively. For example, in the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church association, bishops, priests and laity gather to elect the Catholicos and Malankara Metropolitan through a democratic vote. Among the Copts, the laity (including women on the nomination committee) plays a significant role in electing the Pope. The Armenian Church fosters lay presence even in the bishop's synods.

Remarkably, the role of the laity in the liturgical order of the enthronement of a bishop reveals in the process of examination of the candidate, public confession of faith of the candidate, reception and the final acclamation of *Axios* – he is worthy. In the Syrian Orthodox tradition, the laity holds a separate liturgical service, *Sunthroniso* (Enthronement), while receiving the bishop to attain the authority of bishopric function in his assigned diocese. This liturgical performance shows the episcopal authority on the one hand and the accommodation of the democratic principles in the church governance and ecclesial celebrations on the other. In short, by imaging the nature of Christ, the Oriental Orthodox Churches uphold a symphony of primacy, synodality and conciliarity in their ecclesial life.

Collegiality and Synodality in Antiochian Tradition

Ignatius of Antioch addresses the Church of Rome that “presides in love” (Roman 1) and asks Polycarp to call a council revealing the collegiality of the Antiochian tradition even from its outset. This is in union with the teachings found in the Apostolic Constitution, which reveals the importance of collegiality in its 34rd and 35th canons.

34: For the bishops of every people, it is right to know who is first among them and to count him as the head and not to do something greater without his consent. But every one of them shall manage only those (affairs) that belong to his own eparchy and the places under it. But he shall not do anything without the consent of all; for so does unanimity take place and God be glorified.

35: A bishop must not dare to confer an ordination beyond his to own bounds, in towns or countries that are not subject to him. Further, if he is convicted of having done so without the consent of those who rule those towns or countries, his deposition shall take place and also those whom he has ordained.¹⁰

10. Arther Vööbus (trans.), *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition* Vol. 1, Louvain: Secretariat du Corpus SCO, 1975, p.76.

As part of the call from Ignatius of Antioch, this tradition follows collegiality to the degree of respecting each tradition. The Syrian Orthodox church, which emerges within the Antiochian tradition, continues the legacy of Ignatius until this date.

Patriarch and Universal Syrian Orthodox Synod

As the successor of the Throne of St Peter and Ignatius of Antioch, the Patriarch of Antioch, the supreme head of the Syrian Orthodox Church (ܐܕܬܐ ܣܘܪܝܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܬܪܝܝܬܐ, *Idto Sūryāytho Trīsaith Subhō*) exercise the significant manner of the primacy of honour and collegiality in its synods. The Syrian Orthodox Church underlines the role of St Peter as the head of the Apostolic collegium, not in isolation but in collegiality with other Apostles. In the same way, the Patriarch as the successor of St Peter acts as the head of the synod. The primacy of the Patriarch is understood as the head of the synod, the visible symbol of the synod. The Patriarch, the symbol of the unity of the Church, the spoke person of its faith, doctrine and tradition, serves as the general supervisor of spiritual and administrative matters. Elected by the Universal Synod, the Patriarch becomes the president and general administrator of the Universal Synod in all the spiritual, administrative and financial matters of the Church. The Constitution of the Syrian Orthodox Church says, “His Holiness the Patriarch is the supreme head of the Church and its holy Synod and the general administrator to its religious spiritual and administrative affairs. He supervises Archdioceses’ religious, spiritual, and administrative matters.”¹¹ In that capacity, the Patriarch convenes the holy synod and presides over its meeting sessions, sanctions, and announces its decisions.

The constitution further affirms the Patriarch’s various authority over the synod. “The Holy Synod, headed by His Holiness the Patriarch, is the supreme religious, spiritual, legislative and administrative authority of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch.”¹² The synod has even the power to decide against the will of the Patriarch and even to take

11. Constitution of the Syriac Orthodox Church, Art. 12.

12. *Ibid.*, Article 3.

disciplinary action in the severe misgivings of dogmatic, spiritual, moral affairs or insanity.

In addition to the Universal Synod, the Syrian Orthodox Church is annexed to a regional synod in India (Malankara). Generally, the Synod of Syrian Metropolitans outside India is presided over by the Patriarch. The Synod of Indian Metropolitans (Malankara Synod) is chaired by the Catholicos (if the Patriarch is present, he will preside over the Malankara synod).

Catholicos, Regional Synod, Other Administrative Bodies, Diocese, and Parish Counsels

The Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church is an autonomous church within the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church. The Catholicos, duly consecrated by the Patriarch, is the regional head of the Malankara Church and abides by the liturgical and canonical traditions of the Mother Church, holding the Apostolic succession of St Peter. The Malankara Church preserves the synodality with the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church. The synodality operates here not necessarily in uniformity but in conciliar ways, taking the particular contextual realities seriously. (St Paul preaches the same in Galatia and Corinth but in a manifold, even sometimes dialectical way). The regional synod in India addresses matters related to the Malankara Church. But matters of faith, the consecration of new bishops, and the general discipline of the church are subjected to the ratification of the Universal Synod and the Patriarch.

Historically, the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, the entire Malankara Church, was one patriarchal vicariate. Following the decisions of the Mulanthuruthy Synod in 1876, presided over by H.H. Patriarch Ignatius Petrus III, different dioceses were created, and the Malankara Association, the supreme ecclesial body of the Malankara Church encompassing the voices of Metropolitans, priests and laity (both men and women) was formed. The Malankara Association elects a Managing Committee and a working committee to do the day-to-day affairs of the Church. These bodies make decisions in consultation with the Synod.

The diocesan and parish level meetings imitate synodal nature with the utmost symphony combining the primacy and representative models. Diocesan Counsel is a consultative body of selected clergy and laity convened by the local bishop to discuss, evaluate and decide the diocese's matters. The diocesan bishop chairs the counsel; in his absence, he appoints a priest to conduct the meetings. The council members are elected by the diocesan general body and are accountable to the general body. All parishes and spiritual organisations are legally bound to meet their general body at least once a year and make decisions democratically.

Duly elected managing committee members to manage the managing committees of the parish churches and congregations. The priest (Vicar) of the church presides over the managing committee meeting or parish general body, but in his absence, the vice president, an elected layperson, leads the committee. The managing committee is responsible for maintaining and protecting all the parish property, dealing with the financial and administrative affairs and facilitating all spiritual activities. In both cases, sub-committees are presided over and governed by an elected president, a priest or a layperson.

The Participation of the Laity in the Decision-making

The synodal journey of a baptized person in the MSOC/JSC (Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church also known as Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church) begins at the childhood. When a child is baptized in MSOC, with the guidance of the godfather/godmother, the child is shown the path for his spiritual life. When a child is admitted to a secular school the same child is also in parallel admitted to the Sunday school of his parish which is the first spiritual organization. As he/she grows, after 12th grade (17 years) the grown-up boy/girl will continue his/her service in church through various spiritual organizations such as Student's Movement, Youth Association, Women's Association, Elders' Association, and then move to the Parish Managing Committee etc. The Parish/diocesan/church managing committee always will have representations from all these spiritual organizations where the voices of each spiritual organization are heard. Each spiritual organization is guided by a Metropolitan appointed by the synod, and he represents the voice of such organizations in the synod.

The progression of the committees, like the Parish Managing Committee and the Diocese Managing Committee, reaches an upper body called Regional Church's Managing Committee (Execution Committee of the Regional MSOC). The Managing Committee of the MSOC in India consists of Catholicos/Metropolitan Trustee, Metropolitans, Priest Trustee, Priests, Lay Trustee, Lay Secretary & Lay representations (Inclusive of Spiritual organizations).

Ecumenical Approach of MSOC and Synodality

As a Resident of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary, we always prioritize the inclusive approach, which is evident at our theological Seminary, the only theological institution of our MSOC in India. Here we welcome students from all Christian denominations. We always have students from the Chaldean Church of the East, Malabar Independent Syrian Church, The Salvation Army, the Evangelical Church etc. We also have teaching faculties from sister denominations as we wanted to give an ecumenical approach to understanding theology and the Holy Bible. Even in our Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary's Convocation, we always have a sister church participation as a chief dignitary. The ecumenical voice is respected and accepted in all these processes as part of its synodal vision.

Conclusion

In the Oriental Orthodox tradition, Synodality is deeply rooted in its faith and praxis, echoing its Christological confession. The Church is a community of believers and co-pilgrims on earth and represents fundamental equality. It does not discredit the hierarchical dimension. The Patriarch/Catholicos or bishop represents both Christ and the Church and holds the authority to teach and to preside over the community. This authority is interrelated with other bishops and the community. The Synodic tradition of the Oriental Orthodox Churches follows a Christological affirmation of the inclusion of both episcopacy and the life and mission of the people of God. In short, we understand synodality as pilgrimage of the entire people of God; it is our journey together as the WCC Faith and Order Document reminds us, "The Pilgrim church is not community closed in on itself; rather it is called to

share the joyful news of the gospel in vibrant and inviting way in the complex realities of today.” It is our common affirmation as the document continues, “There is need further to consider the way Christians move together and how witness happens with truthfulness and integrity in a pluralistic society.”¹³

13. Come and see: A Theological Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, Faith and Order Paper No.224, Geneva 2019, par. 27, 28.

2.1. SYNODALITY
IN THE ANTIOCHIAN SYRIAC
ORTHODOX CHURCH

KEYNOTE

Understandings and Practices of Synodality in the Syriac Orthodox Tradition

Mor Polycarpus Aydin

Introduction

In this article,¹ I would like first to give a brief account of the Syriac Church to situate it in its historical context. Second, I will say a few words about canon law in the Syriac tradition. Next, I shall reflect about the sources of authority in which scripture holds a pre-eminent place. In a third section, I shall reflect on the ecclesial structures of authority with special reference to the notion of synodality. Since the faithful are dispersed throughout the world these days, the Syriac Church faces moral discernment in a worldwide context. The fourth section reflects the challenges that arise from this and describes how, in searching for a response to new needs and questions, St Ephrem's (ca 306-373) reflections guide the Syriac tradition until today. Finally, I will offer some concluding remarks on the subject under consideration.

The Syriac Orthodox Church in Its Historical Context

The Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch forms a distinct tradition belonging to the Oriental Orthodox family of churches and exists alongside the Greek and Latin traditions. Its significance within

1. This is a slightly revised and abridged text of my previously published article: Inspired by Ephrem the Syrian: Moral Discernment with a Therapeutic Approach, in M. Wijlens et al. (eds.), *Churches and Moral Discernment*, vol. 1: *Learning from Traditions*, WCC Publications, Geneva 2020, pp. 9-19.

Christian tradition stems from its roots in the biblical/Semitic world, out of which the Bible and Christianity sprang. Furthermore, its Syriac language,² the local Aramaic dialect of Edessa, which is employed in the liturgy today, is not all that different from the Galilean Aramaic that Christ himself would have spoken. As Robert A. Kitchen notes, “Syriac-speaking Christianity is centered about the heritage of its language, not around its theology. Many strands, theological, ecclesiastical and literary, are woven together to produce the distinctive Syriac tradition of Christianity which never forgets whose language it speaks.”³ Earliest Syriac tradition, up to the 4th century, is Semitic in character, free from the later influence of Greek culture, philosophy, and worldview.⁴

To understand the current worldview and development of the Syriac Orthodox Church, we must also bear in mind that it has faced many persecutions and horrific massacres throughout its history, especially the genocide of 1915 during the First World War. In it, the Syriac, Armenian, and Greek Christian populations of Anatolia were massacred at the hands of Turks and Kurds in the last years of the Ottoman Empire. This and many other preceding horrific events throughout time led to the dwindling as well as dispersion of many members of the Syriac community in the various countries of the Middle East, and subsequently through the Western world where today one finds sizeable diaspora communities in Americas, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. Furthermore, the history of persecution has had a major impact on social conditions and consequently, on the development of canon law in the Syriac Orthodox tradition. This can be seen in the work of the Syriac Orthodox prelate and polymath, Bar Hebraeus (1226–1286), who wrote the most comprehensive systematic legal collection of

2. Aaron M. Butts, Syriac Language, in Brock et al., *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*.

3. Robert A. Kitchen, *The Syriac Tradition*, in Augustine Casiday (ed.), *The Orthodox Christian World*, Routledge, London & New York 2012, p. 66.

4. On this, see Sebastian P. Brock, *Asian Christianity: The Need for a Historical Perspective*, *Asian Horizons*, 10/III (2016), pp. 441-50.

the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Book of Directions (*Kthobo d-Hudoye*), which is better known in the literature under the title of *Nomocanon*.⁵ The work comprises 40 chapters of ecclesiastical and civil law.⁶ It is also worth mentioning that Bar Hebraeus, in his major work on moral doctrine called the *Ethicon* (*Kthobo d-Ithiqon*),⁷ also deals with questions of ecclesiastical law, frequently citing canonistic literature.⁸

It is against this background that I would like to consider synodality and its implementation in the Syriac tradition. In doing so, I shall consider three related areas as parameters for an authoritative moral discernment in the Syriac tradition: namely, sources of authority, structures of authority, and finally, the dynamics of authority.

Sources of Authority

In the Syriac Tradition, scripture is used as a foundation and the primary source of inspiration by secondary sources for moral discernment. In addition to scripture and church Tradition, the other “key” sources considered for moral discernment and which are employed in such a process include prayer, conscience reason, *oikonomia* (*mdabronutho*), human culture, philosophy, and related sciences.

Sabino Chialà in his article “St Ephrem the Syrian as a Reader of Holy Scripture: A Witness of Plurality in Biblical Hermeneutics,”⁹

5. Paul Bedjan, (ed.), *Nomocanon Gregorii Barhebraei*, Otto Harrassowitz, Paris & Leipzig, 1898.

6. On this see Hubert Kaufhold, *Sources of Canon Law in the Eastern Churches*, in Wilfried Hartmann and Kenneth Pennington (ed.), *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law to 1500*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C, 2012, pp. 252-255.

7. Paulus Bedjan, (ed.), *Ethicon; seu, Moralia Gregorii Barhebraei*, Otto Harrassowitz, Paris & Leipzig, 1898.

8. Kaufhold, *Sources of Canon Law in the Eastern Churches*, cit. p. 253.

9. Sabino Chialà, *St Ephrem the Syrian as a Reader of Holy Scripture: A Witness of Plurality in Biblical Hermeneutics*, Syriac Orthodox Patriarchal

demonstrates this centrality of typology in the Syriac scriptural tradition. Chialà explains that the biblical text, beyond its apparent simplicity, is open to multiple meanings. These create a complexity that the Doctor of the Universal Church, Ephrem, creatively interprets. In his *Commentary on the Diatessaron*,¹⁰ a harmony of the four gospels, Ephrem states,

If there only existed a single sense for the words of the Scripture, then the first commentator who came along would discover it, and other hearers would experience neither the labor of searching, nor the joy of discovery. Rather, each word of our Lord has its own form, and each form has its own members, and each member has its own character. And each individual person understands according to his capacity, and he interprets the passages as is granted to him.¹¹

The concept of the multiplicity of meanings in scripture, because of the complexity of the text and that of the reader's situation, is again repeated in another passage of the *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, where Ephrem, addressing God, exclaims,

Who is capable of comprehending the extent of what is to be discovered in a single utterance of yours? For we leave behind in it far more than we take away from it, like thirsty people drinking from a fountain. The facets of God's word are far more numerous than the faces of those who learn from it.¹²

Chialà goes on further to explain that both the "biblical word" and "those who meditate upon it" possess many "facets." This in turn, gives rise to the variety of interpretations as two criteria of the hermeneutic fruitfulness of the biblical text; one intrinsic to the text, and the other extrinsic.¹³

Journal 55 (2017), pp. 39-49. In this section, I draw upon the line of thought of Sabino Chialà.

10. Carmel McCarthy, Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron: An English Translation of Chester Beatty Syriac MS 709 with Introduction and Notes, «Journal of Semitic Studies» Supplement 2, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993.

11. Sebastian Brock, The Bible in the Syriac Tradition, Gorgias Press, Piscataway, N.J. 2006, p. 66.

12. Brock, The Bible in the Syriac Tradition, cit. p. 66.

13. Chialà, St Ephrem the Syrian as a Reader of Holy Scripture, cit. p. 45.

Ephrem explains this double richness, intrinsic and extrinsic, by using two images, namely that of a fountain and a mirror. Regarding the intrinsic fruitfulness of the text, he employs the image of a fountain:

God depicted his word with many beauties, so that each of those who learn from it can examine that aspect of it which he likes. And God has hidden within his word all sorts of treasures, so that each of us can be enriched by it, from whatever aspect he meditates on. For God's word is the Tree of Life (Gen 2:9) which extends to you blessed fruits from every direction; it is like the Rock which was struck in the Wilderness (Ex 17:6), which became a spiritual drink for everyone on all sides: "They ate the food of the Spirit and they drank the draft of the Spirit. (1 Cor 10:4)." ¹⁴

As to the second criterion, the fruitfulness extrinsic to the text, Ephrem employs the image of a mirror. This is beautifully expressed in his Letter to Publius. He addresses his correspondent,

You would do well not to let fall from your hands the polished mirror of the holy Gospel of your Lord, which reproduces the image of everyone who gazes at it and the likeness of everyone who peers into it. While it keeps its own natural quality, undergoes no change, is devoid of any spots, and is free of any soiling, it changes its appearance before colors although it itself is not changed.

Before white things it becomes [white] like them.

Before black things, it becomes dark like them.

Before red things [it becomes] red like them.

Before beautiful things, it becomes beautiful like them and

before ugly things, it becomes hideous like them. ¹⁵

From what is said above, it becomes clear that the pages of scripture reflect not only the face of God, whose narrative and teaching it contains, but also the face of the person who reads it.

Chialà, summarizing his thought on St Ephrem as a reader of holy scripture and as a witness of plurality in biblical hermeneutics, concludes

14. Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, cit. p. 66.

15. Edward G. Mathews et al. (eds.), *St Ephrem the Syrian Selected Prose Works, The Fathers of the Church*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C. 1994, p. 338.

by saying, this is the hermeneutical method by which our “theologian” poet constructs his thoughts about God, to take up the triad mentioned at the beginning: exegete, theologian, and poet. Ephrem’s thought is dynamic, transfused through the power coming through his poetic verse... We thus see all the coherence both of the formation of his thought and of its expression. This is a theology that leaves room for God’s and man’s complexity, as Scripture itself demands through its double fruitfulness, intrinsic (divine) and extrinsic (human).

Ecclesial Structures of Authority

Synodality, or synodal path, refers to the Church’s journey, which in turn asks how to travel the path while respecting the new realities of our lives, our Church, as well as our world. Also, listening to the spiritual gifts and charismas of all the baptized faithful. The term “synodal” would best describe the structure of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch. The constitution of the church states that “the Holy Synod, headed by His Holiness the Patriarch, is the supreme religious, spiritual, legislative and administrative authority of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch.”¹⁶ Within this structure,

His Holiness the Patriarch is the supreme head of the Church and its holy Synod, and the general administrator to its religious, spiritual, and administrative affairs. He supervises Archdiocesan religious, administrative, and financial matters.¹⁷

In that capacity, it is the patriarch who convenes the Holy Synod and presides over its meeting sessions and sanctions and announces its decisions.¹⁸ The patriarch sets the agenda for the Holy Synod and invites

16. Constitution of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch, Centre International Jacques de Saroug, Brussels 2008, Article 3.

17. Constitution of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch, cit., Article 12.

18. Ibid., Articles 13 and 14.

all the diocesan bishops¹⁹ to send relevant items to be included in the agenda. Decisions of the Holy Synod are reached and decided upon through majority voting or by consensus, depending on the nature of the topic in question. The approved decisions of the Holy Synod are then communicated in writing by the patriarch through letters sent to all the bishops (the members of the Holy Synod), who then disseminate it through the churches within their jurisdiction to be announced and acted upon.

In the Syriac Orthodox model, the regional church structure is typically composed of (arch)dioceses. Each diocese has its own council that is representative of clergy and laity and convened and presided over by the bishop. This council exercises prescribed legislative, administrative, and judicial functions. The council may also have its own committees and other bodies. The council is the deliberative body for administrative, cultural, social, economic, patrimonial, and pastoral matters, composed of representatives of clergy and laity elected by the parishes.

The relationship in terms of authority between local, national, regional, and worldwide structure of the Syriac Church is, then, properly called synodal. As mentioned above, the patriarch is the supreme head of the church and its highest authority. He is the one who calls for a Holy Synod and invites the diocesan bishops to send the relevant topics and items to be added to the agenda. The Holy Synod is called by, and

19. In the Syriac Orthodox Church, it should be noted that after the conflict and the splitting of the archdiocese of Sweden into two in 1996, the Holy Synod decided to ordain all subsequent diocesan bishops as patriarchal vicars in the western diaspora in order to overcome the problem that occurred in Sweden. That is to say, the patriarch can single-handedly remove or transfer a diocesan bishop without the consent of the Holy Synod. Although the term an arch(bishop) and patriarchal vicar, may suggest that he is vicar of the patriarch and that the patriarch himself is the head of the diocese, in practice, there is no difference between a resident diocesan arch(bishop) and the arch(bishop) who is also a patriarchal vicar.

convenes under, the auspices of the patriarch and attended only by the diocesan bishops; however, the priests and the laity through the diocesan council are also involved in the process of the decision-making, and in some cases they may even influence the decision of the Holy Synod. This is because in the last century, in addition to canon law, the church constitution specified the establishment of parish boards within each diocese (whose membership consists of laity) presided over by the parish priest, and a diocesan board (whose members are drawn from the respective parish boards) presided over by the metropolitan or bishop of the diocese. Parish boards have been strong features of lay participation in the 20th century church, and bylaws regulating their functions have been enacted and modified over the years. The bylaws enacted by the synod held at Mor Matay Monastery²⁰ (Iraq) in 1930 were subsequently updated to better serve community needs. The last version issued in the 20th century was “The Unified By-Laws of the Local Parish Councils Adopted at All Archdioceses of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch,” which was decreed by the Holy Synod on March 31, 2000.²¹ The bylaws embodied a century-old tradition of a functioning civil participation in non-theological church matters, and communal activities working in close coordination with church leadership. This tradition of joint administration found relevance in the diaspora, where this is a common tradition.²²

The local church is represented in the Holy Synod by the bishop who “witnesses” (i.e., testifies) to the faith of the church. Before attending the Holy Synod, the bishop normally meets with the diocesan clergy and the lay members of the diocesan board. Based on the outcome of the meeting, the bishop will send any relevant item to be included on the agenda of the holy synod. However, the inclusion of items is decided by the patriarch together with the General Secretariat, consisting of a number of bishops. Certain items are excluded, deferred for a subsequent synod, or dealt with separately depending on the urgency

20. George A. Kiraz, Matay, Dayro d-Mor, in Brock et al., *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*.

21. Constitution of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch, cit. pp. 119-132.

22. Dinno, *The Synods and Canons in the Syrian (Syriac) Orthodox Church in the Second Millennium: An Overview*, cit., p. 32.

and relevance of the topic. The obligatory character of the synodal decisions and their implementation, in practice, depends on how realistically and fully they deal with the question or topic under consideration and provide the necessary guidelines and recommendations.

It is notable that the synod is exclusively Syriac Orthodox, as no other Christian communities of the region may participate in the synodal deliberations except as observers. However, the hierarchs may unofficially consult with members of other Christian communities to discuss relevant or similar issues or topics that they are dealing with in their respective churches. In the case of the Oriental Orthodox churches in the Middle East, who are in communion with one another, the patriarchs of the Armenian Church (Catholicosate of Cilicia), the Coptic Church of Alexandria, and the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch met regularly and officially before the current war in the region. They began to deal with a number of contemporary issues and topics common and relevant to their churches, especially in the Middle East, often issuing unified statements on social and theological issues.

Furthermore, the synod is not always without external influence, namely from the state. In the Middle East and elsewhere, the government regime, to a certain extent, might interfere with the church and the work of the synod. Often, this is an attempt by the state to exercise control and power over the people through the church and its governing bodies.

Dynamics of Authority in a Worldwide Church

To an extent, the local context affects the structures and processes for synodality and moral discernment. Because of the nature of the universality of the church and the dispersion of its faithful throughout the world, the Syriac Church is required to consider moral discernment in a worldwide context with room and with relevance to the local and national context. The church is inevitably bound up with the society and culture within which it is situated. The differences between the various dioceses in distinct parts of the world are, therefore, likely to be more pronounced in this area than in the sources and structures of authority. Some relatively common features might nonetheless be tentatively identified. What is distinct about the Syriac tradition's structures and

processes for moral discernment is its therapeutic, rather than judicial, approach in dealing with the brokenness and infirmity of the human nature. This might be best understood in the context of the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15), where the emphasis is put on the healing of the prodigal son through the unconditional love of the merciful father. This act of mercy and unconditional love not only brings healing and restoration to the broken wayward son but also makes him sit at the right hand of the father to nourish his soul and body from the Eucharistic banquet set before him, thereby rejoicing with the father and all those invited to the wedding feast.

St Ephrem and Women Choirs

That being said, I would now like to briefly mention an example from the Syriac tradition to show how St Ephrem, inspired by the holy scripture itself, created women choirs in the church to sing praises to the Lord. In doing so, St Ephrem overturned the Pauline instruction in the First Letter to the Corinthians that “women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says” (1 Cor 14:34). St Ephrem considered praising God to be an essential element in the life of every believer; to offer praise was a joy and duty of everyone. Hence, he believed that women together with men should also give praise to the Lord in the liturgical celebrations. St Ephrem even went a step further: he composed doctrinal hymns or “teaching songs” specifically for the women choirs (known in Syriac as *madroshe*) with the intention that the orthodox theological content of these songs would enable the women to learn about the faith, and participate actively in the liturgical celebrations, as well as transmit the faith to further generations. St Ephrem therefore, overturned the instruction on St Paul that women were to remain silent in the Church. St Jacob of Sarug (ca. 451-521) narrates and explains in a panegyric hymn the change introduced by St Ephrem, by referring to other sources from the scripture. This example is of immense relevance for the Syriac tradition, because over the course of history it has served

as an inspiration – one could say, as a hermeneutical guide – to address new challenges.²³

Conclusion

The approach as described above, embodied by the example of Ephrem, is probably one of the inspiring and dynamic models for the church to use in making its moral and ethical discernment in today's complex and dynamic world. Past liturgical decisions, drawing upon the key sources discussed above, this modality of decision-making is applicable to any conceivable issue currently present in the church. It functions like a hermeneutical lens for interpreting scripture and tradition in the context of the changing circumstances of the people. Therefore, this method prevents a mere positivistic or literal interpretation and allows for a dynamic understanding that focuses on the salvation of the human person. In that sense, the method is more therapeutic than judicial. The synodal structure, then, only serves to enhance this paradigm, as it draws from a wide base of experience – not only from the various ecclesiastical priestly ranks but from the constituent laity who comprise their local councils.

23. See Mor Polycarpus A. Aydin, *From the Pauline Admonition to Remain Silent to St Ephrem's Creation of Women Choirs in the Liturgy*, in M. Wijlens et al. (eds.), *Churches and Moral Discernment*, vol. 2: *Learning from History*, WCC Publications, Geneva 2020, pp. 221-231.

EXPERIENCES OF SYNODALITY – WORKSHOPS

Laity in the Syriac Orthodox Church

Martina Aras

Introduction

When the topic on Laity in the Syriac Orthodox Church was suggested to me, I was a little overwhelmed at first because the position of the laity in the Syriac Orthodox Church varies greatly from country to country and ultimately from parish to parish. So how can I, as a Syriac Orthodox Christian born and raised in Germany, adequately answer this question for the Syriac Orthodox Church? The answer is that it is impossible, but I can try to reflect on the very important role of the laity in my Church in Germany, and beyond that, as far as I am able, point out possible perspectives.

So if I may, I will reflect about the role of the laity in the Syriac Orthodox Church. I do, myself as a layperson, who is an academic theologian, an observer, and a member of the Syriac Church. I can therefore sense and experience the role of the laity in the ecclesiastical life.

Although this topic is very broad, I will try to give an overview that will cast the light on the special mission of the laity and beyond that, to shape as a scope for action.

Laity has always held a distinctive position in Syriac Christianity, and been notable for its contribution in many different services; may it be in terms of organization (structure of communities) or Spirituality (liturgy, teaching, etc.). Orthodox tradition has always regarded the status quo of laypeople as ordained (through Baptism).

This short article examines the context and content of Laity, in order to assess what authority this vocation carried for the ancient Syriac churches, and to suggest possible implications for today.

It seems important to show where the term “laity” comes from and what it means to be layperson. Often, there seems to be a terminological misunderstanding which appears also in many dictionaries (and Western ideology) when we try to differentiate between the clergy and the laity. In differentiating between the two we usually think of the latter as having a negative connotation and focus more on what laity cannot do. When we look at the term lay’, which is rooted in the Greek word “laos” and basically means “people”, a highly positive connotation can be ascribed to it. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament the term “laos” (which the Syriac translates as “ramo”) is applied to People of God, to Israel, the people elected and sanctified by God Himself as His people.

Laypeople belong to the community of people in general, and, in this sense, are members of a dynamic and organized community. This could imply the concept of full, responsible and active membership. But how is it possible to regain this understanding nowadays, so that everyone in the church can see themselves as responsible and active members again?

Early Church

Susan Asbrook Harvey describes the constant interaction of monastics, the clergy and the laity in the context of daily life, as well as in devotional piety, and liturgical service, as one of the important characteristics of the ancient Syriac Christianity (just like today!). This intermingling of the different vocations of Christian life is crucial for understanding what Jacob of Sarug means when he speaks of the Church in its “gathered wholeness”, or of worship “properly performed”: each person is a necessary part in order for the body to be whole. All are needed.¹ Therefore, Harvey claims that Jacob does not in fact understand the

1. Susan Asbrook Harvey, To whom did Jacob Preach? in George Anton Kiraz, Jacob of Serugh and His Times, Gorgias Press, New York 2010, pp.115-131, here 124-125.

devotional obligations to be different for the laity, monastics, or the clergy in their essential discipline:

Love of God, compassion for the poor, sick and needy; service of the church; distance from worldly ambitions, material excess, greed, envy, or self-serving desires: such self-discipline in Jacob's view was required of every Christian, of every station in life, regardless of age or gender².

It is important to Jacob that every member of the gathered church would participate in the act of liturgical celebration. He names each group by gender, age, ethnicity (People/ the Nation), social status and ecclesiastical rank. In addition to that he effectively erases the lines between the lay, the monastic, and the ordained, as worship celebrants:

O my Lord, the mouths of human beings praise you with their tongues, Behold, the young people praise you with the branches of the trees
And the voice of praise of the aged is mixes with that of the children.
Behold, the shepherds and their flocks adore you.
Behold, all voices from all mouths are singing your praise with all tongues...³.

He makes it clear that the laity themselves are included as ritual participants whose role is as necessary to the fulfilment of the liturgical act as those of the ordained clergy and the hierarchs. The church becomes truly "a priesthood of all believers" (1 Peter 2:5ff.).

Nowhere is this proclaimed so forceful as in the picture Jacob draws of Christ, the good physician, welcoming Eve, "the despised woman." As Jacob points out, all women are welcome, even the most marginalised.

Jacob's insistence on the all-inclusive condition of the church presents the church -including the female, the male, the rich, the poor, the young, the old- as a mirror of the wholeness of humanity redeemed.⁴

2. Ibid.

3. Jacob of Serugh, FH 10, Sunday of Hosannas, in Susan Asbrook Harvey, *To whom did Jacob Preach*, pp.259-260.

4. Susan Asbrook Harvey, *To whom did Jacob Preach?* in George Anton Kiraz, cit. pp. 115-131.

Equality in the role of Laity

According to Harvey, choral singing represents a specific area of activity for laywomen in the Syriac Orthodox Church, and was of particular importance in the early Church. Therefore, Harvey described the legacy of women choirs as a forgotten history of a long tradition. Ephrem enhances the role of women in the community in a formative way.⁵

The first historical sources on women choirs of the Syriac Orthodox Church are already known from the 4th century and are mentioned in the Hagiographies of Ephrem who is considered as the founder of the women choirs.⁶ Syriac women choirs are attested to in ecclesiastical doctrine from the fifth to the ninth century, and were discussed literarily in hagiographies as well as in historiographies, hymns, and homilies.

Often, but not always, the singing women were called *Bnat Qyama*, which translates as “daughters of the covenant”. And similar to the *bnay Qyama* (sons of the covenant), they lived without much property and in celibacy under the leadership of their respective bishop. They did not usually aspire to the diaconate or monasticism. While men in some cases pursued a clerical career, women were active in the service of the church as virgins.⁷ Besides Ephrem, Jacob of Sarug is also considered a church father who, as has already been mentioned, appeared as a great advocate of women choirs. In his writings, for example, he eagerly urges the Christian communities to follow the women’s songs, which are full of

5. Susan Asbrook Harvey, Performance as exegesis: Women’s Liturgical Choirs in Syriac Tradition, in Bert Groen, Steven Hawken-Teeple and Stefanos Alexopoulos, *Inquiries into Eastern Christian Worship*, Peeters, Leuven 2012, pp. 47-65, here p.47.

6. Joseph P. Amar (ed.), *A Metrical Homily on Holy Mar Ephrem by Mar Jacob of Sarug*. Translated by Joseph P. Amar. *Patrologia Orientalis* 209 (47.1), Turnhout, Brepols, 1995, Verses 46-51.

7. Susan Asbrook Harvey, Performance as exegesis: Women’s Liturgical Choirs in Syriac Tradition, in Bert Groen, Steven Hawken-Teeple and Stefanos Alexopoulos (eds.), *Inquiries into Eastern Christian Worship*, Peeters, Leuven 2012, pp. 47-65, here p. 48.

wisdom. The importance of choral singing for Jacob of Sarug can be seen in one of his hymns that he composed about Ephrem.

In this hymn he praises Ephrem for introducing women's choirs and calls him a second Moses:

The Hebrew women made a joyful sound with their tambourines, and now (Syrian) women sing praises with their hymns. That wise Moses instructed the daughters of his nation not to refrain from the required praise. Likewise, the blessed one, who became a second Moses for women, taught them sweet melodies to give praise. The daughters of the Hebrews saw deliverance, and clapped (their) hands to give praise at the command of Moses to the One who delivered them. Chosen Ephrem (did) the same with his teaching; by the daughters of the nations, behold, (our) great Deliverer is praised ⁸.

For Ephrem, this kind of practical performance of the song was, in a sense, an assumption of the role of the Biblical characters themselves.

Thus, the women would not only sing about Mary; rather, with their singing, they would represent the voice of Mary herself. That especially women should sing these songs, has a theological dimension for Ephrem. He frequently compares the virgins to the Virgin Mary, through whom redemption itself first came into the world and through whom the sins of Eve could be atoned for. Such typological parallels were often drawn and among others, interpreted by Jacob in his homily to Ephrem as a divine will. Jacob sees another function of the choirs to proclaim to the Church the correct doctrines and to provide it with the experience of salvation through the saving work of Christ in the liturgy. Thus he emphasizes that whereas Eve's disobedience had closed the women mounth, Mary's obedient consent was able to open them again.

Jacob explains in soteriological terms, that woman and man should sing of God's glory equally and with equal value. Just as both sexes were baptized into Christ through one baptism, both would experience the

8. Joseph P. Amar (ed.), *A Metrical Homily on Holy Mar Ephrem by Mar Jacob of Sarug*. Translated by Joseph P. Amar. *Patrologia Orientalis* 209 (47.1), Turnhout, Brepols, 1995, Verses 46-51.

same redemption. Harvey, in her elaboration on women choirs, emphasizes that the solemn affirmation of the equality of women and men, as occurs in Jacob of Sarug, is something not found in any other Christian literature.

At the same time, Jacob makes an ethical demand on women; they would have to sing the songs with instructive methods, so that they could win the fight against Satan in any case. According to him, women singing was the best way to teach the truth of God.

Today. Conclusion

In the beginning of the 20th century, the Syriac people faced genocidal persecution by the Ottoman Empire. This specific genocide affected and continues to affect the Syriac Orthodox Church in many ways. Since then, the Church has faced many challenges which may explain why there have been shortcomings on both sides, the laity and the clergy, that created somehow very complex relationships between church structures. Above all, the role of laywomen became quite suppressed along with the role of laity in general. For instance, the laity was and is not involved actively in the liturgy anymore. It is promising to note that there are some Syriac churches in Europe that have established the idea of church choirs once again. There are many church members who are eager to be involved in the service of the church. Theological education is one possible area for laywomen or laymen to teach and to be involved. This can be done through academic work (university) or Sunday schools (at Church).

Synodality: The Experience of Women in the Syriac Orthodox Church

Salaam Somi

Introduction

Thank you for inviting me to share with you my experiences of the roles played by Syriac Orthodox women within the community of the Church.

One of the greatest Syriac poets and theologians, St Ya‘qub of Serugh (c. 451-521), wrote a long song praising St Ephrem the Syrian (c. 300-373), his major source of inspiration. Jacob celebrates Ephrem as the great teacher of the Syriac Church, especially as the courageous innovator who introduced female voices into the liturgical chant.

Ephrem not only made women sing alongside men but also used their voices to proclaim the doctrines of faith in a unique way. Addressing himself directly to Ephrem, Jacob says:

Our sisters were strengthened by you to give praise;
for women were not allowed to speak in Church.
Your instruction opened the closed mouth of the daughters of
Eve;
and behold, the gatherings of the glorious church resound with
their voices!
A new sight of women proclaiming the Gospel;
and behold, they are called teachers among the congregations¹!

1. Slightly adapted translation from K. den Biesen, “A drop of salvation”: Ephrem the Syrian on the Eucharist, in D. Hellholm & D. Sänger (eds.), *The Eucharist – Its Origins and Contexts: Sacred Meal, Communal Meal, Table Fellowship in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (WUNT 376, 3 volumes), Volume II. *Patristic Traditions, Iconography*, Tübingen 2017, pp. 1121-1142.

Why did Ephrem want women to raise their voices in church? Jacob's answer is as simple as it is profound:

Your teaching signifies an entirely new world;
for yonder in the Kingdom, men and women are equal.
Your effort made the two sexes into two harps,
and men and women began simultaneously to glorify God.

Ephrem teaches that if men and women are equal in the Kingdom of God, they should also be equal in the Church as far as the Church's liturgy and life are an anticipation of the Kingdom of God. In Jesus Christ, the New World has already been realized, and the life of the Church is called to faithfully reflect that reality.

Therefore, Christians must carefully consider the cultural, social, and political ideas, norms, and patterns of behaviour they adopt from the world in which they live. Jacob's point is that Ephrem, by placing the women's choir in the center of the church building, proposed a way of believing, thinking, and living that was a correction of his community's sexist conditioning.²

2. Cf. Susan A. Harvey, Spoken words, voiced silence: Biblical women in Syriac tradition, *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 9 (2001), pp. 105-131; Revisiting the Daughters of the Covenant: Women's choirs and sacred song in ancient Syriac Christianity, *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* [<http://www.bethmardutho.org>] 8/2 (2005), pp. 125-149; On Mary's voice: Gendered words in Syriac Marian tradition in D.B. Martin & P. Cox Miller (eds.), *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography*, Durham NC & London 2005, pp. 63-86; Women in the Syriac Tradition,' in Sebastian P. Brock, Aaron M. Butts, George A. Kiraz and Lucas Van Rompay (eds.), *Women in the Syriac Tradition*, Gorgias Press 2011; online ed. Beth Mardutho 2018; <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Women-in-the-Syriac-Tradition>.

Syriac Orthodox women in the service of the Church

Syriac Christianity, from the beginning, assigned women important positions in its communities as widows, consecrated deaconesses³ and consecrated virgins. The latter were both men and women, called Sons and Daughters of the Covenant (*bnay wa-bnoth qyomo*), who had taken vows of celibacy and simplicity, and all worked for the church.⁴ However, over the centuries, these male and female virgins, like widows and deaconesses, were gradually marginalized and lost their specific functions, which were then performed exclusively by male priests. This clericalization completely absorbed even the essential functions of male-ordained deacons.

The name ‘daughter of the covenant’ survived as the name of a priest’s wife, who is allowed to help her husband with the baptism of adult females in the way consecrated deaconesses once did. The Syriac Orthodox Church has rituals for the consecration of the wife of a priest as a *qaššišto* or *presbytera* and of a widow as a deaconess. Still, unfortunately, their rituals are hardly ever celebrated.

On the other hand, girls’ and women’s choirs have experienced a great revival since the late 20th century, although their liturgical role is limited. Yet even their active presence during the liturgy is not everywhere appreciated or stimulated to the same extent. This is due to the various social and cultural environments in which Syriac Orthodox grew up in the Middle East – and later Western – diaspora. Compared to their sisters in Syria, for example, women in Turkey were much more oppressed and not given as many rights nor as much freedom.

There is still much of this diversity in the Syriac Orthodox diaspora. However, even in neighbouring parishes, there are somewhat different views on the importance of the role of women in the Church. Let me give you two examples from my own experience.

3. S. Brock, *Women in the Syriac traditions*, One in Christ, 54 (2020), pp. 147-157; <https://www.oneinchrist.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/OiC54-1copy.pdf>.

4. Cf. G. Nedungatt, *The Covenanters of the Early Syriac-Speaking Church*, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 39 (1973), pp. 191- 215, pp. 419-444.

In 1994, Bishop Mor Julius Ješu Çiçek (1942-2005) appointed me as his representative in the Council of Churches in the Netherlands, forbidding me to tell anyone in my community. After all, some men, and even women, would not accept a woman representing the Church at the national level. Still, he did tell other bishops and his guests from other Churches. Only more than ten years later, during a Sunday Eucharist in my parish, he made my representation in the Council of Churches in the Netherlands public. He then gave me, in gratitude for my services to the Church, the latest book he had published, saying that he was proud that a woman represented our Church in the Council of Churches.

My second memory dates from 1995 when, with permission of the priest, I recited the reading from letters of Saint Paul during the wedding service of some relatives. Afterwards, someone told me that half the guests had left the service because they were offended by a woman reading from Scripture. I was baffled by their thinking since this had become normal practice in most Dutch parishes, where for years, I had been helping my priest with baptisms, weddings, and the anointing of the sick.

When I reflect upon my experiences in the church and my relationship with the clergy so far, I would say that some priests and bishops have treated me as equal to a deacon, even though I have only been appointed to a singer (*mzamronitho*), the lowest rank of the liturgical services. Since I have studied theology, however, I am also considered an official teacher of the faith, a *malfonitho*, which is a respected function within the Church. So overall, my position is somewhat ambivalent.

Positive change

In recent years there has been a spirit of renewal in the Church. Strange ideas that do not belong to Christianity in general or to our tradition are gradually disappearing. Currently, it is normal for women to be members of the church council, sing in a mixed choir of men and women, and teach at a parish Sunday school and the diocesan summer camps. Furthermore, there are women representing the Syriac Orthodox Church in an ecumenical organization, not only at the national level but also at the international level, such as the World Council of Churches. In

many parishes, young women from the choir are allowed to recite a long supplication called *Husoyo*, and recite the readings from the Old Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Letters of St Paul during the Eucharist.

In general, women are mainly active as volunteers in their parishes, while a few are also active within the diocese. In addition, many perform multiple tasks, such as being a church board member or a hostess during festivals, while also performing simple tasks such as cleaning, washing liturgical clothes, etc.

Of course, there is still resistance, both from the side of men and women, who have internalized certain limited conceptions. It will take considerable time and effort to question and let go of certain ways of thinking and cultural patterns adopted from our non-Christian surroundings. Developing a new Christian culture inspired by our original tradition will take even more time and effort.

In my understanding, what we need is a clear vision of the position of women in the Church today, translated into a realistic as well as a courageous plan of action and then patiently realized. We need a kind of synodality, that works both bottom-up and top-down. With this, I mean to say that our Church leaders, Patriarch and bishops and priests, considering the challenges of the lives of the faithful in today's world, must work out a concrete plan of action. Positive changes are already happening, but they cannot be left to chance: only enlightened and courageous leadership will promote and consolidate this growth of authenticity of the whole Syriac Orthodox community.

Youth in the Syriac Orthodox Church

Hadi Adnan Jabbour

1. Church, the Youth and Society

A church is a mother who needs her children as they need her. A church is never complete without its young members/disciples, for they are the beating heart of its existence.

This was a quote from the address of His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem the Second, the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and the Supreme Head of the Syriac Orthodox Church worldwide at the Sixth Convention of the Syriac Orthodox Youth, which was organized by the Syriac Patriarchal Youth Department from July 20th to 25th, 2022. The convention was attended by followers of our Church from all over the world.

Our Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch wants to prove that it is the place where the youth can be heard and supported, which is why it has empowered them spiritually and given them the right to make choices. With the consent of the eminent archbishops led by His Holiness our Patriarch, they were able to consecrate a bishop for the youth, namely, His Eminence Mor Antimous Jack Jacob.

This was an example of the youth being heard and supported to participate in decision-making for a better future of the holy Church. By playing such roles, all members of the church, clergy and laity, become effective by expressing their dreams and desires to the Church community.

The Syriac Patriarchal Youth Service (SPYD) was established by the Bishop for the Youth to keep up with the affairs of our youth. Its essential role is to hold diocesan meetings and organize annual gatherings of all Syriac youth.

Every year, the annual gathering of Syriac youth is held and sponsored by the Syriac Patriarchal Youth Department; among other projects aimed at reviving the Syriac heritage.

In addition, other projects are run, such as the ecclesiastical youth championship and the establishment of the radio station KIFO. *This name means rock in the Syriac language*, and the program is engaged in broadcasting the news and activities of the youth in particular.

In the time of the late Patriarch Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, and in the time of our current Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, many young bishops were consecrated. They now constitute the majority of our Holy Church Synod. This is an indication that our Syriac Church is an example of unity in diversity and an institution that relies on the creative outlook of youth which is the main engine of prosperity and progress. The main pillars of the church are: Partnership, Commitment and Prayer.

The identity of the church has been distorted and the role of the church has been misinterpreted over the years. The main reason is the deportation and immigration of youth due to the massacres and wars in Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Palestine and Iraq. These difficult times and the instability of life have left their mark on the youth.

2. The Youth is the present and Future of the Church

His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II was the one who established a private University in Syria (Rif Dimashq, Maaret Saidnaya).

The university was named: Antioch Syrian Private University.

The university has many departments such as, Engineering, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Basic Sciences, Administration and Economics, Law and Syriac Language. This university was established to meet the needs of our Syriac youth. It also offers a wide range of free educational scholarships.

Next to the university is St Ephrem Monastery, which was founded during the time of the late Patriarch Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas. The monastery includes the Mor Aphrem Seminary which offers educational programs in Theology and Philosophy, holding summer activities, conducting private courses for youth to become servants and deacons in the church.

Another project was carried out with the commitment of His Holiness our Patriarch and the young people committed to their faith in Jesus Christ and His holy Church.

This project is the private TV STATION associated with the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch. The name of the station is: Suboro TV.

The TV station is run by the Media Department of the Patriarchate headed by His Eminence Mor Joseph Bali.

The station is aimed at broadly broadcasting the news and reflecting the reality of our Syriac dioceses. A highly qualified staff of our church works at the said station and effectively exercises the right to participate in media coverage of our church's affairs.

Partnership means power. With that motto in mind, the Synod of our Syriac Orthodox Church emphasizes the mission to empower youth to play an effective role in all Syriac Orthodox dioceses. Therefore, youth committees have been formed in all dioceses to deal with the affairs of the youth and meet their needs. These committees are led by our young staff. It is a collective effort based on cooperation with other Christian groups to exchange knowledge and organize activities.

3. What do young people really want from the Church?

Today, the youth expect church leaders to help and care about the problems facing youth, especially those in the Middle East with all its crises.

The relationship between youth and the church is based on trust. The youth must feel trusted by their church to continue its legacy.

That being said, effective leaders in the church must trust the youth and treat them as partners in accomplishing the work for which they have been appointed.

By way of conclusion, I would like to say that my talk today was not only meant to point out the role of our Syriac Orthodox youth in the church today, but was also meant to indicate what we, as young members and disciples of the Church, can and do have to offer back to our mother Church. A church is like a mother. A mother who gives deserves to be given back. We must serve her with love through our constant work to improve her effective role.

The purpose of this convention is to help us reflect about the synodality in the church to make her more effective and wholesome.

We must never look backward; we must look forward. The future awaits us to enjoy the mission of Christianity among our beloved spiritual brothers and sisters.

Finally, I thank the organizers and sponsors of this convention, who enabled the churches to exchange knowledge and experiences. I really hope that the Oriental churches will have the opportunity to manifest their important role through this synod, because they are rich in experiences, knowledge and traditions, and they have always been proud to carry the message of the Holy Bible since the beginning of Christianity.

Not to mention that our Oriental churches are known for their rituals, experiences of synodality, the role of monastic life in the Syriac Orthodox Church spirituality and close family ties that everyone knows.

Monastic Life in the Syriac Orthodox Church

Charbel Rizk

Introduction

The history of the Syriac Orthodox Church in the twentieth century is a story of how powerful the Body of Christ is when all of its members – laymen, monastics, and clergy – walk together. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the Syriac Orthodox Church, mainly centered in southeastern Anatolia at the time, was brought to the verge of extinction as a result of the genocidal persecution at the hands of the collapsing Ottoman Empire. However, in the course of the same century, the Syriac Orthodox Church not only recovered but also flourished in ways that are reminiscent of its golden ages, and today, its members are to be found throughout the world.¹ This journey, from crisis to revival, would not have taken place, had its members not walked together. To give even a brief account of this journey is beyond the scope of this contribution. I will, however, say a few words about the current state of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Sweden since I grew up in Sweden and because the monastery in which I live is located in Sweden.

With around 120.000 members and 50 parishes organized in two archdioceses under the guidance of two archbishops, who also oversee two national youth organizations respectively, and a shared theological seminary, the Syriac Orthodox Church in Sweden is a vibrant Christian community. What is also remarkable, is that the Syriac Orthodox Church has been present in Sweden no more than half a century; that is, since

1. For a detailed study of the history of the Syriac Orthodox Church in the twentieth century, focusing on its crisis and revival, see Khalid S. Dinno, *The Syrian Orthodox Christians in the Late Ottoman Period and Beyond: Crisis then Revival*, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2017. See also the third volume of Sebastian P. Brock and David G. K. Taylor (eds.), *The Hidden Pearl: The Syrian Orthodox Church and its Ancient Aramaic Heritage*, Roma: Trans World Film Italia, 2001.

the 70's. Despite the sociological challenges facing any group of people migrating to a new country, the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Sweden successfully managed to establish themselves as a Christian community in their new home, and they did it together. As for the monastic life in the Syriac Orthodox Church in Sweden, it was established only recently, roughly three years ago, and I was appointed by the Patriarchate of the Syriac Orthodox Church to take the responsibility of participating in this establishment after my monastic formation in Maaret Saidnaya, Syria. This has been both a great and difficult responsibility.

In what follows of this contribution, I will share two thoughts on the aspect of responsibility in the context of synodality from my experience as a monk in the Syriac Orthodox Church. The first thought has to do with tradition; the second, with spirituality.

Synodal responsibility: Tradition

What does it mean to participate in the mission of the Syriac Orthodox Church as a monk? To answer this question, or any other question that has to do with the Church, recourse has to be made to its tradition. The tradition of the Church is essentially the gospel of Christ that He handed over to the Church. This tradition is dynamic in that it is inherently capable of being expressed in a variety of ways. In his sermon in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, Peter expressed it in one way (Acts 2:22-36). In his creedal formula in one of his letters to the Corinthians, Paul expressed it in another way (1 Cor 15:1-5). In asking Christ to forgive those who were stoning him to death, Stephen expressed it in yet another way (Acts 7:59-60). In all of these different ways, the one and the same gospel was truly expressed. This makes the tradition of the Church not only rich but also applicable in different times and to different people.

However, the dynamic nature of the tradition should not be taken as a pretext for expressing the gospel of the *Zeitgeist*. The Church, therefore, has to be careful. Synodality has to be accompanied by responsibility. We take responsibility in our synodality when we make sure that we are walking together in the tradition of the Church following the footsteps of the apostles who preached the gospel of Christ, the

teachers who taught it, the confessors who confessed it, and the martyrs who died for it.

In the tradition of the Syriac Orthodox Church, monastic life is deeply rooted in the mystery of baptism.² Unbaptized people cannot take on monastic life, but once baptized, they can do so, and more importantly, if they do so, they are reconfirming the eschatological promise of their baptism and thus witnessing to the eternal kingdom of Christ in which they now live. It is a life in unceasing prayer, true repentance and total dependence on Christ. It is a life that carries a powerful message to the world. It carries the gospel of Christ to the world. In praying, repenting and depending on Christ, the world will be transformed to that which it is created for. It is in this way that I, as a monk, participate in the mission of the Syriac Orthodox Church.

Synodal responsibility: Spirituality

In participating in the mission of the Church, we certainly face many challenges. One challenge has to do with staying true to the tradition of the Church. Another challenge has to do with maintaining our spirituality which will, among other things, enable us to stay true to the tradition of the Church. But what does it mean to maintain our spirituality? In suggesting an answer to this question, I would like to draw on the Genesis account of the fall of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:1-7) as read by two early Syriac Orthodox Fathers; namely, Ephrem the Syrian and Jacob of Serugh.³ Their reading is based on their anthropology

2. Mor Polycarpus Augin Aydin, *The Syriac Order of Monastic Profession and the Order of Baptism: Common Structure, Imagery and Theological Themes*, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2017.

3. For the life, works and theology of Ephrem, see Sebastian P. Brock, "Ephrem," in Sebastian P. Brock et al. (eds.), *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage (GEDSH)*, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011, pp.145-147; Kees den Biesen, *Simple and Bold: Ephrem's Art of Symbolic Thought*, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006; Sidney H. Griffith, *Faith Adoring the Mystery: Reading the Bible with St Ephraem the Syrian*, Milwaukee: Marquette

which in turn guides their understanding of spirituality. What they say about the spiritual experience of Adam and Eve is equally true with respect to the spiritual experience of each human.

According to Aphrem and Jacob, what brought about the fall of Adam and Eve was not the temptation of a crafty serpent, seemingly representing the dark powers, but rather their own greed. In fact, according to Aphrem and Jacob, Adam and Eve were neither immature children nor somehow underdeveloped, whom the serpent tricked into sinning, but rather adult people, endowed with the capacity of reason and the freedom of action, who consciously and willingly sinned. The role of the serpent in the fall of Adam and Eve was simply to tempt them to give way to their own greed. They gave way to their own greed not because the temptation of the serpent was irresistible but because they failed to maintain their spirituality.⁴

University Press, 1997; Sebastian P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem*, Cistercian Studies; Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992. For the life, works and theology of Jacob, besides Sebastian P. Brock's entry, "Ya'qub of Serugh," in Brock, *GEDSH*, 433-435, see Philip Michael Forness, *Preaching Christology in the Roman Near East: A Study of Jacob of Serugh*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, Thomas Kollampampil, *Salvation in Christ According to Jacob of Serugh: An Exegetico-theological Study on the Homilies of Jacob of Serugh on the Feasts of Our Lord*, Piscataway, Gorgias Press, 2010, George A. Kiraz, ed., *Jacob of Serugh and His Times: Studies in Sixth-Century Syriac Christianity*, Piscataway, Gorgias Press, 2010.

4. For Aphrem's reading, see his commentary on Genesis: R. M. Tonneau (ed), *Sancti Ephraem Syri In Genesim Et In Exodum Commentarii*, CSCO 152, Louvain: Durbecq, 1955; English translation in Edward G. Mathews and Joseph P. Amar, transll., *St Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994. For Jacob's reading, see his homily entitled *Love for the Poor*, Paul Bedjan (ed.), *Homiliae selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, vol. 2, Paris: Harrassowitz, 1906, pp. 816-836; and his homilies on the creation and fall of Adam which have been edited and translated to French by Khalil Alwan, Jacques de Saroug: *Quatre homélies métriques sur la*

Similarly, the cause of our falling into sin is our own passions, be they greed or envy or anger, and so on, but this is not to deny the impact that external causes may have on us. Nevertheless, we are created by God in such a way – in His image – that our autonomy is indestructible, and therefore, the healing of our brokenness is not beyond our capacity, but we certainly need divine help. Before healing the paralytic who had been ill for thirty-eight years, Jesus asked him: “Do you want to be made well?” (Jn 5:6) Commenting on this healing story, Jacob first explains that Jesus asks each one of us this question, and Jacob then has Jesus say to each one of us the following:

You will be healed, if you want it, / for I have the capacity to heal you, and you have the capacity to want to be healed. / I will not take away from you the power of your will. / Want it, and you will be healed, for I have no pleasure in your death⁵.

Following this, Jacob says:

By our will, we become broken and healed. / We are the cause of our brokenness and our healing. / Our will is, as it were, the second divinity: / it binds us and it sets us free and it cannot be forced to do this or that⁶.

In my monastic participation in the mission of the Syriac Orthodox Church, I will have to want to pray, repent and depend on Christ, and if I want to do so, then I trust that divine help will enable me to do so. If I pray, repent and depend on Christ, then I know that I will not give way to my passions, and only then am I maintaining my spirituality, spirituality and close family ties that everyone knows, without which my participation in the mission of the Syriac Orthodox Church would fail.

creation, CSCO 508–509, Louvain: Peeters, 1989.

5. Paul Bedjan (ed.), *Homiliae selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, vol. 4, Paris: Harrassowitz, 1908, p. 712.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 712.

2.2. SYNODALITY IN THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH

KEYNOTE

Understandings and Practices of Synodality in the Armenian Apostolic Church

Bishop Ardashir Nalbandian

It is well known that in the first centuries the churches were led by apostolic traditions and church fathers' canons, which were spread and accepted among all Christians in the form of oral, traditional canons. The pre-Nicene church did not have any written canon: the guiding way of Christian church administration was based on the Biblical commandments, orders, and ancient church traditions. The canon law of the universal church was based on the traditions left by the Apostles themselves. In the writings of the Church Fathers, it is evident how much power tradition has had in the life of the Church of the first centuries.

Already in the 2nd century, the Church was guided by one basic principle in the matter of church canons. If any canon was observed among all Christians, it meant that it was established based on tradition. Indeed, many ecclesiastical unwritten orders were preserved, just because of the power of the authority of tradition and custom. Tertullian states: "... here tradition has its strength as a foundation, habit as an institution, and faith as a defense."

Various controversies (especially about the date of Easter, the manner of fasting, the rebaptism of heretics, and other controversial issues) show that in the first four centuries, the churches, being in a heterogeneous region and having different forms, were simultaneously ruled by various bishops, who practically used various canons and practices, trying not to contradict the centuries-old tradition. The Church Fathers either came to an agreement on this or that ritual issue that differed from each other, or often acted independently and sovereign, finding that some formal differences did not at all harm the theological principles themselves. Until the 4th century, the absence of

written canon collections made it extremely difficult to consistently maintain the Church's order, canons, and apostolic tradition.

Tradition, with its deep meaning, gave a rather high position to the bishops initially. Since the bishops occupied the highest position in the church hierarchy in the beginning, naturally they were considered the bearers of church tradition. In other words, each bishop was a source of growth and orthodoxy for the church. The doctrine preached by the Church, became the "monopoly" of the bishops, and began to differ in various Christian churches. This important circumstance was the cause of various disputes, which became more and more intense, when, parallel to the expansion of Christianity from the end of the 3rd century, the followers of different Christological schools began to clash, trying to prove their own orthodoxy.

In fact, from these times it seems that some obvious differences began, which were later to reflect on the various confessional principles of the Christian churches, creating a gap between them.

In the maelstrom of sectarian disagreement, the convening of local ecclesiastical assemblies was a weapon in the hands of the bishops, as each bishop sought the help of the ecclesiastical assembly of the district within his jurisdiction.

As already mentioned above, the lack of written canons made it quite difficult to maintain a uniform order in the Universal Church. In the conditions of continuous persecution and oppression of Christians, there was no question of convening general assemblies.

Therefore, the churches ensured their union and communication through messengers, who conveyed to each other the decisions made by small local church assemblies. Various writings of the Church Fathers were also aimed at securing the union of the Universal Church, with the content of clarifying various religious issues. These letters were also sent to each other to warn of traps in the various sects.

The Armenian Church was an important part of the Universal Church. The origins of the Armenian Church date back to the period of apostolic evangelization. The Armenian church was based on the direct preaching of the two Apostles of our Lord. According to tradition, the founders of the Armenian Church were the Apostles Thaddeus and

Bartholomew. A succession of Armenian bishops, whose names are remembered in manuscripts, lived in Armenia from the early evangelical period until the beginning of the fourth century, when the country officially accepted Christianity as the state religion. The complete and official conversion of Armenians to Christianity was realized in 301 by St Gregory the Illuminator. He is the patron saint of the Armenians.

The Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church is part of the family of the Oriental Orthodox or Non-Chalcedonian Churches: the others in this family are Coptic, Syriac, Indian, Ethiopian and Eritrean Churches. These Churches are all national autocephalous (independent) churches and are in communion with each other. They accept only the first three ecumenical councils (Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus) and reject the Council of Chalcedon. The oriental Orthodox Churches elect their own heads or patriarchs or Catholicoi.

From the early days of Christianity, the Armenian church has its own synodical structures. It forms a unique Oriental Christian tradition. It exists alongside Greek – Byzantine and Latin traditions. Its importance and significant uniqueness within Christian tradition can be based on the fact that Armenia was the first nation who accepted the Christianity as a state religion.

The pre-Gregorian Armenian national church, not having valid binding rules and ordinances, operated with apostolic and church traditions until the 4th century. In the following centuries, there are even many testimonies extracted from apostolic traditions in the patriarchal papers preserved in various theological collections. The latter were used to emphasize the orthodoxy of the Armenian Church.

Starting from the 4th century, Christianity becoming a ruling power, receiving “citizenship”, gaining the support and patronage of the state power, and established general canons for all the churches by convening General Synods. The enforcement of ecclesiastical canons was greatly aided by political laws. Written collections began to be drawn up so that the canons of the Universal Church plus the Ecumenical Councils, some local councils, as well as the Holy Fathers’ words would be applied consistently and uniformly throughout the Christian world. Moreover, the decisions and judgments passed by the previous meetings were always taken into account when developing new canons.

In general, the basis for deciding ecclesiastical issues through councils is laid already in the apostolic period. For the first time, it is the apostles who meet and decide, for example, to forbid Christians to perform Mosaic rituals. This procedure is later generalized throughout the Christian world, initially for the discussion of local, then much more important issues, with the convening of universal (ecumenic) councils. Until it is established that meetings are convened everywhere twice a year.

The functional structure of the Armenian Church has been primarily based on the canons and established traditions of the Armenian Church. It was formulated over the centuries. One of the most important aspects of the Armenian Church administration has been the conciliar system. In other words, the administrative, as well as doctrinal, liturgical, and canonical norms are set by a council, following a collective and participatory decision-making process, and after approval of the catholicos (head of the church), decisions are implemented. Conciliarity in decision-making is a significant aspect in the Books of Acts chapter 15 (the Apostles meeting in Jerusalem).

Early medieval Christian historiography documents that congregations were indeed convened very often. Only the Armenian Church is an exception to this generality characteristic of all Christian churches. In the 4th-6th centuries, a limited number of congregations were convened. At least that is what our medieval sources testify to.

The reason should certainly be sought in the fact that Armenia was the first nation in the world who declared the Christianity as a state religion. Thus, it was not only sponsored by the state, but the latter consistently participated in the spread of the new religion, imposing church rules as civil laws on everyone.

According to some historic sources the appointment of St Gregory as the chief bishop (catholicos) of Armenia took place at an annual gathering of the royal and the feudal detachments under the command of the nobility. This is an indication that the early fourth century practice in Armenia was the following: the king of Great Armenia proposed the name of the candidate of the office of the chief bishop (catholicos) of Armenia, and the nobility gathered expressed their agreement. This consensus practice continued until the appointment of Sahak as the chief

bishop (catholicos) of Armenian Church in 389. Sahak was appointed by a council-of-the-realm.

Christianity thus acquired, in addition to ecclesiastical administration, civil administration as well. The faithful people in turn, obediently obeyed the law and the order established by the church. Many Catholicoi in the early medieval Armenia were unique characters of holiness and noble discipline. The Catholicos, including Sahak Partev (387-428), first of all, following the church rules and sacraments with accuracy and sanctity, traveled throughout the country for years, working to establish the same order everywhere, to solve and settle existing problems and disputes. This is, of course, the main reason why the spiritual and secular authorities no longer considered it necessary to convene church assemblies to examine the issues in a more official way.

The Armenian canon book contains various rules related to the 4th century defined by the Armenian patriarchs, which, although they were not approved by any church Synod at the time, are referred to by all subsequent Synods. The history of the Armenian Church has many such facts, when the people unanimously accepted any rule set by the patriarch, without the ratification of any local church assembly (or Synod). The aforementioned rules did not directly contradict the sacred traditional Armenian national customs, reflecting the centuries-old views of the people; therefore, considering them as a continuation of the principles of the national church, the faithful people accepted them unconditionally. Moreover, the Armenian patriarchs acted with the authority of the king, and the people, as evidenced by the early medieval sources, were always unanimous in relation to the decisions of the royal authority.

Returning to the issue of the early medieval Armenian Church and the church assemblies, we should emphasize that only one church assembly was convened in the 4th century, the Ashtishat Assembly in 354 during the Patriarchate of Nerses of Parthev (353-373).

According to sources, the mentioned assembly is the first official national church assembly in Armenia. Starting with Grigor the Illuminator (Lusavoric), for half a century, and taking into account the interests of the new faith, the Armenian patriarchs followed mainly the spread of Christian doctrine and the strengthening of the church as a

newly organized structure. A new period in the history of the church begins from the time of the patriarchate of Nerses of Parthev. The new period was mainly concerned with moral and religious improvement. During this Council decisions were made to establish monastic and charitable institutions, and reform disciplines on some moral issues in the country.

The famous scientist M. Ormanyan explained that if the light of faith was spreading before Nerses Parthev's catholicosate, then after him, was spreading the light of reforms. Catholicos Nerses Parthev's reputation was so high both among the faithful people and the clergy that he was even considered "the second Illuminator (Enlightener) of Armenians". Having received his education in Constantinople and being familiar with Greek church orders, Nerses Parthev, according to the testimony of Movses Khorenatsi, tried to define the same rules in the Armenian Church as well.

The Ashtishat Assembly lays the foundation for the assemblies establishing church rules in Armenia. Perhaps the most characteristic feature of this meeting is that it is convened with equal participation of clergy and laity. The participation of representatives of secular classes, princes and nobles gave the meeting the character of the highest legislative power and authority.

In the following centuries all the synods were convened even those exclusively to decide theological issues, with this important principle of the participation of the secular class together with the clergy class. This principle became the key and main feature and was permanent in Armenian national church history.

The second Ecclesiastical National Assembly of the Armenian Church took place in Shahapivan in 444. It is most likely that Hovsep Hoghotzmetzi (440-452) was elected as the new catholicos at this assembly. During this assembly the participants (40 bishops, priests, deacons, feudal lords, and the faithful people) adopted the canons of the Council of Nicaea and those of the local councils of the fourth century. The Council of Shahapivan was very important in the history of the Armenian Church, since it was the first known gathering where, next to the clergy, also different ranks of lay people participated in order to set or adopt church canons. This was also the first council of the Armenian

Church, during which a catholicos was elected. The Council of Shahapivan served as a precedent for subsequent Armenian Church councils or assemblies too, where with the clergy and also lay people participated.

In a related manner, it is much more clearly emphasized in the case of absence of royal power, when the church assumes a unique managerial role in the life of the people for centuries. One of the rules of the Ashtishat assembly, for example, forbade the marriage of nobles and princes with close relatives, done solely to preserve the dynastic inheritance. The Code of Canon Law of the Shahapivan Assembly already established punishments for crimes, thereby leaving the canonical nature and gaining the meaning of the judgment book.

In Christian church history, we do not find it a fact that a large number of representatives of the secular class has taken part in the church synods. As mentioned, it is one of the unique features of the Armenian Church. During the same period, the few imperial and royal representatives present at the ecumenical assemblies convened in the Roman, and then the Byzantine Empire, were strictly instructed to eliminate everything that would interfere with the examination of the assembly's issues. Theological issues raised were to be clarified as deeply as possible within the framework of a clergy alone. Their imperial representatives were ordered not to interfere at all in religious discussions. "... it is unfair for a person who does not belong to the collegium of holy bishops to interfere in the affairs of the church" (so Hefe). Of course, at the same time, it should be emphasized how far the same imperial representatives sought to ensure the independence of the church, because the issue of the status of the church in the mentioned period is a completely different issue.

Church assemblies are divided into two large groups: canonical and non-canonical. The canonical or ecclesiastical law was formed by the rules adopted by canonical church assemblies, on the basis of which canonical collections were compiled (for Armenians, such is the "Armenian Book of Canons"). The rules were binding and were applied by the authority and on behalf of both the church and the state. The non-statutory church assemblies discussed all kinds of issues: such as theological, ritual, national, ecclesiastical, inter-church relations, and

adopted decisions, wrote papers, letters, official messages, and circulars. They were important for clarifying the church's position on this or that issue and orienting themselves in liturgical and ecclesiastical issues. Many decisions had purely moral significance. The Armenian Church, unlike the Catholic Church, did not elevate its main religious and doctrinal principles to the level of a canon (dogma) and did not impose them.

The Armenian Church is an inseparable part of the Universal Christian Church. Although Armenians did not participate in both the 2nd Ecumenical Council of Constantinople and the 3rd Council of Ephesus, the Armenian Church was closely related to the Universal Church in its creed, doctrine, and holy sacraments.

It is important to recognize Armenian tradition as something quite distinct within Christian tradition. And since it is distinct, this means that it has its own contribution to make to Christian tradition. We should understand each tradition as complementing the others: each has its own special contribution to make to Christianity. Each tradition should recognize the value of the other traditions, and thus be enriched by them.

EXPERIENCES OF SYNODALITY – WORKSHOPS

Prospects for the Laity in the Armenian Apostolic Church

Aram Mardirossian

If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness,
we are lying, and we are not practicing the truth.
But if we walk in the light, as he himself is in the light,
we are mutually in communion, and the blood of Jesus
his Son purifies us from all sin (1 Jn 1, 5-6).

The Armenian Church founded by patriarch Gregory the Illuminator and King Trdat the Great at the dawn of the 4th century seems to be familiar with the conciliar institution from the first decades of its existence.¹ However, the sources only become accurate after the creation of the national alphabet in 405.²

The only ecclesiastical assembly prior to this date whose historical sources seriously report the existence, is that which patriarch Nersēs I

1. See J.-P. Mahé, Norme écrite et droit coutumier en Arménie du V^e au XIII^e siècle, Travaux et mémoires 13, 2000, p. 683-705 ; A. Mardirossian, Le Livre des canons arméniens (Kanonagirk' Hayoc') de Yovhannēs Awjnec'i. Église, droit et société en Arménie du IV^e au VIII^e siècle, Louvain 2004, p. 24-32 (now Le Livre).

2. See J.-P. Mahé, L'alphabet arménien dans l'histoire et dans la mémoire. Vie de Machtots par Korioun/Panégryrique des Saints Traducteurs par Vardan Areveltsi, Paris, 2018.

Part'ew would have gathered in Aštišat around 354.³ Let us recall that the title *catholicos* was not officially used to designate the head of the Armenian Church until the 6th century.⁴ Anyway, according to the *Buzandaran* – an anonymous author who writes around 470 – the synod of Aštišat was exclusively composed of bishops.⁵ This type of assembly composed only of prelates – at least in appearance – is no longer attested from the following century.

Thus, the synod of Šahapivan meeting on June 24, 444 is the first Armenian council whose acts have been preserved for us. This fundamental synod elaborates the first properly Armenian canons.⁶ Subsequently, the Church frequently convened general councils to deal with all important questions, be they canonical, judicial, doctrinal, ecclesiological, or political. Moreover, it was this assembly that elected the *catholicos*.⁷ Certainly, for the clerics it is a specifically Christian institution which meets by virtue of the word of Christ who recalls that “Let two or three, in fact, be gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20) and whose decisions, taken collectively, are dictated by the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28).

3. See, N. Garsoïan, *L'Église arménienne et le grand schisme d'Orient*, Louvain 1999, p. 99-106.

4. See, N. Garsoïan, *L'Arménie, Histoire du christianisme*, III. Les Églises d'Orient et d'Occident (432-610), Paris 1998, p. 1130, n. 20.

5. *The Epic Histories Attributed to P'awstos Buzand*, Cambridge, Ma. 1989, English translation by N. Garsoïan, IV, 4; pp. 113-114 (now *The Epic*).

6. A. Mardirossian, *Le Livre*, pp. 501-510. See also, N. Akinean, *Šahapivani žoḷovin kannonerə. Matenagrakan usumnasirut'iun art'iw 1500 amey taredarjin* (444-1944) (The canons of the Synod of Šahapivan. Literary study on the occasion of the 1500th anniversary [of the synod]), *Handēs Amsoreay* 63, 1949, pp. 79-170.

7. See P. Hamalēan, *Artašati žoḷovə ew anor masnake'ol episkoposnerə* (The Synod of Artašat and the bishops who participated in it), *Bazmavēp* 109, pp. 256-262; 110, pp. 4-10; K. Maksoudian, *Chosen of God. The Election of the Catholicos of all Armenians from the Fourth Century to the Present*, New York 1995, pp. 14-19.

But we know that among the participants of the Synod of Šahapivan there were not only clerics, but also lay people: “And all the clergy assembled, the princes of all the cantons, the great dynasts of the country of Armenia.”⁸ Five or six years later, the Synod of Artasat has the same mixed composition. Łazar P‘arpec‘i and Elišē, who have kept the list of participants, mention by name the presence of eighteen bishops, as well as eighteen dynasts and “the principal priests and religious” for the first, while the second adds:

Many chorbishops and honorable priests from many places, and the holy clergy of the Church in one accord and in a united manner gathered together in [the former] royal city of Artasat, together with the great princes and all the population from the country.⁹

By their composition, the synods of Šahapivan and Artasat therefore present rather close similarities with a very old institution of the Arsacid period: the council of the kingdom.¹⁰ Traditionally, the monarch was required to convene this assembly each time an important decision for the country had to be taken. It is possible that this council also sat as a court of the realm to try crimes against the kingdom committed by a dynast. The king could use this assembly to try to give legal value to his retaliatory actions against princes who challenged his authority. From the 4th century, the council also functioned to help the

8. Preamble of the synod of Šahapivan, éd. V. Hakobyan, op. cit., p. 427 (our translation).

9. Łazar P‘arpec‘woy Patmut‘iwn Hayoc‘ ew T‘uġt aġ Vahan Mamikonean (Łazar P‘arpec‘i. History of Armenia and Letter to Vahan Mamikoean), (eds.) G. Tēr Mkrtč‘ean, S. Malxaseanc‘, Tbilissi, 1904, reprint. New York, 1985; english translation by R. W. Thomson, *The History of Łazar P‘arpec‘i*, Atlanta, 1991; Elišēi vasn Vardanay ew Hayoc‘ Paterazmin (History of Vardan and the Armenian War), (ed.) E. Ter Minasyan, Erevan, 1957 [English translation by R. W. Thomson, *Elishē. History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, Cambridge, Ma, 1982].

10. A. Mardirossian, *Le Livre*, pp. 125-128.

king in the choice of a new patriarch, and of course, clerics were also present. This assembly which most often seems to have had only an advisory opinion, gathered around the king all the nobility, both high (*išxan*, *naxarar*) and low (*azat*), but also, on certain occasions, representative non-nobles (*ramik*, *šinakan*).¹¹ It should be noted that in Iran under the Sassanids, the council of the kingdom – which existed from the Achaemenid period – saw its influence decline as the process of centralization of royalty progressed.¹²

Above all, after the disappearance of the Arsacid royalty in 428, the general synod attempted to compensate for the absence of a central power by becoming the country's supreme decision-making body, within the limits agreed by the king of kings and then by the caliph. It therefore seems inconceivable that, along with the clergy, the rest of the people, and in the first place the dynasts who are the agents of secular authority, should not participate in this institution.¹³ (Note in passing: it is probably for this reason that the Council of Aštišat of 354 only brought together clerics, because at that time the council of the kingdom still existed.) We can therefore consider that at the latest from Šahapivan, the synodal institution, like other elements of the Church, was the subject of a process of “dynastization” which explains the existence of its specific characteristics which are not found in the councils of the Imperial Church. In other words, certainly Armenia was christianized, but moreover, Christianity was “armenized”!

It is understandable that the competences of the general synod are numerous and varied. Thus, during the council of Šahapivan, work was being done to put a new patriarch in place, by modifying in passing the

11. Ibid., pp. 125-126.

12. N. Garsoïan, *Secular Jurisdiction over the Armenian Church (Fourth-Seventh Centuries)*, Harvard Ukrainian Studies. Vol 7, Okeanos: Essays presented to Ihor Ševčenko on his Sixtieth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students (1983), pp. 220-250 (from now *Secular*).

13. A. Mardirossian, *Le Livre*, pp. 127-128.

traditional mode of access to this function.¹⁴ While the council of the kingdom in principle only had an advisory opinion, the general synod, backed by the presence of the bishops, assumed decision-making power. In addition, the Šahapivan fathers innovated by acting as a legislative body, and we will have the opportunity to see that they grant very important judicial powers to the general synod. Shortly afterwards, in Artašat, the participants are required to take a decision that is both political and religious, the scope of which involves the entire future of the country.¹⁵ A couple of months later, the decisive battle of Awarayr took place (May 26, 451).

Thus, the Armenian Church, which remains the only institution present in the country, soon turned into a “Church-Nation” which tries as much as possible to compensate for the absence of a State.¹⁶ Such an evolution reinforces the role of the catholicos and the general synod, as well as the place of the laity within it, even if certain assemblies which primarily deal with theological questions are only composed of ecclesiastics.¹⁷ Backed by this ancient tradition, the Supreme Council of the Armenian Church still includes a minority of lay people today. This particularity, which is the result of a chaotic and specific history, explains why that in Armenia more than elsewhere, Christianity itself is inextricably linked to politics and religion.¹⁸

So, what are the prospects for the laity in the Armenian Church? Two things seem key.

First, we must preserve and perpetuate the tradition of the Armenian Church, which grants an important role to the laity within the

14. J.-P. Mahé, *Le rôle et la fonction du catholicos d'Arménie du VII^e au XI^e siècle, Des Parthes au Califat. Quatre leçons sur la formation de l'identité arménienne*, Paris 1997, pp. 79-105, here pp. 81-83.

15. A. et J.-P. Mahé, *Histoire de l'Arménie des origines à nos jours*, Paris, 2012, pp. 94-96.

16. J.-P. Mahé, *L'Église arménienne de 615 à 1066, Histoire du christianisme, IV. Évêques, moines et empereurs (610-1054)*, Paris 1993, pp. 457-547, here pp. 457.

17. A. Mardirossian, *Le Livre*, pp. 294-296.

18. A. Mardirossian, ‘Religion des pères’: le christianisme en Arménie des origines à nos jours, *Istina LXI*, 2016, pp. 145-167, here pp. 152-155.

framework of the synodal institution. I take this opportunity to say that, more generally, the Church must never make the mistake of running madly behind modernity.

It must certainly adapt to each era, but always remain firm on the Gospel and tradition. For example, more than ever, it is necessary to continue to celebrate the mass in classical Armenian (*grabar*) and in no way replace it with modern Armenian, supposedly to allow the faithful to better understand the worship. The mass and its summit represented by communion with the Body of Christ do not constitute a catechism course but a divine immersion in the sacred!

Secondly, even if the laity play an important role in the synods and more generally in the Church, it falls above all to the clergy led by the Catholicos of All Armenians to have the last word on major decisions. Today, this scheme is fortunately respected with regard to the Supreme Council of the Armenian Church. But on a more local level, aberrations sometimes occur, as for example in France where certain lay people adopt insane behaviors and claim to dictate to the clerics the way the ecclesiastical affairs must be directed.

To these, we must remember the words that the lay people – princes, nobles and members of the people – present at the synod of Šahapivan addressed to the bishops and priests: “Now you prescribe the laws which are pleasing to God and which restore the Church, and we will obey them and keep them firm”¹⁹.

19. Preamble of the synod of Šahapivan, (ed.) V. Hakobyan, cit. (our translation).

The Participation of Women in the Life of the Armenian Apostolic Church

Diana Tsaghikyan

The 4th century Armenian social system was patriarchal. However, the study of late Antiquity and Medieval Armenian sources reveals that women have played certain roles not only in the Armenian conversion story, but also in different fields of the life of the Church throughout history. It is worth mentioning that the priority of these women was to be dependent on God and to follow Jesus Christ. This was a gradual change involving the incredible power of choice. With this, the most precious gift known to humankind, women set in motion a process of transformation which led to a significant change in the growth of spiritual life. Women in different centuries have realised how important they were in the life of the Armenian Apostolic Church. As new disciples of Jesus Christ, they started with something they could achieve, “listening” and “responding” to Jesus Christ, in whom God was “revealed in flesh”.

1. Witness of Faith

It is believed that Christianity was preached in Armenia as early as the second half of the 1st century CE and that the daughter of an Armenian king, young princess Sandoukht, was greatly influenced by this preaching and converted to Christianity.¹ Sandoukht herself is accepted as the first martyr of Armenia. We learn from her life that she went against the will of her father King Sanatruk and was therefore condemned to death. Her faith became a great witness for the proclamation of the truth of Christianity to the people of Armenia. Moreover, the pagan society got its first real warning about the newly

1. Cf. Մովսես Խորենացի, Հայոց Պատմություն, ԵՊՀ, Երևան 1981, p. 181. For English see R.W. Thomson (trans. & com.), Moses Khorenatsi; History of the Armenians, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1978.

developing Christian community. With the heroism of her faith manifested, Sandoukht became an excellent example of a faithful young Armenian woman. In the Armenian Church tradition thus far, her image had served as an inspiration for both men and women to make the right decisions for the sake of truth.

2. Conversion and Evangelisation

I wonder: if it were not for solid female characters who demonstrated a firm belief that Christ is Risen and the incredible power of choice, would Christianity have been adopted in 301 CE as the state religion of Armenia, making that country the world's first Christian state? A prime example of such characters is the story of St Hripsime and St Gayane, who with a group of nuns proclaimed the triumph of dignity, devotion, and the Christian faith.² In the 7th century, Catholicos Komitas I Aghtsets wrote about St Hripsime: "[She] [d]esired great advice and name, chosen on earth and placed with my angel. She is an example of the holiness, a doctrine of righteous people."³ These words demonstrate a stunningly sincere admiration of a woman martyr. Many parents in Armenia still name their daughters Hripsime and Gayane as these names have strong associations with the Armenian conversion story.

The history of the Armenian conversion also presents some other female characters, such as Princess Khosrovidoukht and Queen Ashkhen, whose intelligence and ingenuity motivated the pagan King Trdat III to finally meet St Gregory the Illuminator.⁴ And as a result of St Gregory's faith, prayers, and conciliation, the whole nation underwent conversion

2. Cf. Aganthagelos, *History of the Armenians*, in R.W. Thomson (trans.& com.), State University of New York Press, Albany 1976, pp. 147-217.

3. In 618, Catholicos Komitas I Aghtsetsi built StHripsime Church and wrote a sharakan/hymn on Devoted Persons. For the additional English text of this sharakan see A. Hacikyan (ed.), *The Heritage of Armenian Literature. From the Sixth to the Eighteenth Century*. Vol. 2, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 2002, pp. 906-907. The translation mentioned above is mine.

4. Cf. Aganthagelos, *History of the Armenians*, cit., pp. 217-227.

and evangelisation.⁵ These women were most likely secret Christians and did their best to encourage the spread of Christianity among the people of Armenia.⁶ They are excellent examples of courageous women who, through their devout life and Christian behaviour, were willing to change reality through daily actions. In the Armenian Church tradition particularly, such women have set a good example of woman leadership. Nowadays, many women in Armenia and Armenian communities worldwide partake in different organisations of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and women's leadership is flourishing in many aspects.

3. Monastic Life and Deaconesses

According to Fr Abel Oghlukian, the development of the Armenian female diaconate is divided into four historical periods: the 4th to 8th centuries in Greater Armenia; the 9th to 11th centuries in Eastern and Cilician Armenia, where the term “deaconess” is included in the ritual book of ordination (*Uuzung*); the 12th century and later, with rites and literary references in liturgical texts for the ordination of deaconesses in Cilicia and eastern Armenia; and the 17th century renewal of the female diaconate in the Armenian Church.⁷ In comparison with their male counterparts, female deacons' duties were supposed to be partial, and it has been suggested by some that their role was limited to that of sub-deacon. However, the story of the outstanding deaconess of the 19th century Hripsime Aghek Tahiriants is an excellent example of the authority and influence a female deacon could wield in the life of the Church, who even had a pectoral cross and a ring.⁸ Sister Hripsime was

5. Ibid., pp. 259-315.

6. Ibid., pp. 300-305.

7. Cf. Fr A. Oghlukian, *The Deaconess in the Armenian Church. A Brief Survey*, in S. P. Cowe. (trans.), *St Nerses Armenian Seminary*, New Rochelle, New York 1994, pp. 12-13.

8. Ibid., pp. 30-31.

a final abbess of a nunnery of St Stephen in Tiflis. She died in the Holy See of Etchmiadzin and was buried in St Gayane Monastery.

4. Education

In Armenian literature, the earliest known female poet-musician is Sahakdukht Siunetsi, who lived during the 8th century.⁹ After receiving her education, she retreated to the valley of Garni, became an ascetic, and authored several anthems, sharakans/hymns, and melodies which were primarily devoted to the Virgin Mary. She glorified Mary as the “incorruptible altar”, the “ray of divine light”, and the “tree of life”;¹⁰ these beautiful metaphors and phrases became very dear to other Armenian poets and Church fathers. Unfortunately, we do not have detailed information about Sahakduht’s life, but it is said that “she taught music to the children of Garni while seated behind a curtain”.¹¹ Perhaps, this story is like many other stories of women of different centuries who for a long time were behind a curtain, in the corner, out of public view, but never stayed in the darkness. On the contrary, because they had discovered purpose, devotion, humility, and possessed talent given by God, they educated generations for centuries. In the Armenian Church tradition, nuns were involved in the work of education, and this deserves special attention and admiration.

5. Foundation of Monasteries

In 874, Princess Mariam Bagratuni, the daughter of King Ashot Bagratuni, built churches in Gegharkunik, one in the most difficult places on beautiful Sevan Island.¹² The monastery became a powerful place of

9. Cf. A. Hachikyan (ed.), *The Heritage of Armenian Literature. From the Sixth to the Eighteenth Century*. Vol. 2, pp.162-163; pp. 918-920.

10. *Ibid.*, p.162.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

12. S. la Porta, *Monasticism and the Construction of the Armenian Intellectual Tradition*, in I. A. Murzaku (ed.), *Monasticism in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Republics*, Routledge, 2015, p. 332.

worship and is still one of the must-visit holy places of Armenia. In 976, the monastery of Haghpats was founded by Queen Khosrovanush, wife of the Armenian King Ashot III the Merciful.¹³ The 13th century Tegher Monastery is located in the northern part of Byurakan, in the Tegher village, and is directly associated with a very smart Mamakhatur – the wife of prince Vache Vachutian. This is a short list of numerous monasteries and churches founded and sponsored by women in Armenia.

The mother cathedral of the capital city of Ani, whose foundation was laid in 989 under King Smbat II, was completed in the first two decades of the 11th century and flourished because of three outstanding personalities: architect Trdat, King Gagik I Bagratuni, and Queen Katranide.¹⁴ As 10th century historian Stepanos Taronetsi writes,

The pious queen ... completed the building of the church founded by Smbat, a magnificent edifice with lofty vaults and a sanctuary surmounted by a heaven like cupola. And she adorned it with tapestries embroidered with purple flowers woven with gold and painted in various colors, and with vessels of silver and gold through whose resplendent brilliance the holy cathedral in the city of Ani shone forth like the heavenly vault.¹⁵

The above-mentioned monasteries and churches indicate these women's ability to think intelligently and, moreover, to act intelligently. Their gift of vision, ability to identify the context of a problem, analyse possible solutions, and decide on the right action, clearly demonstrate their problem-solving skills. Are there any other skills we want to see in a leader of a present Christian community?

6. Involvement of Women in Decision Making

The Armenian Church tradition has enabled women to be involved in decision-making in the life of the Church community as well. Both in

13. See H. Acharian, *Dictionary of Armenian Proper Names*, vol. 2.

14. See *The Universal History of Step'anos Tarōnec'I*, in T. Greenwood, (trans. & com.), Oxford University Press, 2017.

15. Quoted by Nina Garsoian, *The Independent Kingdom of Medieval Armenia* in R. Hovannisian (ed.), *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, Vol.1., St Martin's Press: New York, 1997, p. 180.

Armenia and the diaspora, women are actively engaged in the governing body of the Church, particularly in the work of parish councils. Such a council, elected by its parish members, is the governing body that cooperates with the pastor and deals with the spiritual, educational, and financial endeavours of the parish.

Their involvement in their parish allows women to give their opinions on the parish mission and take part in maintaining the Church as the place of Christian teachings and life. Equally to men, women are called to make the Church a place to share the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ through worship, education, service, and fellowship. Women's organisations are currently involved in every Armenian Church parish, and women sing in choirs, participate in parish leadership, teach at Sunday schools, and so on. On top of this, we meet more tangible examples of the involvement of women in decision-making in the Armenian Church tradition. Women are allowed to participate in the National Ecclesiastical Assembly of the Church, which in the Armenian tradition is considered the highest decision-making body of the Church. This body holds the Election of Catholicos of all Armenians and is empowered to make decisions on doctrinal, ecclesiastical, canonical, and administrative matters. The involvement of women in the work of this body is a classic expression of synodality which deserves particular attention and can provide insight into other Church traditions, as well as enabling us to think of ways to involve women more actively in the life of the Church – particularly in decision making.

Conclusion

Armenia's ecclesial path through many centuries was greatly complicated by combinations of such major elements as political instability, Church history, acquaintance with the Islamic world, and the formation and collapse of the Soviet Union. All epochs have their imperatives, and all have seen significant conflict over different issues. Overall, the Armenian Church has faced severe challenges in preaching the word of God. But even when faced with the horrific reality of persecution against Christianity and Christians, women did not forsake their faith or stop their mission of spreading God's love. Moreover, they overcame

genocide, atheism, natural disasters, and wars by praying, and literally, taking the Holy Bible with them in times of fleeing.

Being humble followers of Christ and keeping a sense of imagination and unity, these women became “vessels for honour” (2 Tim 2:21). They remained actively involved in Church life and spread the Word of God through their prayers and deeds. In the footsteps of their role model, the Virgin Mary, as women of contemplation, they “treasured up everything and pondered” (Lk 2:19), strengthened their faith, and served their children and their nation. Thus, they raised Church leaders, built churches and monasteries, became deaconesses, educated, and took care of the spiritual formation of the young generation for many centuries.

Women have a beautiful power to make the world more inclusive and caring. Therefore, women, along with men, as the pillars of Armenian Christian society, still have many responsibilities and duties. The unified mission should be to leave future generations with a world where nothing can overshadow the journey of faith, a world in which they will not be afraid (Jn 14:27), a world in which they can “put on the armour of light” (Rom 13:12), a world in which they can still “rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer” (Rom 12:12).

Unfortunately, today, Christian Churches all over the world face the horrific reality of how our materialistic and secular age consumes humanity. Many questions need to be taken very seriously in the search for the right path for synodality. This path is full of individual stories that guide, inspire, uplift, and heal. On the one hand, the process of synodality is valuable, as the experiences of synodality can be very fruitful in terms of their ecumenical, educational, and spiritual dimensions. On the other hand, synodality is how the Church lives and operates, so we might face some challenges in the practice thereof, in the theological dimensions. Indeed, critical questions must not be avoided. Thus, the process of walking together is a process of developing the habit of listening to each other. It is the gift of caring for and healing each other. It is the process of living the life God has given us. Thus, synodality needs nourishment, and our journey of faith will prosper and practically work when Christians matter to each other.

2.3. SYNODALITY
IN THE ASSYRIAN TRADITION
(ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST AND
ANCIENT CHURCH OF THE EAST)

KEYNOTES

The Theology of Synodality in the Assyrian Church of the East

Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III

Your Eminences; Your Excellencies; Reverend Fathers and Clergy;
Esteemed Professors, Students and Guests: Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great joy for me to be here with all of you this evening, and to participate in this international ecumenical conference titled: *Listening to the East. Synodality in the Syriac Orthodox and Church of the East Traditions*, presented jointly by the Pro Oriente Foundation of Vienna, and the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas of Rome. I express my gratitude to both institutions and to the respective organizers for their kind invitation to present the opening talk on this important topic, which is very pertinent to our modern ecclesiastical age.

Introduction

Synodality has become a technical term that we are continually hearing more of, day by day. In the Roman Catholic Church, it came about as a direct consequence of the reflection of the Second Vatican Council on how the Bishop of Rome may better exercise his ministry in conjunction with that of other bishops in communion with him. In 1965, the then Roman Pontiff, Pope Paul VI, introduced the idea of the ‘Synod of Bishops’ in the life of the Catholic Church. This further led to the creation of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of every country. In a word, the Second Vatican Council in its documents, particularly on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), accentuated the ancient biblical concept of the ‘People of God’ and the important ecclesial concept of ‘collegiality,’ that is, how the Bishop of Rome exercises his jurisdiction *with* the rest

(and *in* the rest) of the college of bishops. Thus, the understanding that the Church is ‘corporate’ (i.e., essentially a body) came to the fore – the Body of Christ (that is, the People of God), governed by a college of shepherds (i.e., the bishops). No doubt, the dynamics of such an ecclesiological vision and understanding has been the undertaking of both theologians and ecclesiastics, and much progress has been made since that first, seminal step taken by the Council in the early 60’s of the last century.

Recently, and particularly with the pontificate of Pope Francis, the concept of Synodality has received an invigorated interest, and indeed an unprecedented accentuation. With the 50th anniversary of Paul VI’s creation of the episcopal structure known as the ‘Synod of Bishops,’ Pope Francis stated the following in his address at the *Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*:

From the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome, I sought to enhance the Synod, which is one of the most precious legacies of the Second Vatican Council...We must continue along this path. The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.¹

And indeed, this very conference which we are participating in is part and parcel of that very intense reflection of the Catholic Church – and particularly its present-day emphasis by Pope Francis – on the very understanding of synodality as it relates to the everyday governance and life of the Church and her faithful.

Synodality in the Life of the Eastern Churches

I’m sure that we would all agree that much like theology in general, ecclesiology does not develop in a bubble. Even the very first inklings of the Second Vatican Council’s reflection on the concept of the Church as

1. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

being a “synodal” body came about, I believe, by the mere fact that there were many non-Catholic observers present at the Council. Among them were also observers from the Assyrian Church of the East who were present at the second session of the Council (29 September to 4 December 1963), as well as many of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches.² And although the Council of the Latin and Eastern Catholic bishops began the important task of rediscovering the synodal character of the Church, the non-Catholic Easterners were already past that point of discovery and were already realizing in their daily Church life the concept of synodality. In fact, the Council had just ‘rediscovered’ as it were the concept of episcopal collegiality, a major departure from the ‘centralizing’ ecclesiology of the First Vatican Council.

Interesting to note is the important fact that at the Second Session of the Council in October of 1963, the third of five propositions placed for voting by the bishops was the following question: whether this college

2. Pope Paul VI addressed these words to the Christian non-Catholic observers present at the opening of the Second Session of the Council, on September 29, 1963: “Here Our discourse respectfully addresses the delegates of the Christian communities separated from the Catholic Church, sent by them to attend these solemn gatherings as, as they say, Observers. We would like to greet them from the bottom of our hearts. We thank them for coming. Through them We send to the venerable Christian communities that they here represent a message, interpreter of Our paternal and fraternal affection. Our voice trembles, Our heart flutters, because just as their present closeness causes Us inexpressible comfort and sweetest hope, so their daily separation bitterly saddens Our soul. If some guilt is to be recognized in us for this separation, with humble supplication we ask God’s forgiveness, and we ask forgiveness of those Brothers if they feel they have been offended by us. As for us, we are ready to forgive wholeheartedly the offenses done to the Catholic Church and to forget the pain with which she has been wounded by the prolonged disputes and divisions.” See Paul VI, Solemn Beginning of the Second Session of the Ecumenical Council Vatican II: Address of the Holy Father Paul VI, Sunday, September 29, 1963, nos. 6.4-6.6. [https://www.vatican.va/content/paulvi/it/speeches/1963/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19630929_concilio-vaticano-ii.html], accessed on November 18, 2022.

of bishops is the successor of the college of the apostles, and in communion with the pope, enjoys full and supreme power over the universal Church; 2148 bishops voted in favor, while 336 opposed. The fourth proposition up for vote at this session was equally novel: whether the authority of the college of bishops (i.e., united with the pope) is of divine origin (i.e., and not by mere delegation from the pope); 2138 bishops voted in favor, and 408 opposed. One can notice the beginning of an already apparent shift in the Catholic Church's almost millennium-long understanding of the role of bishops vis-à-vis the pope.³

By way of contrast, in the Christian East there is no real difference between 'synod' and 'council', although there is general agreement as to the distinction of the levels of importance of a local synod or council, as opposed to an ecumenical one, for example. For the Eastern Orthodox, the seven ecumenical councils are absolutely dogmatic and infallible, thus being essential for the sense of communion for that family. For the pre-Ephesian (i.e., Church of the East) and the pre-Chalcedonian Churches, it is obvious that they too practice and adhere to a common ecclesiological understanding and appreciation for synodality, based on the role of the Holy Synod headed by the patriarch. While in the Latin west, the concept of synodality has only recently been rediscovered, in the Christian East it has been a part of the Church's life from time immemorial.

The Early Church's Understanding of Synodality

No doubt, the concept of 'synodality' is not new in the life of the Church. In fact, it was St John Chrysostom who coined the dictum, "The Church and Synod are synonymous."⁴ While in the ecclesiology of the Catholic Church consequent to the Council there is a real canonical difference between 'synod' and 'council,' such a difference does not exist for the

3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Vatican_Council#Second_period:_29_September_-_4_December_1963.

4. *Expositiones in Psalmos* 149; *Patrologia Graeca* 55, p. 493.

eastern non-Catholic Churches; ‘synod’ and ‘council’ are synonymous. In fact, the very term ‘synodality’ is a neologism in the Latin Church.⁵

The concept of synodality, however, is truly biblical at its roots. The foundational scriptural event for this type of ecclesiology is the first apostolic council described in Acts 15. At that time, the early Church of the apostles considered the matter of the role of the Mosaic Law vis-à-vis the pagan/non-Jewish converts who accepted the Gospel. This divergence of outlook – the Judaizing tendencies of some of the apostles and presbyters in Jerusalem on the one hand, and the all-inclusive non-Jewish stance of St Paul on the other—was a real struggle for the early Church, and the matter was only resolved when the apostles met in a synodal/conciliar forum in the Holy City. In Acts 15:6 we read that the “...*apostles and elders* (i.e., *presbyters*) *came together to consider this matter.*” Later, in v. 25 the apostolic decision is communicated thus: “...*it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord...*” and equally important is the last note concerning how the final decision was reached (v. 28): “...*it pleased the Holy Spirit, and us...*” This last statement is very important, I believe, because the final consensus of the apostles and presbyters was reached by discerning the will of the Holy Spirit for the Church and her life.

In a nutshell, this – I believe – is an indispensable example of how the early Church of the apostles lived out an ecclesiology based on a synodal or conciliar spirit. It was not the single decree of any one of the apostles *by himself* and *apart from* the body of the other apostles (and elders), rather it was a collective discernment of the shepherds concerning the will of the Holy Spirit. We see in vv. 14 and 19 that it is in fact James, the first bishop of Jerusalem, who communicates the final decree and judgment on this important issue.

5. See: The International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” no. 4; [https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html#_edn14], accessed on November 11, 2022.

The Assyrian Church of the East's Theology of Synodality




At the very outset of his well-known *Nomocanon*, Mar Abdišo', the metropolitan of Nisibis and Armenia delves into the meaning of the word *synhodos* (ܫܢܗܕܘܨ), the Syriac term for 'synod.' He describes the derivation and meaning of the term thus:

The derivation of the name 'synod' is from the numbering of the luminaries. It indicates a fullness of an assembly, that is, an assembly of rulers who are gathered together. Its definition is the stars with the sun and moon. If an 'assembly' of Christians with their head, the bishop, is defined as the church, and if we call [a gathering] of bishops and metropolitans with the catholicos an 'assembly', yet if there is an assembly wherein there is no head who governs all in common, it is not called a 'synod'.

This cosmological paradigm given by Abdišo' is his particular way of illustrating the understanding of the concepts of universality and primacy within the Church. Also, for him the "assembly" and "the head" (i.e., primacy) go together and are inter-dependent. If there is no assembly, there is no head; if there is no head, there is no synodical assembly. We may also add that for Abdišo', this paradigm is valid for all levels of Church life: local, provincial and universal.

The Greek term *σύνδοξ* is comprised of two parts: *συν*, the preposition meaning 'with,' and *ὁδός*, which means 'path.' The theological and ecclesiological nuance here is that the Church as the People of God is walking together on the same path (supposedly) which leads to Christ. This understanding elicits a 'theological *déjà vu*,' as it were, to the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, more commonly known under the name *Didache*. The *Didache* begins from the very outset with setting out the existence of the 'two paths' – the one that leads to life, and the one that leads to death. It is obvious, I believe, which path the reader should choose. Could this be the same 'path' nuanced in the term *σύνδοξ*?

For Abdišo', however, the fundamental understanding of the term 'synod' (in Syriac ܫܢܗܕܘܨ), is in fact, quite a biblical one. The ܫܢܗܕܘܨ is

exactly the sacred gathering of the community of believers as *one body*. This understanding, no doubt, accentuates the corporate nature of the Church, and of her synodal gathering. This is a continuation, I believe, of the foundational understanding of the People of God in the Old Testament. That is, that the Covenant People (the ) constituted the elect of God. This concept was juxtaposed against the () or 'peoples', who were in fact outside of the Covenant given by God. Furthermore, the other veterotestamental Hebrew term *Qobeleth* is another major antecedent for the Syriac term . The People (i.e., the Israelites) who were formerly scattered while in Egypt, were now collected by God into one corporate body, governed by the terms of the Covenant given by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

By direct extension, the Church is now – in light of the mystery of Christ the Son of God – the People of the Covenant which is of a greater degree than that of the Old Testament people. For, this Covenant is now sealed in the Blood of the Only-Begotten Son of God, who suffered, died and rose again on the third day. Notwithstanding this important development, the fathers of the Church of the East continued to stress the *corporate* dimension of the Church – the community of those who are in Christ Jesus. Thus, while the Church is the *ekklesia* – the one 'called out' from among the nations – in the Greek understanding, our theology stresses more the gathering or assembling of the one Body – the Church. The reason for this is because although all nations are called to repentance and to accept the Gospel, it is only the Church the New Covenant community of believers – which constitutes the indivisible Body of Christ, who himself is the head.

Abdišo' continues in Chapter 2 of Section 1 to reply to this question: can a single bishop or a doctor (teacher) establish canons outside of a synodal assembly? Abdišo' responds in this fashion: "If a certain bishop or teacher should establish some canons while they are not in a synodal assembly, the canons ought not be accepted by anyone, nor should they be called *synodal*." The only exception is in the following case: "However, if the catholicos accepts them, and the patriarch convenes an assembly because of them, and they are accepted by the assembly, then they may be called synodal, like the rules of Timatheos [i.e., 805/6 and 820/821] and Ishobarnun [ca. 823], which a synod of the

fathers received and were titled ‘synodal’.” Thus, even if the patriarch were to intervene in the matter posed by this question, it would still have to be carried out in the context of a convened assembly of the Church’s shepherds.

Thus, at the heart of Abdišo’s understanding of the function of the term ‘synod’ is the very gathering together of the various ranks of the hierarchy as one ecclesial body. Naturally, implicit in this model is also the existence of the laity in the same Body. Although he does not specifically mention them here (he will in other places in his *Nomocanon*), they too by virtue of the sacrament of baptism are a part of this very same body, or assembly, of the Church.

This very same understanding is expressed in his theological treatise the *Book of the Pearl*, or the *Marganitha*. In defining the term ‘Church’, Abdišo’ states the following: “The term ‘Church’ implies a congregation, and an assembly met together to unite in acts of festive celebration. It is symbolic of things above...”⁶ The Syriac word for Church (i.e., ܪܚܝܩܐ) is the feminine form of (ܪܚܝܩ), meaning ‘feast’ or ‘celebration.’ Thus, the gathering of the ecclesial assembly together is in order to celebrate the Church’s redemption in Christ Jesus. What the Church is continually celebrating is the Paschal Mystery, which is made present in the life of the Church at every moment without ceasing, for it pertains to the very nature of the Church.

He continues in this same light: “The name ‘Church’, as we have said, has this signification; for Christ does not call material foundations and stones a ‘Church’ but the total congregation of those who believe in Him.”⁷ The continued emphasis of Abdišo’ on the congregational nature of the Church – that is, its act of assembling together – is quite clear. Therefore, for him, ‘synod’ and ‘synodality’ are expressions of the very nature and essence of the Church itself, which is not only *a* body, but *the* Body of Christ.

6. Marganitha (The Book of the Pearl), Part III, Chapter 8, p. 47. See <https://acoecalifornia.org/files/MARGANITHA-The-Pearl.pdf>.

7. Ibid, p. 48.

Thus, we may conclude by saying that while the Greek-speaking east understands the ‘walking together’ of the Church in the term *synodos*, in the Syriac understanding it refers more to the ‘gathering together.’ But this act of gathering together is not a profane gathering, but a sacred one that is sanctified by the perpetual presence of Christ in the celebrative Church, whose Body she continues to be without fail.

Synodality As Communion in the Understanding of the Assyrian Church of the East

Synodality is an ecclesiological phenomenon that must be lived and practiced by the Church; it is not a mere theological or intellectual exercise. As such, it can be expressed in a plethora of ways – canonically, liturgically, spiritually, etc. This is especially true with regard to the way that the Church as Body is governed and shepherded by those who are elected and consecrated by the Holy Spirit – that is, the bishops of the Church – to bring about this governance in a concrete and tangible way.

The synodal tradition of the Assyrian Church of the East, we may say, is essentially based on the apostolic paradigm of Acts 15 which I shared above. Many of the synodal canons were based on the important understanding that a conciliar decision is one that was in essence the expression of the will of the Holy Spirit for the Church. Thus, the official formula for the enacting of a synodal canons in the tradition of the Assyrian Church is: “For, it has pleased the Holy Spirit, and He has commanded...” (in Syriac: ܡܠܟܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ). But also, it must be stressed that this very will of the Holy Spirit must be discerned in a conciliar or synodal manner. One must remember that for the Church of the East, one of the main questions is not merely the ‘reception’ vis-à-vis a synod/council, but the very process of discernment and decision-making itself. The Church – as the Body of Christ which is sanctified by the Spirit – gathers together in assembly in order to discern the will of God for her.

At the heart of this eastern understanding is the fact that synodality is an expression of the Church’s lived communion, that is, the believers coming together in one spirit, one faith and as one Body. We may also say that communion is a prerequisite for synodality, without which it

cannot actually exist – communion makes synodality, and synodality concretely expresses this communion. In turn, this communion of the hierarchy/clergy together with the laity as one body stems from the invisible (or, mystical) communion itself between Christ and the Church. Without this ‘dominical’ or ‘mystical’ communion, the ecclesiastical one which we experience on a day-to-day level cannot exist. Furthermore, the communion of the various local Churches together is also based on the union of Christ and the Church.

Synodality in the Life and Practice of the Assyrian Church of the East

Synodality, or conciliarity, is at the heart of the structure of the governance of the Church. The Holy Synod is the college of bishops, together with the chief bishop – the Catholicos-Patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon – as its head. Without the patriarch presiding, this body cannot canonically be called the ‘Holy Synod.’ Our canonical tradition refers to the catholicos-patriarch as ‘Peter’ among the other bishops who are in communion with him. This echoes the ecclesiology of Cyprian of Carthage to some extent. But be that as it may, this metaphor is expressive of the understanding of a primacy existing within the college of bishops. Together, the patriarch as the head and the bishops as the members of this sacred episcopal body comprise the ‘Holy Synod.’ At the conclusion of the Synod, the catholicos-patriarch must first place his signature on the synodal decrees enacted, accompanied by the signature of the bishops attending. Without the signature of the catholicos-patriarch, the decisions are not considered valid.

All matters affecting the Church on a worldwide level are discussed at the Holy Synod meeting. Usually, the bishops are to meet with their diocesan clergy before the convocation of the Holy Synod, in order to solicit their recommendations or other pertinent matters to submit to the patriarchate through the Holy Synod Secretariat for inclusion in the Synod’s working agenda. The lower clergy and lay faithful may also send their recommendations to the Synod through their diocesan bishop, but at times it has been known that in grave situations they have appealed directly to the Holy Synod.

At the diocesan level, the Church is governed by the bishop as the shepherd who is mandated by the Holy Synod and consecrated and

confirmed by the catholicos-patriarch to govern the local Church entrusted to him. In the Church of the East, there are metropolitans (technically termed ‘metropolitan bishops’), who govern the archdioceses, and such a one is the ‘provincial bishop’; there may be any number of suffragan bishops under the metropolitan. In turn, the remaining dioceses are governed by what we refer to as ‘simple bishops.’ Both episcopal ranks presume the necessary participation of the presbyterate and diaconate serving with and under them. According to canon law, the metropolitan is obliged to convoke the provincial synod, consisting of all of his suffragan bishops with himself presiding, twice a year. The canons are reviewed by all, and local matters that do not concern the entire Church universally are discussed.

At the diocesan level of the simple bishop, he governs and presides over the presbyteral council, with the liturgical assistance of the diaconate and the lower grades of the clergy. Each metropolitan and bishop is expected to have one functioning archdeacon and one cor-bishop. The archdeacon directs the episcopal liturgies and assists the bishop in all matters pertaining to the ordering of the clergy in the diocese, and generally acts as the bishop’s vicar. The cor-bishop, or visitator, visits the most distant parishes and village communities as the official representative of the bishop. He also acts as an inspector of the institutions that are present in the diocese (which in former times included seminaries, schools, hospitals, monasteries, etc.). Each diocese, in accord with the 1986 *Diocesan Constitution* enacted by the Holy Synod under Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV, is expected to have a ‘central diocesan council,’ consisting of the parish priests and two lay representatives from each parish (usually chosen from among the parish council members), with the diocesan bishop presiding at its head.

At the parish level, the presbyter (priest) is the representative of the bishop, and he is responsible for all sacramental celebrations, which he celebrates in accord with the liturgical and canonical prescriptions and by mandate from his bishop. A priest may not improvise the prayers or liturgies at will but must follow the liturgical formularies. He is assisted by his deacons, who must serve with the priest at every liturgical celebration, and also at the hours of prayer. The priest is assisted in his

administration of the parish by an elected parish council, consisting of lay faithful who are members of that particular parish.

According to the *Constitution*, the parish council is an advisory board which is elected for two years. In the absence of an election, the diocesan bishop may appoint the board, with names being recommended by the parish priest and an *ad hoc* nomination committee. The parish council members are to take care of the patrimony of the parish and its day-to-day upkeep but may not deliberate on matters of the Church's dogma. In all matters pertaining to the purchase or sale of any Church properties, a plenary parish meeting is to be called. No parish priest may buy any properties without the consent of the bishop, and only after calling a meeting of the general membership of the parish. In turn, the bishop may only sell a Church property after having received the express written permission of the catholicos-patriarch, and after having consulted the parish concerned and/or the diocesan central board. A parish priest may not sell any Church property at any time, unless a situation necessitates that the parish priest act on behalf of his bishop, and then only with the express written permission of the bishop.

The lay faithful are encouraged to be active in the daily life of their parish and diocese, and to participate in the parish and diocesan board, and other various parish sub-committees and ministries, which among others include the ladies committee, the building committee, the youth association for the younger members of the parish, to only name a few. Every parish must, according to the *Constitution*, conduct a general body meeting of the parish not less than once a year. In some dioceses, these meetings take place twice a year. Such a structured arrangement came about as a direct result of the influence of the local social context on the Church, particularly in the diaspora and in the western countries at large.

Since the 1940s, and particularly in North America, the Church's structures have continued to progress and evolve towards more active participation of the lay faithful, and towards more 'committee-based' governance of the parishes and dioceses. This is not so prevalent in the Middle East, though. Nonetheless, such an inclusive and orderly structure allows for the principle of synodality to be experienced and observed not only at the episcopal level, but also at the 'grassroots' level concerning the average lay faithful. This has proven to give the Church

more stability, structure, and order in its daily life and activity on various levels.

Final Observations

In closing, I believe that we are all experiencing a new dawn as we progress in this our third millennium of the Church. In past decades, we have been busy studying, at various levels, the life of the Church, both in the East and in the West, concentrating on the first and second millenniums of the Church. As a result, we can observe divergent ecclesiologies and shifting ecclesial paradigms when we compare the first and the second millenniums. In recent times, the ecumenical movement has helped us to identify and understand these divergent trends in the ecclesiology of these past two thousand years.

However, the present age has now afforded us with the precious opportunity of bringing about the ecclesiology which will mark the third thousand years. The eastern non-Catholic Churches for their part have continued the patrimony bequeathed by the early Church and its understanding of the importance of the synodal structure of its daily life and governance. We already see this phenomenon in Acts 2:46-47: “So they continued daily with one accord in the temple, and in the house, they would break the Bread, and they received their sustenance with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and finding favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved.” Can our Churches, today or in the near future, truly and concretely retrieve and relive this simplicity of the Early Church?

As we look towards the future, other pertinent questions will include: how will the Church express its synodal nature in this now already third millennium? How will it come to understand ‘communion’ as a lived and shared experience? And even more importantly for our ecumenical relations and dialogue – how will it understand primacy (on both the local and universal levels)? No doubt, each Church must reflect on its own ecclesiology and how it has experienced the synodality which we are collectively seeking today. Nevertheless, I am highly encouraged by the genuine quest of Pope Francis to better understand Petrine primacy “in the greater light of a more synodal Church,” already

expressed by him in 2015.⁸ I believe also that Pope Francis' further understanding of a "conversion of the papacy" are equally appreciated.⁹ Already in 1995, in his *Ut Unum Sint*, Pope John Paul II, of blessed memory, indicated the desire to solicit the aid of the ecumenical community, particularly the non-Catholic Eastern Churches and their patriarchs, to better understand – or maybe, to redefine? – the understanding of universal primacy and the Petrine office which would be more "...open to a new situation."¹⁰

All of the above are concrete statements indicating the desire of the Catholic Church to understand primacy at large, and the function of the papal office in particular, in a Church that is *really* and *fully* synodal in its life. No doubt, this is a lengthy journey, which requires much reflection on the part of theologians and ecclesiastics alike, for it would effectively mean the redefining in the Latin west of its understanding of the universal role of the Bishop of Rome as we know it today or have known it *until* today. However, I believe that the eastern non-Catholic Churches have an indispensable role to play in this redefinition, and their common ecclesial experience can indeed help to reshape the western Church's ecclesiology into one that is truly synodal for the Church of the third millennium.

8. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

9. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 32: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html; accessed on November 11, 2022.

10. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint* (25 May 1995), 95.

Understandings and Practices of Synodality in the Church of the East

Mar Paulus Benjamin

The object of this study is to investigate Synodality in the legislation and ecclesiology of the Assyrian Church of the East. Synodality is the means to bring the Lord's revelation up to date and therefore the church of the third millennium must keep its eyes open to make a church that is truly for the people. The life, culture, and mentality of the third millennium require the Church of Christ to 'actualize' itself in order to open the doors of the Church to all the faithful who can bring a living and heard voice to it, instead of being kept on the margins and excluded.

Synodality etymologically derives from the word συν ["together"] + ὁδός ["way", "journey"¹], and in Latin it is also called "Sinodus". In the Syriac language the word is usually used to indicate the gathering of bishops. It is not known when the word entered the Syriac language, where however, there is also the term 'Knushya Sunhadiqaya', a composition of two words: the first Syriac (Semitic²) and the second a 'Syriacised' form of sinodus.³

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synodality> (from synod, a term often used to describe the process of fraternal collaboration and discernment that bodies like the Synod of Bishops were created to express.

2. In the Hebrew language, the parliament is called 'Knesset', which has the same meaning as it has in Syriac, i.e. the convention.

3. Abdisho in his Nomocanon writes, section 1, chapter 1: "*Undenam nomen synodi desumptum, et quid significet? Nomen hoc synodi desumptum est ex ratione luminarium; significat autem perfectionem congregationis, idest collectionem, quae habetur cum principibus, qui simul coeunt. Terminus (definition) autem eius est convention stellarum cum luna et sole. At si iuxta ecclesiae acceptionem definatur est congregatio christianorum cum capite eorum episcopo. Attanem concilium dicimus, episcoporum, et Metropolitanum cum catholico. Quod si fuerit collection*

In the Old Testament, especially in the book Exodus, the term 'synod' is used when, by God's command, Moses forms a group of seventy wise elders to help him lead the people to the promised land (Exodus 3:16). Later in the Old Testament, we see the group of 12 leaders of the Hebrew tribes who, after the disappearance of Moses, were elected to take possession of the promised land, under the command of Joshua (Jos 13:8-17:18). The group of the 12 plays; in practice, a synodal role, was widely used by the Assyrian Church of the East throughout its history.

In the New Testament we see that Jesus forms the group of the twelve apostles, analogous to the elders in the book of Joshua. The Lord calls them to instruct them on his message of salvation that he has brought to mankind: "You are my friends, if you do what I command you" (John 15:9-17). On the other hand, we see that Jesus empowers them to sit on the twelve chairs of the sons of Jacob to judge the twelve tribes, and Jesus said to them,

Truly I say to you, you who have followed me, in the new creation, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you will also sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel' (Mtt 19:28).

The image of the twelve with Jesus, which has eschatological rather than ontological significance, represents a pedagogical model of synodality in the church. After the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the apostles received the mandate to take the salvific message to the people; they convened a council in Jerusalem that represents the first example of synodality (Acts 15).

capite destitute, etsi omnes communiter complectatur, non dicitur synodus." English translation by Fr Michael Bernie (non-official): "On whence the name 'synod' is derived, and what it indicates? The derivation of the name 'synod' is from the numbering of luminaries. It indicates {19} a fullness of an assembly, that is, an assembly of rulers who are gathered together. Its definition is the stars with the sun and moon. If an 'assembly' of Christians with their head, the bishop, is defined as the church, and if we call [a gathering] of bishops and Metropolitans with the catholicos an 'assembly', yet if there is an assembly wherein there is no head who governs all in common, it is not called a 'synod'".

To understand synodality one must first understand the meaning of the Church because the Church in itself carries this synodal process. In other words, the Church and synodality happen together. Synodality serves the Church because it guarantees the mission and protects it; that is, it protects the members of the Church, those who are often called living stones.

The Church, in its journey, provides itself with various means to fulfil its mission in the most useful way. Convening synods and councils has been a very effective way of directing the Church. The synod of Nicaea, par excellence, was the first council convened by the Roman Empire to discuss all issues, including heresies, that threatened the existence of the Church. The first four centuries are the transitional period; indeed, we see that, in the fourth century in particular, synods find an essential place in the running of the Church. The church of the Apostles was not structured in such a way as to have an organisation with its own doctrine; but when the Church Fathers entered the scene, various interpretations foreign to the teaching of the church came along with them, which are called heresies. In order to purify the teaching of the church and keep it upright and orthodox, as Abdisho explains in the preface of his *Nomocanon*,⁴ the Christian emperor Constantine convened the ecumenical council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., which took important steps in defining the orthodoxy of the faith and organising the church. All bishops of the Church of Christ, from all countries, both within and outside the Roman Empire, were invited to the council, and 318 bishops participated. In the field of faith, this council gave us the creed, which is still valid today and has remained in its original version. In the context of church organisation, 20 canons were decreed. The canons of Nicaea were brought to the Assyrian Church of the East in 410 A.D. by Mar Maruta, bishop of Miapraqat.

The Synod of Mar Ishaq (410) was the first ‘Knushya Sunhadiqaya’ (Synodus) of the Church of the East and thus became a model for the canonical constitution of the Church. It should be noted that in the language of the Church of the East, Synodus includes all the bishops under the chairmanship of the Catholicos-Patriarch. Sometimes the term

4. Abdisho' Nomocanon, Canonical Collection (Modern Syriac version).

‘council’ is also used as a synonym for synodus, although according to Salachas D., in the *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of the Christian East*, council is used for assemblies of bishops qualified as ecumenical, while synodus is used for synods that are more local than general.⁵

As already mentioned, the Council of Nicaea was – let me call it – the council of councils. The first reason to call it the council of councils is that this synod was truly ecumenical because it embraced the entire Church of Christ, both the Western and the Eastern Church. The council defined the Church as One, Holy, Apostolic and Catholic, without divisions or differences. This is why all churches accept it, and especially the Apostolic churches.⁶

In the same way as the Church of the East advances in the evangelisation of peoples, so too does it progress in organisation. Suffice it to recall that during the first 14 centuries, 13 great synods were convened by different patriarchs.

To give a clear idea of synodality in the Church of the East, I divide its history into three distinct phases; a: from the beginning until the 14th century with the death of Mar Timothy II; b: the centuries of Hakkari (14th to 20th) and finally c: from the First World War (1914-1918) to the present day.

1. The First 14 centuries

In the first part of its history, we see that the Church of the East was born in the Persian Empire and went beyond the borders of the Empire to the countries of the Far East. The *Synodicon Orientale*⁷ (the Canonical Collection), which documents the 13 synods convened over the

5. Salachas Dimitri, *Synodus – Concilium*, in Edward G. Farrugia, *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of the Christian East*, in Pontifical Oriental Institute, 2015, pp. 736.

6. According to Abdisho, who remembers this in the preface of his canonical collection, Mar Shimun Bar Sabbe, the Catholicos of the Church of the East, was also invited, but because of uprisings and wars in his country he cannot go and sends the priest Shahdost.

7. J.-B. Chabot, *Synodicon orientale ou recueil de synodes nestoriens*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1902.

14 centuries, shows us the zeal and faith of the clergy and faithful in enduring torture, discrimination, and injustice because of the Christian faith.

In its first phase, the church promoted education and established two large and famous schools such as the school of Edessa and then the school of Nisibis; later we see schools in monasteries and monastic cells. The fruit of these schools are the great theologians such as Mar Narsai, Mar Babai, Mar Aba I, etc. Later, we see the presence of great spiritual personalities such as Isaac of Nineveh, John Dalyatha, Joseph Khazaya etc.

It is necessary to have a picture of the hierarchical structure of the church where the Catholicos-Patriarch is at the top, then the metropolitans, and at the third hierarchical rank there are bishops, priests, and finally deacons. In such a pyramid, one must not forget that there are the faithful because, to be truly a Church, all the baptised must be included.

In this first phase, the Church of the East had deep relations with the Church of the West; the fathers of the Church of the East aspired to establish a Church that resembled the Church of the West in its organisation, even though there was not full communion between them, and cultures and language were different. This is evidenced by the journeys of the patriarchs of the Church of the East, such as the journey of Mar Ishoyahb in 585 and Mar Awa I, to the countries of the West in order to meet with Christian leaders.

To be valid, a synod must be presided over by the Patriarch, who may delegate a Metropolitan or bishop in his stead in administrative affairs, but not in dogmatic and moral ones. The Patriarch must approve all synod decrees for them to be valid, even those in synods presided over by a Metropolitan on the Patriarch's behalf.

Metropolitans preside over the archdiocese, which can be divided into dioceses headed by bishops. The Metropolitan, according to the Nomocanon of Abidsho, must convene the synod of the archdiocese every four years in which only administrative business is discussed. The Metropolitan has no power to judge his bishops but can only make recommendations to them. In serious cases where it is necessary to judge

them, he must turn to the synod of bishops presided over by the Patriarch. According to the Nomocanon, the metropolitan can also ordain a bishop, but the bishop ordained by him must go to the patriarch to declare his submission to the patriarch and receive his blessing in order to fulfill his duty as bishop.

According to the canons of the Assyrian Church of the East, the patriarch is consecrated by a metropolitan together with the other metropolitans and bishops.

The bishop, by nature of his ordination, is an active member of the synod of bishops. He can ask his clerics for their suggestions on matters to be brought to the synod by deciding on the priority of issues. In directing his diocese, the bishop is assisted by his clerics (Archdeacon, Corbishop, priests and deacons). Every bishop, according to the Nomocanon, must have an Archdeacon who is responsible for organising liturgical services at the diocesan level. The Corbishop, on the other hand, as the name implies, is the bishop of the villages furthest from the city and has the duty to visit churches and all other diocesan institutions, obviously with the bishop's permission. In ancient times, we read that the bishop authorises the Corbishop to ordain subdeacons and lectors in the villages, which today are called minor ranks in the hierarchical structure. The bishop must establish a committee, either by choice or by election, of educated lay faithful to assist him in the administration of the diocese. The priests who run the parishes must be canonically bound to the bishop and perform their duties (liturgical services, youth, Bible studies to adults and catechesis to the young). Everything that has been said about the duties of bishops, i.e., having archdeacons, corbishops etc., also applies to the Metropolitan.

Finally, the ordination of clerics also takes place with the consultation of the faithful of the person to be ordained. For example, in the Nomocanon it is explained that before the ordination of a Corbishop (peryarduta), the faithful are called together and then the deacon makes the proclamation.⁸ Calling the faithful to the ordination of

8. Abdisho, *Collezione Canonica*, Part II, Cap. 7.

a Corbishop certainly indicates that the church is asking them to witness a right choice.

Similarly, to elect a bishop, the local Metropolitan must seek the opinion of the faithful on the candidate to be ordained bishop. This means that the faithful also play a role in the process of electing and consecrating a bishop.⁹

Later we read in the Nomocanon that the bishop also asks the opinion of the faithful in managing and administering church property, and in choosing the most suitable person to hold this position.¹⁰

We also read that when the Church decided to ordain a deacon, priest, or bishop, it always asked, directly or indirectly, for the opinion of the faithful of the parish or diocese in the case of the bishop.

2. The Period of Hakkari

The second phase of the Church's history lasts seven centuries (from the 14th century until the beginning of the 20th century) and has its own specificity, as the Church experienced the first great Jihad genocide proclaimed by Tamerlane against Christians in particular, including the Christians of the Church of the East. This second period is referred to as the Hakkari period, i.e., the period when the Christians of the Assyrian Church of the East were mainly confined to the mountains of south-east Turkey and northwest Iran. The Crusades were indirectly the major reason for the collapse of the Church of the East. The church lost a huge number of believers, many were killed, some possibly converted to Islam and some hid in the mountains and in hard-to-reach places: monasticism vanished, and monasteries were abandoned. In the Hakkari period, circumstances did not allow the precepts to be implemented according to the church canon in some cases, as the struggle for survival was the first necessity of the population. Since no synods were convened during this period, one can understand the serious geo-political situation of the time. It is possible that there were synods, but there were no decrees like those in the first phase of church history.

9. Abdisho, *Nomocanon*, Part II, 9, Act 1.

10. *Ibid*, Part II, Cap 8, Act 1.

The head of the church, the Catholicos-Patriarch, plays a double role, i.e., he also takes on the power of head of the people for socio-political affairs. This power, in the 3rd century, was granted to him by the Persian emperor. The patriarch formed a group of councillors, mostly chiefs of Assyrian tribes, as well as another group of bishops, priests, and deacons. The duty of the councillors was to help the patriarch with decisions on everything that could bring good to his people.

3. The Diaspora phase

The third phase of the Church's history includes the movement of the population from the mountains to the city and even into the diaspora, where life is conducted very differently from what it was in Hakkari. In the city, people were able to meet Christian missionaries from various churches in western countries. In Iran and Iraq, where the Assyrian members of the Assyrian Church of the East settled after the First World War, Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, Evangelical and even Russian Orthodox missionaries arrived. These missionaries brought with them modern education and built schools, encouraging families to have their children study the new sciences. The result of these schools was that new generations were born with a Western-style culture, to the point that even Patriarch Mar Shimon XXIII was sent to England to study the religious sciences. His trip to England did much to give a role to the laity in the Assyrian Church of the East in helping the bishops at the diocesan level and the priests at the parish level.

After the election of Mar Dinkha IV as Patriarch (1976), a new era began in the Assyrian Church of the East, which continued during the Patriarchate of Mar Gewargis III and Mar Awa III. This period of diaspora is certainly a time of great developments in the Assyrian Church. First, the number of bishops increased, the education of clerics was promoted with the creation of seminaries, and synods were convened that were as numerous in less than forty years as there were in the first fourteen centuries. The number of synods indicates that synodality in the church is a primary need. Ecumenism has also been promoted to the extent that Patriarch Mar Dinkha has been known as 'the patriarch of peace and union'. Suffice to mention that during his

patriarchate, the Joint Christological Declaration with the Catholic Church was signed by Mar Dinkha IV and the Holy Father John Paul II in 1994. In this regard, another declaration on the sacramental life was jointly signed during the patriarchate of Mar Gewargis III in 2017. This ecumenical process will certainly continue during the patriarchate of Mar Awa III, who began his ministry with a collaborative study with the Catholic Church concerning the image of the Church.

Conclusions

Of all that has been said, I would like to reiterate a few essentials including that ecumenism is a necessity for the church in order to restore unity as it was between the apostles. It also promotes synodality, which saves the church and helps our believers to feel that they are in a church united in the spirit, which was given to the pastors, the leaders of the church.

Every apostolic church is realised in its synod, which is formed by the patriarch together with the bishops, following the model of St Peter with the other apostles. To realise a united church under one shepherd certainly requires deep studies based on mutual respect and love so that the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ, who invites his church to unite as in the union of the Trinity, can be fulfilled (John 17: 21): “That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be in us one”.

EXPERIENCES OF SYNODALITY – WORKSHOPS

The Lay Experience: Synodality in the Assyrian Church of the East

Peter Azzo

For the laity of the Assyrian Church of the East, the term “synod” may have a hierarchal connotation, more specific to the episcopate, as the faithful most frequent the term when their local pastor reads to them the decrees of the Holy Synod. In a sense, it is an honest association of the term for the laity of the Assyrian Church of the East, as the “Holy Synod” is used in reference to the gathering of all the metropolitan archbishops and ordinary bishops to administer the Holy Church of God together with the supreme primate, the Catholicos-Patriarch.¹ At face value, it may seem that the synodal process of hierarchs gathering to enact legislation for the universal Church without the direct participation of the laity in the meetings, is exclusive to the episcopate, but in theory, the local hierarchs gather the requests of his respective diocese, clergy and lay alike, to present to His Holiness the Catholicos-Patriarch, and the members of the Holy Synod for deliberation and determination of the concerns at hand. As shepherds of their flock, the synod members remain committed to the advancement of the entire Church and her children during the meetings.

The hierarchs of the Assyrian Church of the East have all been elected by the members of the Holy Synod and confirmed by the

1. Traditionally, all metropolitans should gather with the patriarch once per year, and the ordinary bishops shall join with their brother metropolitans and the patriarch once every four years before the Great Fast (i.e., Lent). In a modern context, all the metropolitans and ordinary bishops assemble at the request of the patriarch, generally once per year. See M.J. Birnie, trans., *The Nomocanon of Mar Abdisho of Nisibis*, Seattle, WA: unpublished manuscript, no date, pp. 104-105.

Catholicos-Patriarch to lead and serve a geographical jurisdiction according to the faith, rites, and canons of the Church. Since the Catholicos-Patriarchate is a very sacred institution, the laity of the Church depends on their supreme primate to guide all the hierarchs; therefore, one may question the role of the laity in determining the hierarch who would be known as the “father of fathers.”

At either the demise, or more recently, at the resignation of the supreme primate of the Assyrian Church of the East, the members of the Holy Synod are called by the senior-most metropolitan archbishop to gather in council to elect a new universal father for the Holy Church.² As it is a closed-door council, the laity has no position within the general voting process to cast a ballot for their preferred candidate. According to the canons of the Synod of Mar Gewargis (671 A.D.) laymen have no right to interfere in the entirety of the election process, let alone assist a bishop in his case for election to the most supreme see of the Assyrian Church of the East.³ After the synod elects the new Catholicos-Patriarch, he is to be consecrated and enthroned at the Patriarchal See with the participation of the hierarchs, clergy, and laity. Although the canons are clear; there shall be no direct interference of the presbyterate, diaconate, or laity in the election of the new supreme primate, the liturgical celebration seems to ensure that the entirety of the church offers their acceptance of the Catholicos-Patriarch elect.

In the patriarchal consecration and enthronement liturgy, before the principal celebrant places his right hand on the Catholicos-Patriarch elect and the hierarchs on his back, the archdeacon presents the candidate for consecration to the entire congregation. After the

2. Mar Gewargis III (2015-2021) offered his resignation to the Holy Synod due to personal health concerns and left the Holy See of Seleucia-Ctesiphon vacant in 2021. This was the first time in modern history of the Assyrian Church of the East that the supreme primate offered his resignation; therefore, initiating the process of the election of a new Catholicos-Patriarch.

3. M.J. Birnie, trans., *The Eastern Synods (Synodicon Orientale)*, Seattle, WA: unpublished manuscript, 1999, p.242.

proclamation of the archdeacon, the liturgical rubrics for the rite note for the “people” (i.e., the laity) to respond three times, “It is right and just!”⁴

In their confirmation of the candidate, all the members of the Holy Church offer an expression of consent and joy for the elected hierarch to be consecrated to the most sacred see of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. After the response of the people, the laying on of hands continues and the Catholicos-Patriarch elect is enthroned. Hence, the tradition is clear that all people – hierarchs, clergy members, and the laity – all have their own set role within the selection, election, and confirmation of the supreme father of the Assyrian Church of the East.⁵

Outside of the Apostolic and primatial see, and more specifically, within the election of local bishops for dioceses, there has been a more recent phenomenon that directly includes the laypeople in the process of naming new hierarchs. In 2009, the metropolitan archbishop of Malabar and all India, His Beatitude Mar Aprem Mookan, hosted an archdiocesan-wide election for the new auxiliary bishops of the said archdiocese. The results of the election were then offered to the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East chaired by the late Mar Dinkha IV, of most blessed memory, for approval and confirmation.

In January 2010, the Holy Synod met in the Archdiocese of India and ordained the two priests as auxiliary bishops for said archdiocese, whose names were submitted as a result of election from the laity, hence enacting a new type of direct involvement of lay people in the selection of their local hierarch. Although, since 2010 until the present time, there have been consecrations of six new bishops across the world in the Assyrian Church of the East; none were selected by the direct elections

4. The response of “It is right and just!” or in Syriac, ܐܝܬܝܢ ܚܝܬܝܢ ܐܝܬܝܢ, is a learned liturgical response for the laity as the same response is used in the preface of the anaphora. Therefore, the common response would allow for a majority of the faithful to express their consent to the consecration.

5. There are very similar versions of the proclamation of the archdeacon and the response of the people in the consecration services of metropolitans and bishops, alike, but instead of the people responding three times, they would respond twice and once, respectively.

of the laity, rather they were nominated and confirmed by members of the Holy Synod in a closed session.

The participation of the laity in the confirmation of the supreme primate through a liturgical response, and the direct election of their local hierarchy by casting a ballot, are two different examples of the role of the lay in the Assyrian Church of the East and their participation in synodality. Nonetheless, there are a variety of ways that the laity participates in the life of the church.

The lay faithful of the Assyrian Church of the East take an active role within the parish councils of their local communities, serving as an advisory board to the parish priest to make decisions on parish administration and help maintain the day-to-day upkeep of their local church. These councils are not only boards of advisement for the parish priest but also can be successful committees that can make serious changes within the life of the parish.⁶ This form of lay leadership, with the local priest and the parish council working together and at the same level, is more prevalent in the West and has been for many decades now, whereas some Middle Eastern dioceses are starting to adopt this structure of administration more recently.

Lay people are called to serve throughout the various ministries of the Holy Church, and it is important to recall the various ways that the faithful laity partakes in this calling. The most important role that the laity takes within their communities is the education of the faithful. With a limited number of ordained ministers and with the unfortunate decline of a once-vast monastic tradition, the lay members of the Assyrian Church of the East are the key educators and formators of faith for the future of the Church. This extraordinary role for lay people within the Church allows them to shape individuals in their spirituality according to the ancient faith of our forefathers. This role does not come lightly either, because if there is a lack of proper catechesis amongst the educators, then their lack of formation will fail to transmit the orthodoxy of the Assyrian Church of the East to future generations.

6. Parish councils are governed by the "Diocesan Constitution of 1986," which was ratified by the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East.

Moreover, there are many other roles that lay people serve faithfully on a daily basis that have been granted to them as a result of synodical legislation. For example, the first synod of Mar Dinkha IV in 1978 decreed to allow women to serve as members of the parish council and within the central committee of the diocese.⁷ In this drastic move by the newly elected patriarch, the synod fathers wanted to ensure that women were being included in the decision-making processes of their local church. This decree also prohibited a single hierarch from excluding women from serving in his local diocese, as the synod decreed a general canon for the eternity of the Assyrian Church of the East.

In the same council of 1978, the synod fathers decreed that all the ranks of the Holy Church – from lector to the Catholicos-Patriarch – were open for the nomination of any man of “good deeds” and “high character.”⁸ This decree abolished within the canons of the Assyrian Church of the East for any household to claim the right of sole hereditary succession to a specific see or position within the Church. Through this decree, the fathers encouraged good-willed men to follow their vocation and serve Christ as candidates in ordained ministry.⁹

More recently, under the tenure of the current primate, a decree was published that the bishop of the Diocese of Western Europe was to serve as the chairman of the “Patriarchal Commission for Youth Affairs.”¹⁰ In this deliberate effort to ensure that the voices of the

7. Mar Dinkha IV, *Minutes of the First Holy Synod of Mar Dinkha IV's Patriarchate*, Baghdad, Iraq: Assyrian Church of the East, 1978, 3.

8. *Ibid.*, 5.

9. The election and consecration of Mar Dinkha IV, of blessed memory, in 1976 ended the hereditary line of succession for the Primatial and Apostolic Throne of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, which was within the Mar Shimun family for over 650 years. Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV always genuinely encouraged any young man of reputable character to come forward to serve throughout his tenure as the supreme primate of the Assyrian Church of the East.

10. Mar Awa III, *Decrees of the First Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East Convoled by His Holiness Mar Awa III Catholicos-Patriarch*, Assyrian Church News, Assyrian Church of the East, September 24, 2021,

younger members of the Holy Church were not being neglected on a synodal and local level, the new patriarch saw an opportunity to include the future of the Holy Church within the present.

In closing, although the traditional participation of lay people in the synodality of the Assyrian Church of the East remains through the local bishop, as the father and overseer of the diocese, who presents the concerns, requests, and needs of his spiritual children to the Catholicos-Patriarch and members of the Holy Synod, there are other ways that the laity is involved. From the consecration of their hierarchs to teaching the future generation of the Church, the lay people are integral to our mission.

Experiences of Synodality in the Church of the East – The Participation of Women

Nisha Mary Thomas

Introduction

Synodality is a way of journeying together. Being a follower of Jesus Christ, our aim is to grow in Christ by sharing our faith in Him with others, and helping others grow in Jesus by becoming a servant to others in Christ. As the people of God, we should journey together in the Holy Spirit with a common mission of making known to others the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is important to connect people to God and one another. A woman has an important role to play in the synodality of the Church. The role of a woman in moulding the character of a child starts at the time of pregnancy. It is remarkable that the woman's prayer during the three to ten months of gestation, mark the spiritual growth of the child during the pregnancy itself, which will provide a spiritual infusion for the growth of that child in the future. The experience Zechariah's wife, Elizabeth, had when Mary greeted her during her visit was so glorious. "For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy" (Luke 1: 44). This is the best example of the spiritual growth of the child during the time of pregnancy. Only a woman can spiritually nurture a child at birth. So, the role of a woman in a Christian church is valuable. The role of a woman from the spiritual growth of a child by birth to the spiritual growth of a church is inevitable.

Women in the Bible: A brief survey

In the ancient era, women were considered to be inferior and subordinate to men. Most of the Eastern communities considered women to be mediocre and insignificant. The role of women in the ancient societies were predominantly domestic; i.e., women were meant to carry babies in their wombs, feed them and take care of only

household affairs. They did not have permission to leave their homes. They had no authority to come to public places or to study, as women were considered to be unclean. Men should not greet women in public places. In the daily prayers of the Jews, they thanked God by saying "Praised be God that he has not created me a woman." Moreover, women were not safe during that time except under the shadow of men.

Jesus strongly opposed the authoritative and the conservative nature that prevailed during his time. Jesus gave suitable answer through his actions and words to oppose the injustices that existed against widows and women. There are many incidences in the Bible which shows that Jesus stood as a revolutionary leader during that time when women were stamped as impure. Jesus spoke to women in public (Luke 7:11-15, John 4:4-42); Jesus healed a woman who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years (Luke 8:43-48); Jesus healed a woman who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years on a Sabbath day and called her a daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:10-17); Jesus often taught men and women the holy book and the words of God (Luke 10:38-42), though the study of the scriptures was forbidden to women; Jesus considered Lazarus' sister, Mary, as one of the disciples sitting at His feet, listening to what He said, which is absolutely the position of a male disciple. These are just a few incidences. Even though there were hundreds of millions of men in the society, Jesus chose Mary Magdalene, a repentant sinner and a prostitute, forgiven by Him to proclaim His Resurrection to the whole world. Jesus chose a woman from the society who was stamped as inferior, insignificant and impure, to broadcast the gospel of His Resurrection and Ascension. Jesus, through His words and deeds, showed us examples of how to treat women as equals with men, never subordinated nor restricted in role.

1. Synodality and women

There are many female characters in the Bible who were leaders, prophets and missionaries who proclaimed the word of God and lived by the will of God. Shiphrah and Puah were considered to be the first revolutionary women in the Bible. The Bible marks Shiphrah and Puah, two midwives as the epitome of women's liberation (Exodus 1:8-22). The prophetess Miriam is sent by God to lead Israel (Exodus 15:20-21). She

is a woman of courage with deep family connections, a good leader, led a faithful life, and who helped save a nation. Deborah is one of the judges “the Lord raised up” who “saved Israel from the hands of their enemies”. She was a prophetess and the highest leader in all Israel (Judges 4:4-14). Huldah was a prophetess during the time of Josiah along with Jeremiah and Zephaniah. Priests consulted the prophet Huldah on finding the lost book of the law and submitted to her spiritual leadership. Israel’s leaders, including the King, the elders, the prophets, and the people, accepted her word as divinely revealed. The obedience of Israel’s male leadership to God’s word, spoken through a woman, sparked what is probably the greatest revival in the history of Israel (2 Kings 22:14-23:25, 2 Corinthians 34:22-35:19).

God used women in the greatest of all prophetic roles. God continued to speak through women in the New Testament, also through the song of Elizabeth (Luke 1:25,42-45) and Mary’s Magnificat, the first Christian exposition of Scripture (Luke 1:46-55). Phoebe was the first deaconess in Christian theology. She was referred as deaconess by the apostle Paul (Romans 16:1-2). Junia was an apostle of Jesus who believed in Him much before the apostle Paul was an outstanding among the apostles of Jesus. Some of the other women missionaries who partnered with the apostle Paul were Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11), Nympha (Colossians 4:15), Apphia (Philemon 1:2), Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3), and they evangelized and spread the Gospel to the nations. Throughout the Bible, women have played a key role in fulfilling God’s plan and they have held the positions of leadership and responsibility in spreading the Gospel.

2. The Role of Women in the Chaldean Syrian Church of the East in India

The Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East originally was developed among the Assyrians during the first century AD in Assyria, Upper Mesopotamia and North- western Persia, east of the Byzantine Empire. It is an apostolic church established by Thomas the Apostle, Addai of Edessa, and Bartholomew the Apostle. In India, the church is known as Chaldean Syrian Church of the East established by St Thomas the Apostle in A.D. 52. The church follows the traditional Christology

and ecclesiology and employs the Divine Liturgy of Saints Mar Addai and Mar Mari belonging to the East Syrian Tradition. As per the constitution prescribed by the Church and approved by the Holy Synod, equal representation of men and women is envisaged. Women are constitutionally given every right to act as a trustee in the day-to-day operations of every parish in every archdiocese. Moreover, there are various organizations in the Church of the East in India to encourage the participation of women and indulge in the activities to follow the commands of God.

3. Deaconesses

Deaconesses are ordained in the Chaldean Syrian Church of the East in India. The ordination occurs during the eucharistic liturgy at the altar. The ordination ceremony of a deaconess is conducted at vestry where she is brought tying her hands with ribbon as per the order of 'Syameedha'. As mentioned in Philippians 2:7 – "Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man," the tying of hands advocate that a candidate should be a slave and obedient before Almighty God. Deaconesses are selected from the faithful of the Church of the East who should be of good character and reputation. They should be unmarried with a minimum age of 50 years. Deaconesses assist Vicars during the baptism of adult women. They instruct newly baptized women in the faith, counsel the younger women in the community and visit the women faithful, especially the sick, in their homes. They have a special seating during the Holy Qurbana and are the first to receive Holy Communion among the women. The Church has special traditions written by Saints Mar Addai and Mar Mari for the anointing of the deaconesses. This ritual book originated from the canonical rules in the field of spiritual ministry, and shows the importance given by the Church in the field of priestly ministry for the ordination of the deaconesses, and has centuries of tradition.

4. Nuns

Monasticism was very popular in early Syrian Christianity, and originally all monks and nuns were hermits. An early monastic community was

active since the 3rd century in Edessa and its environs. There is much historical evidence which shows the existence of monasticism in the Syriac church traditions. Hudra is the manuscript that consists of the Syriac prayers as per the tradition of the Church of the East, written in 7th century A.D. In Hudra, we could find a prayer which translates “My Lord! Let the nuns of the monasteries and the forest-dwellers of the mountains beg you for me.” This shows the existence of a community of nuns in the Church since the ancient times. The community of nuns in the ancient Church of the East were called “Bar Qyama”. “Bar Qyama” is a Syriac word which means “daughter of the covenant”. The invasion of Islamism in the Eastern countries weakened monasticism of the Church, which resulted in the declination of nuns. Perhaps, because of the subsequent absence of such monastic communities, and also due to the highly respected priestly reception, later, the priest’s wives were called “Bar Qyama”, like these nuns, in consideration of the same quality and spirituality as the priests who were supposed to serve as spiritual fathers. But in the Chaldean Syrian Church of the East in India, nuns are dedicated to serve the community even though the number is less. The nuns are selected from the faithful of Church of the East who are willing to live with a missionary commitment. They devote themselves in prayers and also serve the community.

5. The Women Youth’s Association

The Women Youth’s Association was established in the year 2004 with the intention of involving energetic youth in the field of Church activities and to increase their personality, leadership qualities, and companionship. This association has branches in all the parishes and women of age between 15 to 45 years are the members of this association. The elected secretary of each parish will be a central representative. In addition, the representatives will be elected by the Women Youth’s Association members of the respective parish on the basis of one representative for every 10 members. All these elected members from different parishes form the Central Committee. The Central Executive Committee consists of a President, Vice President, General Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer, and four executive members who are elected from the Central Committee of this association. The Women

Youth's Association provides a platform for the youth to come together and work for Christian and philanthropic causes. The association conducts various awareness programs, motivational classes, charity drives and outreach programs. During the time of Covid-19, the association served as the Covid warriors provided masks, gloves and sanitizers to the hospitals and health workers. They were instrumental in providing medical aid to the needy, mental support, and financial assistance. The association functions with the motto to help channelize the untapped energy and potential of the women youth and thus make them an instrument to proclaim the Gospel to the world.

Conflicting Covid Situations: Participation of Women in the Church

The contributions of the Women Youth's Association during the Covid pandemic situations are appreciable. When our shelter homes turned to be prayer houses, the Women Youth's Association represented a loving and caring mother of our Church. Like *Marth Mariam* who became solace for those who lack resources, women of my parish and the entire Church served as a beacon of hope. Crucial and timely acts of women uplifted our Church during the chaos and became our powerhouse. One of the most significant contributions that needs to be highlighted is bringing back a culture of prayer in the Church. A praying community enhanced the very nature of our Church towards its ancient glory. Apart from this mission, they were in the forefront of many talk series, Bible Quiz programs, Youth Conferences, Gospel Conventions, Christmas programs, various awareness programs, and academically- motivating programs addressing psychological issues during Covid situations, etc. In nutshell, unless women were not in the lead, the Church would not have won the mission against conflicting situations of the Covid pandemic.

Mahila Samajam

Mahila Samajam (it is a Malayalam word which means: Mahila = Woman + Samajam = forum) is an organisation in the Archdiocese for women over 45 years old. The association was founded in the year 1935 with the aim of the spiritual growth of women. It is spread throughout all parishes in India

and is functioning in all the parishes. According to the constitution, the President, Vice President, General Secretary, Treasurer, four executive members, and secretaries and central representatives from each parish constitute the central committee. Each parish has a secretary and a minimum of two representatives with the count of one representative per 25 members who function in a parish. The tenure of the committee is 3 years. The main objectives of this forum are: 1. to illuminate the spirit of the Holy Spirit in daily life and to enrich the spiritual life of women in the Church so as to make the family atmosphere in the community healthier; 2. to improve the lives of women in the Church in all aspects and to plan projects for the protection of widows, orphans and virgins; and 3. to help and cooperate in all other activities of the Church. With this aim, the forum conducts Bible study classes, hosts weekly prayer meetings, visits the sick, etc. They visit the houses of the sick people, conduct prayers, sing hymns, share their sorrows and help the economically backward people within the limits. The visits give great relief to the family and help them to deviate from the mental pressures and draw them closer to God. The Central Committee also manages *Bethania Ashram*, an institute that provides shelter for the destitute.

6. Sunday School

Sunday School is the Church's way of reaching out to the youngest members to help them develop a strong religious foundation that will stay with them throughout their lives and mold them into good human beings who live with Christian values. It plays a role in shaping their character and enabling them to grow into responsible members of society. The history of Sunday School in the Archdiocese of India can be traced back to the year 1905, when Revd Fr Padavupurakkal Thomas (alias: Kuruvilachan) initiated the *Gospel Children Shining Light Sunday School* to instil in children the true faith of the Apostolic Church. In 1914, the school was renamed *Bethany Sunday School*, and later to its present name – *Mar Aprem Sunday School* in the year 1920. Mar Aprem Sunday school teaches students from Grade 1 through Grade 10. The school's initial syllabus was designed and developed by Saint Mar Abimelek Timotheus Metropolitan in the year 1914. Over the course of years, the syllabus was renewed and modified, and it includes Bible

study, Church history, Patrology and the Syriac language. Sunday School curriculum marks the beginning of the spiritual growth of a student. In the Archdiocese, around 85% of the Sunday School teachers are women and they play a very important role in instilling Christian values into the young minds and molding the children into good human beings.

These organisations function by upholding the faith and traditions of the Holy Apostolic Catholic Church of the East, and duty-bound to the Metropolitan of the Church appointed by the Holy See of Patriarchate.

The Board of Central Trustees

The Board of Central Trustees is an administrative body of the Indian Archdiocese elected from the members of Sabha (meaning, Church) Council to execute daily affairs of the Church. It consists of nine members including a Chairman of the board, and all major decisions should be executed with the permission of Sabha Council. Sabha Council is the highest body for all the administrative matters of the Indian Archdiocese, except those spiritual. The Sabha Council is also the highest policy making body of the Indian Archdiocese. From each parish, representatives are elected by the members of the respective parish on the basis of one representative for every 150 members. These parish council members will form the Sabha Council. A minimum of two representatives is to be elected from every parish as a parish council member. A woman also has the equal right to become a member of the parish council. Apart from the elected members, ten members nominated by the Head of the Church, the secretaries of the Central Sunday School, the Central Youth's Association and the Central Mahila Samajam are *ex officio* members of the Sabha Council. There is no reservation in the constitution for the central trustee board member to be a woman. Mrs. Pearly Jos and Mrs. Binu Joshy were some of the lady members elected to the Board of Central Trustees. The participation in the Sabha Council or the Board of Central Trustees help women to integrate their beliefs into the political and religious leadership and fulfill the biblical commands in the process. Even though women are constitutionally given every right to act as a trustee in the day-to-day operations of every parish of every archdiocese, or be part of the Sabha

Council and Board of Central Trustees to execute daily affairs of the Church, women's participation in these matters is much less. We should encourage more women to come forward to act as a trustee.

Conclusions

Genesis 1:27 states, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them". God has created both males and females with equal dignity to the purpose of shared authority. Unfortunately, due to misinterpretations and the urge for power, societies discriminated against people based on gender, race, religion, and social class. But this sort of behavior is condemned in the Bible which states that we are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28). In September 2015, 193 countries came together at the United Nations to adopt and commit to a long-term, comprehensive strategy to tackle the world's greatest challenges related to global sustainable development. As a result of the SDGs, the fifth goal is on gender equality. In the Bible, God calls women and men to all the positions of service and leadership in home, Church, and the world. Church being the body of people, which is built by Jesus on Earth with the Holy Spirit, should imbibe the teachings and actions of Jesus. Just as how Jesus considered women during His life on earth, the Church also needs to give respect and involve women in various Church activities. When we work together with all the members of the Church as Jesus wishes, the body of the Church grows. Church, being a transformative agent of society must have a space for women in the ecclesiastical world. The willingness of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, to be a vessel for God's Messiah son is inspirational. During a time when there was a law to stone the unmarried woman to death for adultery, Mary accepted God's will. This portrays Mary as a courageous woman who was ready to accept God's will, and live per God's plan. In this era also, women who are symbols of courageousness should be given more opportunities to serve God.

Experiences of Synodality in the Assyrian Church of the East: Participation of the Youth

Yousif Oishalim Amrw

For the youth of the Assyrian Church of the East, the term “synod” has a hierarchical meaning, specific to the episcopate, as the faithful recall the phrase when their local pastor reads to them the decrees of the Holy Synod. In certain ways, it is an accurate association of the phrase within the Assyrian Church of the East, as the “Holy Synod” refers to the meeting of all metropolitans and bishops at the order of the Catholicos-Patriarch¹. Although it may appear that the synodal procedure is reserved for the episcopate, in reality, the local hierarchs assemble the demands of their individual diocese and bring them to His Holiness the Catholicos-Patriarch and the members of the Holy Synod.

On the diocesan and parish levels, each diocese has its own youth association which is responsible for organizing youth activities; for example, every church hosts weekly meetings for youth during these meetings; there are spiritual talks; bible studies; open discussions for contemporary challenges and struggles; additionally, there are social and sport activities.

Also, leadership is encouraged in small levels at local churches, especially in the Christian education sector. For example, our Sunday

1. Traditionally, all metropolitans should gather with the patriarch once per year, and the ordinary bishops shall join with their brother metropolitans and the patriarch once every four years before the Great Fast (i.e., Lent). In the modern context, all the metropolitans and ordinary bishops assemble at the request of the patriarch, generally once per year. See M.J. Birnie, trans., *The Nomocanon of Mar Abdisho of Nisibis*, (Seattle, WA: unpublished manuscript, no date), pp. 104-105.

school programs depend on the youth to teach bible lessons, liturgical prayers, as well as our language Sureth (new Aramaic).

More recently, in order to ensure that the voices of younger members were not being ignored on both a synodal and local level, during the current primate's first synod as Catholicos-Patriarch, His Holiness Mar Awa III named the bishop of the Diocese of Western Europe to serve as chairman of the "Patriarchal Commission for Youth Affairs"².

Finally, the 2021 synodal decree on the appointment of a bishop to oversee international youth ministry was also a signal for His Holiness Mar Awa III's priorities as Catholicos-Patriarch. The appointment has already paved way for an international youth conference to take place in the Summer of 2023 in the city of the Patriarchal See, Erbil, Iraq, fulfilling the desire of His Holiness Mar Awa III for the youth to gather in the land of their forefathers.

Overall, the Assyrian Church of the East's synodal process is open to the youth through the participation of their local hierarchy, who acts as a representative of his entire diocese. The local hierarchy, as the father and administrator of a diocese, submits the requests, concerns, and wants of his spiritual children to His Holiness the Catholicos-Patriarch and his brother metropolitans and bishops for genuine discourse at the meeting of the Holy Synod.

2. Mar Awa III, Decrees of the First Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East Convoked by His Holiness Mar Awa III Catholicos-Patriarch, Assyrian Church News, Assyrian Church of the East, September 24, 2021.

Experiences of Synodality in the Church of the East – The Clergy

Oughin Azizianalikomi

Abdisho bar Brikha (+1318), in his Nomocanon, defines the ‘Synod’ for the Church of the East in a very specific way: “We call [a gathering] of bishops and metropolitans with the catholicos a ‘Synod’, yet if there is an assembly wherein there is no head who governs all in common (The Patriarch), it is not called a ‘Synod’¹.”

This definition doesn’t seem to leave any space for the direct participation of any rank of clergy or laity other than the Episcopal rank in the Synod of the church. Yet, the bishop who participates in this meeting in his capacity as the head of the church, represents all the members. For this reason, it is essential for each bishop to be attentive to the suggestions, critiques and needs of his members, and to present them faithfully to the Holy Synod. To do this, each bishop has to go through a preparatory process to present his church in the Holy Synod.

Abdisho, quoting the canons set by the ecumenical synods, says that every archbishop is expected to have a meeting with his bishops twice a year, and likewise, each bishop is to have a meeting with his clergy (a synod summoned by the chorepiscopoi) twice a year, and with his monks once a year. He mentions the reason for these meetings as follows:

Each action which takes place in the midst should be examined and adjudicated justly and uprightly, that through this we may have confidence in the ministry of our priesthood, and we may not, because of transitory affairs, bring a stain upon things which are not transitory².

The last historical synod in the church dates back to 1318 under Mar Timothy II. Sadly, since that time, as the consequence of the conversion of the Mongols to Islam, and later, by the establishment of

1. Abdisho Bar Brikha, Nomocanon, Book 1, sec.1, Ch. 1.

2. Abdisho Bar Brikha, Nomocanon, Book 2, sec.3, Ch. 11.

the Ottoman empire in the mainland of the church of the East, the church went through a long period of great persecution in which she couldn't continue her natural life. Many precious historical documents were lost in this period, which prevent us from having a better view on how the synodality, expressed in the canons of the church, actually lived. This makes any historical study about the life of the faithful of the church of the East very difficult. Also, since then, and for different reasons, the church wasn't able to summon new synods. The church is truly blessed to be left with a number of great historical documents such as Mar Abdisho's Nomocanon to allow her to connect herself with her past. This situation continued to be so until the year 1976, which was the year in which the patriarchal succession through the Shimon family was abolished. It was also the first patriarchal election after almost 600 years. This doesn't mean that there was no synodal life in the church during this time, but that there wasn't an organized synodal meeting in the Church of the East. The first Synod was held at the year 1976 A.D under patriarch Mar Dinkha IV.

So, in this sense, I think, although the Assyrian church of the East is an ancient synodal church, yet in a sense is a very young church in her practices of synodality but by the grace of God it has been able to recuperate the loss of an active synodical life quite well and has held a synod every 4 years since then.

Mar Aprim, Metrapolitan of India, calls Mar Dinkha IV's patriarchate, "a democratic patriarchate". By Mar Dinkha's command various parochial committees and autonomous youth groups were established in all Assyrian Church of the East parishes. These committees paved the way to a more direct and active participation of the faithful in the life and the leadership of their parishes and dioceses. Other than that, during his patriarchate, people's voice was for the first time heard and was directly taken in consideration in the Synodical gatherings of the bishops.

In the Holy Synod of 1978, the second Synod of Mar Dinkha IV, which was summoned in Baghdad, Iraq, since there was no bishop in Iraq at the time, His Holiness asked all priests and each parochial committee of Iraq to be present in the Synod and give their suggestions

directly to the Synod so that they could be discussed. Twenty-three priests, and even more laity, were present in that Synod.

In the Patriarchal Epistle to summon the Holy Synod of the year 2001 (Mar Dinkha's 8th Synod), His Holiness addressed the bishops by saying "We encourage that each of you consider the thoughts of your priests, deacons, and members of the various parish committees, we the prelates, are in need of the need of the various good and reasonable thoughts of the priests, deacons, sons and daughters of The Church."³

As a consequence of these policies, we see many examples in which the bishops summon meetings and listen to their faithful, especially to the clergy, and allow them to share their suggestions, concerns and hopes to be presented in the Holy Synod of the church.

During this preparatory process for each synod several meetings amongst the clerics are held, in which deeper theological, pastoral and liturgical questions are discerned between themselves. This happens, both at the parish and diocesan level, and when this is complete, all suggestions and decisions are sent to the bishop to be presented to the Holy Synod.

Apart from this, if the clerics of a certain diocese are not content with their bishop's activities, and have any complaint against him, they may summon a private meeting amongst themselves and send their suggestions directly to the Holy Synod. If necessary, some may be asked to be present in the Synod to defend their cause.

As an example, in the diocese of Iran, where I come from, before each Holy Synod (which is every four years), a general letter is sent by the bishop to announce the date of the next Synod to all members of the church.

Although in Iran no public meetings to discuss matters are held, nevertheless, the priests listen and welcome people's ideas and suggestions for a while. Once the deadline for receiving the ideas is reached, they sum-up all the suggestions that have been received and send them to the bishop's office. Other than that, a summary of the

3. Most Revd Mar Aprim, Mar Dinkha IV: The Man and His Message, Trichur, India: Mar Narsai Press, 2004, p. 200.

parish's situation and its activity in the course of the last four years is sent to the bishop.

The second step is a number of meetings regarding more profound theological, liturgical and pastoral questions in the church which are discussed among the clergy of each parish. Later, they are projected into a diocesan meeting of the clergy with the bishop. The suggestions or any questions that may arise from these meetings are studied and classified, and once they are deemed necessary, they are taken to the synod of the church by the bishop. An example of this point is Mass before baptism, which was seen as necessary, but now, not anymore. Or, when if Christmas happened on Friday or Wednesday, some people and most of the clergy would continue fasting.

In turn, once the Synod is finished, the new canons get to be read in all parishes and everyone becomes aware of all changes or new synodical laws, and are in power since they have been declared to the public.

So to conclude, All clergy of the church, according to their proper rank, participate in the ministry of their bishop in teaching, sanctifying and ruling the Church in their diocese. For that reason, their suggestions, critiques and hopes are of a great importance to be heard, and if necessary, presented to the Holy Synod. This may help the growth of their diocese, but can also affect the life of the church in general. This process makes sure that the Holy Synod of the Church is an authentic gathering of the whole body of the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic, Assyrian Church of the East, to answer the questions and difficulties that are raised since the last Holy Synod.

2.4. SYNODALITY IN THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

KEYNOTE

Synodality in the Coptic Orthodox Tradition

Anba Kyrillos

November 24, 2022~ Hathor 16, 1739

November 25, 2022 ~ Hathor 17, 1739

Martyrdom of St Mina the Wonder-Worker

Start of the Nativity Fast

The involvement of the whole people of God in the life of the Church is a fundamental aspect of Orthodox ecclesiology. St Paul clearly expresses this notion in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:11-16. The title of this presentation, “Synodality in the Coptic Orthodox Tradition,” presents some difficulties. While common elements and themes of synodality exist in the Coptic Orthodox Church, we typically do not speak of “synodality” per se. Instead, two other ecclesiological terms historically have been employed to convey the life of the members of the Church according to their different orders: *conciliarity* and *liturgy*. Thus, an exploration of these two principles will allow us to comprehend the notion of synodality for our purposes in the next couple days.

1. Conciliarity

Conciliarity, and the newer term of *synodality*, have similar etymological derivatives. Conciliarity comes from the Latin concilium and *synodality* originates from the Greek word, *synodos*. Both carry the meaning of “meeting” and refer more specifically to the ecclesiastical councils. σύνοδος literally means that which will lead to the common path or united way, and is translated as assembly, meeting, or coming together.

More specifically, Orthodox theologians define σύνοδος as “a gathering of bishops exercising a particular responsibility.”¹

A helpful starting point for discussing conciliarity in a manner that can be appreciated by both Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions is the communiqué of Pro Oriente’s Second Study Seminar on Councils and Conciliarity. This communiqué summarizes five theological consultations that took place between Roman Catholic and Oriental Orthodox theologians in Vienna from June 26 to 29, 1992 (more than 30 years ago). Since many of us were not present at that time, I would like to share the first five points of agreement stated in these unofficial consultations:²

The Church is by its very nature conciliar, being an icon in the created order of the ineffable Holy Trinity, three Persons in one *ousia*, bound together in the perfect communion of love. Conciliarity means more than councils. Conciliarity is communion (*koinonia*). Communion in conciliarity can continue even during long periods when no formal ecumenical councils are held.

This communion has two essential dimensions: (i) The vertical-transcendent communion of all members with the Triune God in the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit and (ii) the horizontal communion of all members in all time and all space with each other, a special aspect of which is the communion of the Church on earth with the heavenly Church. Without either of these dimensions the church would not be the Church.

This communion is above all a communion of love; where love is not present, communion cannot be real. This communion is participation in the Body of the one Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, crucified, dead and risen, ascended and seated at the right hand

1. Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, “Primacy and Synodality from an Orthodox Perspective, Paper presented at St Vladimir’s Theological Seminary on 8 November 2014 on the occasion of conferring an honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity.

2. Five Pro Oriente Consultations with Oriental Orthodoxy: The Vienna Dialogue on Councils and Conciliarity Second Study Seminar, Booklet no. 5, pp. 58-60.

of the Father; it is effected by the Holy Spirit, through faith and baptism-chrismation, through the Eucharist, and through sharing in the Apostolic teaching and witness, guarded, authenticated and pastored by the episcopate with the presbyterate and the diaconate, and through loving service to each other and to the world.

Conciliarity belongs to the essence of the Church. This conciliarity is expressed at various levels – in the eucharistic communion of the local church (diocese), with the bishop or bishops, and with the whole Church Catholic in all time and all space, as well as in local, national, regional and universal synods. In the local parish, the presbyter, as vicar of the bishop, is the focus of conciliarity. He exercises the ministry in conciliar fellowship with his people: the ministry of (i) worship, prayer and intercessions, (ii) of pastoral building up of the people, and (iii) of loving service to the world – all three aspects being marked by conciliarity. Furthermore, this consensus is expressed in its 9th and 10th points the following:

The Holy Spirit leads the Church into all truth, and the councils have played a major role in elucidating the revelation in the Lord Jesus Christ. Even when many members of the Church occasionally went astray as happened in the fourth century Arian domination, the Holy Spirit led them back to the truth. The Church is thus indefectible but can be called infallible only in a strictly qualified sense. There is no *a priori* guarantee that a council convoked to be ecumenical would not stray from the Truth and make wrong decisions. But the Holy Spirit always leads the Church into all truth and brings back those who have gone astray, after they have repented. An ecumenical council can play a major role in such bringing back, but it is not indispensable to the process. The indefectibility of the Church is a gift of the Spirit and not something automatically operative. Infallibility is a term of more recent origin, and in the Roman Catholic church is applied primarily to dogmatic formulations.

A council is a coming together (*synodos*) of the Church; bishops represent the fullness of the local church, but presbyters, abbots, deacons and laity also are present and help the discussion at ecumenical councils. Bishops sign the decrees of the councils as representatives of the local churches, but all believers can take part in various ways in the

deliberations, even if all cannot be present. All members of the churches have received the gifts of the Holy Spirit and have a responsibility to use these gifts for the upbuilding of the Church, and therefore in the conciliar process.

Using this consensus as a summary and basis for this discussion, there are some points that should be emphasized as they relate to the Coptic Orthodox tradition. The first point concerns the operation of the Holy Synod, the highest governing body within the Coptic Orthodox Church. Our Holy Synod is presided by the Pope of Alexandria and is currently comprised of all the bishops consecrated in the Coptic Orthodox Church – currently 136. This includes 26 metropolitans and two priests who are the patriarchal vicars in Alexandria and Cairo.

According to Apostolic Canon 34:

The bishops of every nation must acknowledge him who is first among them and account him as their head, and do nothing of consequence without his consent; but each may do those things only which concern his own parish, and the country places which belong to it. But neither let him (who is the first) do anything without the consent of all; for so there will be unanimity, and God will be glorified through the Lord in the Holy Spirit.

In matters that concern the whole Church, neither the patriarch nor any of the bishops individually or in limited numbers are granted the authority to make decisions or take action without the consent of the Holy Synod. In the specific instance of the absence of the patriarch – as in the case of the departure of the Pope of Alexandria and prior to the enthronement of his successor – the primary work and main efforts of the synod with the *locum tenens*, is to take the steps in the selection of the new patriarch. This process involves not only the synod, but the other clergy and laity. Other urgent pastoral issues may be dealt with while the patriarchal see is vacant, but the synod must actively be in the process of selecting a new patriarch.

Conversely, as stated in this apostolic canon, the patriarch does not have the sole authority to make decisions or decrees that affect the whole Church without the agreement and consent of the Holy Synod. His role as primate is to preside over the synod as having priority among the

bishops, his brothers in the apostolic service, but he has no right to overrule councils or the Holy Apostolic Tradition. Thus, each member of the Holy Synod has an equal voice and, as a mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit, faithfully expresses the Holy Apostolic Tradition.

In fact, in the unfortunate case of Pope Kyrillos III ibn Laqlaq (1235-43), the 75th Pope of Alexandria, the canons that bear his name were actually imposed upon him by the bishops of the Holy Synod. Moreover, two bishops – one of which was Bulus al-Bushi, one of the great Coptic figures of that time – were appointed to oversee his actions and without whose approval he could not make any ecclesiastical judgments in order to overcome and prevent any more of the corruption that had existed during that difficult era.³

At the same time, we should recognize that the bishop within his diocese has sole authority over the pastoral decisions and care extended to his faithful. When issues may relate to the entire church (such as for example liturgical calendar, certain liturgical rubrics, etc.) this must be brought before the Holy Synod. But a bishop has wide discretion within his diocese, as long as there are no deviations from the Orthodox faith.

The second point pertains to the authority of councils, in general. As recorded in the Holy Scriptures about the council of our fathers the holy apostles in Jerusalem, the authority of their decisions was based upon the direction of the Holy Spirit and the evidence of the Holy Tradition given by the Holy Scriptures. Thus, they declared “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us” (Acts 15:28). The decision is acceptable to the Holy Spirit and to our fathers the Apostles at the council. Likewise, the purpose of any later council should be to clarify,

3. See OHE Burmester, transl. and ed., *Canons of Cyril III Ibn Laklak*, LXXV Patriarch of Alexandria, *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte* 12, First Series (1949), pp. 81-136 and idem., *Canons of Cyril III Ibn Laklak*, LXXV Patriarch of Alexandria, *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte* 14 (Second Series) 1950-1957, pp. 113-150. See also Mark Swanson, *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt, 641-1517*, Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010, p. 92.

preserve, and defend that Holy Apostolic Tradition which was delivered throughout the centuries in the Church. Therefore, the authority of a council is not ultimately in its convening, its number of members, or its final decrees, but in its reception due to its divine direction and in having preserved the Holy Apostolic Tradition.

Moreover, it is the local reception of an ecumenical council which makes it authoritative and binding.⁴ This local reception, often complicated, painful, and lengthy,⁵ includes not only Church authorities, but the whole community: theologians, monastics, and laymen.⁶

The Coptic Orthodox Church regards the three ecumenical councils of Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus as infallible in matters of doctrine, especially in regard to the Creed of Faith. However, even though the Coptic Orthodox Church may accept a council as expressing and promoting sound doctrine, it may not have officially received the canons of that council. For example, the Council of Constantinople, 381, was eventually accepted by the Church of Alexandria only on the basis of its defending and promoting Nicene orthodoxy.⁷ However, Canon 3 – which designates Constantinople as “New Rome” – was never officially received. In fact, the Coptic delegation protested that this proposed

4. Bishop Hilarion (Alfeyev) of Podolsk, *The Reception of the Ecumenical Councils in the Early Church*, *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 47: 3-4 (2003), pp. 413-430, here p. 414.

5. *Ibid.* “The Nicene faith was fully approved only after fifty-six years of disturbances marked by Councils, excommunications, exiles, imperial interference and violence.” Yves Congar, “La réception comme réalité ecclésiologique,” in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 56 (1972): pp. 369-403, here p. 372.

6. *Ibid.*, E.J. Kilmartin, *Reception in History: An Ecclesiological Phenomenon and Its Significance*, in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21 (1984), pp. 34-54, here p. 38.

7. For further details on the Council of Constantinople, 381, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, and the late reception of the council in the Egyptian Church, see Shenouda Ishak, *Christology, and the Council of Chalcedon* (Denver, CO: Outskirts Press, 2013), pp. 436-445.

canon inharmoniously impinged the ancient privileges of the Bishop of Alexandria established in Canon 6 of Nicaea.⁸

Canon 28 of Chalcedon created similar turmoil for the West. Pope Leo refused to ratify Canon 28, it was struck from the records.⁹ Later, Anatolius of Constantinople wrote a letter of apology to the Pope for attempting the innovative canonical insertion.¹⁰ Thus, some Catholic theologians regard it unacceptable and heretical. Eastern Orthodox theologians, on the other hand, have argued this canon should be understood as a “contextual” canon, that is to be distinguished from “dogmatic” and “dead” canons;¹¹ or a “disciplinary” canon that is to be distinguished from canons related to dogma.¹²

When St James and St John asked for the privilege to sit at the right and left hand of our Lord, the other Disciples became “greatly displeased” until the Lord instructed them toward humble service of one another (Mk 10:35-45). Throughout the history of the Church, similar arguments and divisions have arisen over primacy, authority, and jurisdiction – divisions which we all must be committed to solve through prayerful discernment and obedience to Scripture.¹³

8. Canon 6 of the Council of Nicaea, 325: “Let the ancient customs in Egypt, Libya and Pentapolis prevail, that the Bishop of Alexandria have jurisdiction in all these, since the like is customary for the Bishop of Rome also. Likewise in Antioch and the other provinces, let the Churches retain their privileges...”

9. This canon was rejected by the papal legates in the 16th session of the council. The pope ratified the doctrinal decrees on 21 March 453 but rejected canon 28 since it ran counter to the canons of Nicaea and to the privileges of particular churches. Thus, it was not considered part “of the council.”

10. This letter of Anatolius to Leo is included in the collection of Leo’s Letters. Letter 101.3; JH 1006.

11. Archbishop Philip of New York, Canon 28 of the 4th Ecumenical Council: Relevant or Irrelevant Today?, in *Orthodoxy and the World*, Jan 24, 2009, https://www.pravmir.com/article_4.

12. Fr John H. Erickson, Chalcedon Canon 28: Its Continuing Significance for Discussion of Primacy in the Church, <https://archive.ph/ENxxH>.

13. See Ishak, *Christology and the Council of Chalcedon*, pp. 443-444.

2. Liturgy

The second term is liturgy (λειτουργία). Liturgy was originally understood in Greek culture as public service in a civil setting. Eventually, it came to mean common worship of the Christian faithful in the assembly of the Church. Typically, the term is associated with sacramental worship, but also refers to non-sacramental services such as the hourly prayers from the Coptic Book of Hours (i.e., *Agpeya*), funerals, Blessing of the Waters (*Lakkan*), etc.

The liturgical life of the faithful is not limited to public worship in the church building. The union of the Christian faithful extends outside of the congregational setting; such that any one member of the church through his/her personal worship is united (through prayer) to the rest of the faithful. One is united to all, and all to the one Body of Christ.

The most evident demonstration of this “liturgy outside of the liturgy” is the use of the Lord’s Prayer. When recited in either public worship or personal prayer, the words are said exactly as our Lord taught: “*Our* Father...give *us* this day...forgive us *our* trespasses as *we* forgive those who trespass against *us*...lead *us* not into temptation, but deliver *us*....” So, even if one member prays alone, common language is employed. As Cyprian of Carthage teaches:

Before all else, the Teacher of peace and Master of unity desires that we should not make our prayer individually and alone, as whoever prays by himself prays only for himself. We say neither: “*My* father, Who are in the heavens,” nor “Give *me* my bread this day.” Nor does anyone request that his debt be pardoned for himself *alone*, nor ask that he *alone* be led not into temptation and delivered from the evil one. Our prayer is common and collective, and when we pray, we pray not for one but for all people, because we are all one people together. The God of peace and Master of concord, Who taught that we

should be united, wanted one to pray in this manner for all, as He Himself bore all in one...¹⁴

Liturgy, whether public or personal, involves all the people of God. Each have a role and responsibility as participants in the worship and daily behavior as a member in the Body of Christ. During the diptych prayers of two most common Eucharistic prayers currently used in the Coptic Orthodox Church – the Coptic Anaphora according to St Basil and the Anaphora according to St Gregory – the deacon tells the congregation to pray for “the hegumens, priests, deacons, subdeacons, and the seven orders of the Church of God.” Even though there are many orders that have been enumerated in the Church, the presence of specifically seven orders has its roots in the earliest prayers such as the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and the Anaphora according to St Cyril (Mark). The former states:

We assert that everyone shall stand and confess and believe in what has been allotted to him by God; that is to say, the Bishop as a shepherd; the Elders as teachers; the Deacons as ministers; the Subdeacons as helpers; the Lectors as readers; the Singers as

14 .Cyprian, On the Lord's Prayer, 8. See also St John Chrysostom, Homily 19.6, On Matthew: “He teaches, moreover, to make our prayer common, on behalf of our brethren also. For He saith not, ‘my Father, which art in Heaven,’ but, ‘our Father,’ offering up his supplications for the body in common, and nowhere looking to his own, but everywhere to his neighbor's good. And by this He at once takes away hatred, and quells pride, and casts out envy, and brings in the mother of all good things, even charity, and exterminates the inequality of human things, and shows how far the equality reaches between the king and the poor man, if at least in those things which are greatest and most indispensable, we are all of us fellows. For what harm comes of our kindred below, when in that which is on high we are all of us knit together, and no one hath aught more than another; neither the rich more than the poor, nor the master than the servant, neither the ruler than the subject, nor the king than the common soldier, nor the philosopher than the barbarian, nor the skillful than the unlearned? For to all hath He given one nobility, having vouchsafed to be called the Father of all alike.”

psalmists with intelligence and with constancy; and that the rest of the populace should be hearers of the words of the Gospel according to discipline.¹⁵

For the purposes of this current discussion, I would like to emphasize two points related to the “seven orders of the Church of God.” The first is the harmony and interdependence of each of these orders upon each other. The harmony of the people of God is dependent upon their union with Christ not only sacramentally, but in the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives such that they grow in virtue and righteousness and have the mind of Christ (cf. Phil 2: 5). As St Paul writes, the different orders, gifts, and responsibilities given in the Church are:

for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him Who is the head – Christ – from Whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Eph 4:11-16).

St Ignatius of Antioch writes about this harmony and interdependence as a symphony that is directed by the bishop as the shepherd and ultimately by Christ, the Good Shepherd. In his letter to the Ephesians, he writes:

For this reason it is fitting for you to run together in harmony with the mind of the bishop, which is exactly what you are doing. For your presbytery, which is both worthy of the name and worthy of God, is attuned to the bishop as strings to the

15. Gibson, *Didascalia apostolorum*, Intro; cf. *Ethiopic Didascalia I* [doorkeepers elsewhere in the text]. Cf. also the Liturgy of St Mark: “all the orthodox bishops, elders, deacons, sub-deacons, readers, singers, and laity, with the entire body of the Holy and only Catholic Church.”

harp. Therefore, Jesus Christ is sung in your harmony and symphonic love. And each of you should join the chorus, that by being symphonic in your harmony, taking up God's pitch in unison, you may sing in one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father, that He may both hear and recognize you through the things you do well, since you are members of His Son. Therefore, it is useful for you to be in flawless unison, that you may partake of God at all times as well.¹⁶

Moreover, in the enthronement rite of the new pope of Alexandria, the enthroned patriarch reads from John chapter 10, where Christ states, "I am the Good Shepherd." A new liturgical custom began in 1959 when St Pope Kyrillos VI preceded this statement by saying "Our Lord said..." in order to recognize his submission to the true Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, the submission of the faithful to the clergy, and the source of our ecclesial unity is this. For the bishop (whether the rank of pope, metropolitan, or bishop) – and truly all other orders – are primarily subject to our Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Archpriest, and Shepherd of shepherds, the authority of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Apostolic Tradition.

However, just as the bishop is the shepherd of the flock appointed by Christ, he is also a member of that flock who must work with and be supported by the other orders with their unique roles and responsibilities in order to fulfill his apostolic ministry. In liturgical worship, the bishop prays for all of the orders of the church; and the deacon instructs all the faithful to pray for the bishops, priests, deacons the "seven orders of the church of God." So, each order of the church prays for all ranks of the church.

In fact, the seven orders of the church, as explained in Canon 10 of the Canons of Athanasius, are all essential to serve and work together for the glory of God:

Then Christ, the chief Shepherd and true bishop, shall crown them with crowns, beside Peter, His beloved, and count them among the number of the Apostles. But if their hearts become proud against the people or against the priests that are beneath them, then shall God

16. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Ephesians, 4.

humble them and shall not exalt them, but shall humble them the more – not only the presbyters but also the bishops that are made answerable for this saying and all those also that stand beneath the shadow of the altar, the deacons and the subdeacons, the readers and chanters, and doorkeepers.

For Wisdom has established Her house upon seven pillars. Seven are the perfect spirits of God in the Church: the bishops, presbyters, deacons, subdeacons, readers, chanters and doorkeepers. These, Zechariah calls the seven eyes of God [Zech 4:10], of which God says, He who touches them is as one that touches the pupils of his eyes. For the seven orders that we have named are the seven eyes of the Church; and what is the Church's Head but Christ? And they are the seven pillars upon which the Church is founded, of which the wise Solomon said: "Wisdom has built Her house and established it upon seven pillars."

After this, he speaks immediately to us about the bread and the cup, showing us that thereby he intends the Church, how She calls to the people who dwell in idolatrous ignorance saying, "Come, eat of My Bread (that is, the Body of Christ) and drink of the wine that I have mingled (again, that is the Blood of Christ)."

Do you not know, O bishop, that the Church is not established upon you alone, but also upon the other six [orders] of the Church? So, neither reject these nor despise them; rather honor them. For they are your fellow ministers with you. For the head should not say unto the feet, "I have no need of you," for the head below, which is no foot, is itself all foot (cf. 1 Cor 12:21-22, 17). Likewise, the bishop who despises the doorkeeper, deacon or chanter cannot govern their orders. How can he celebrate the mysteries and (at the same time) keep the doors, or how sing and (at the same time) receive the mysteries? Just as there is need of the head, so also necessity requires the feet...¹⁷

He then continues to relate the same to the priest to serve and edify the people, so that the Church does not suffer loss through Her children. This is also reflected in the liturgical rites, where each rank – the

17. Wilhelm Riedel and W.E. Crum, *The Canons of Athanasius of Alexandria* (Oxford: Williams and Norgate, 1904), pp. 20-23, edits mine.

celebrant bishop (or priest), deacon, and congregation – participates uniquely and distinctly. Moreover, in the Coptic rite, the bishop or priest cannot celebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist without the presence of a deacon (and strictly, one member of the congregation) on the basis that the Eucharist is a fellowship.

The second point regards the liturgical presence of the laity as an order in the Church. Of course, all the people of God are responsible for living their lives in Christ as members of His Body with all faithfulness and in submission to the hierarchy. Yet, they also play an essential role (along with the other orders) in selecting their bishop and shepherd who will care for them. The *Egyptian Church Order* – which bears striking resemblance to the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus – states:

Let the bishop be ordained being in all things without fault chosen by all the people. And when he has been proposed and found acceptable to all, the people shall assemble on the Lord's Day together with the presbytery and such bishops as may attend.¹⁸

The bishops (all together)¹⁹ consecrate the new bishop with the laying of hands. But the assembly of the faithful are involved in the original selection. In the liturgical prayers for the consecration of a new bishop the faithful also affirm the nomination by declaring, "Lord have mercy." In this way, they pray that God may support the new bishop in his apostolic service of carrying the burden that the Holy Spirit has called and appointed him. Once the bishop has been consecrated, the people then proclaim their joyful acclamation and submission by crying out, "Axios!" (i.e., "Worthy!").

Furthermore, concomitant with the honor and the authority of the apostolic service, the bishop has also received the responsibility and accountability of the flock to which he has been appointed before God. In the current rite, this is announced by the candidate with a vow declared before God, the altar, the hierarchy, and the congregation. The ordination prayers also accompany instructions to the candidate. In the enthronement of the Pope of Alexandria, the newly ordained is

18. Gregory Dix, *The Apostolic Tradition* 2, 2-3.

19. Apostolic Canon 1: "Let a bishop be ordained by two or three bishops."

instructed to teach and shepherd the flock of God with all faithfulness and truth because “their blood will be required at your hands” (cf. Ezk 3:18; 33:8).

In the regrettable situation when the bishop is at fault, especially in matters of doctrine and canon, the laity and other orders have the right (and, at times, the responsibility) to address the bishop in the matter. Under extraneous circumstances, the bishop can even be rejected by the congregation and deposed by decision from the Holy Synod. This was most clearly demonstrated in the rejection of the Melkite Patriarchs (Proterius, and his followers) who were imposed upon Alexandria by the Byzantine emperors in the aftermath of the Council of Chalcedon in 451.²⁰

Current Practice and Application

It has been the general practice of the Coptic Orthodox Church to encourage all the faithful (irrespective of age or gender) to be involved in the life of the Church. This involvement extends beyond their individual life in Christ to the family church at home, public liturgical worship, personal witness, education, and any service to humanity. While there are some liturgical services limited to the ranks of the clergy, the laity have abundant and ample participation, especially in the congregational responses.

Church (Parish) Board

On all levels of church administration, there is constant interaction between the priesthood and the laity, even if the laity are not directly involved in the final decisions. For example, within any parish there are multiple services that are ultimately under the direction of the priest(s)

20. For a detailed study of the events surrounded the imposition of Proterius in Alexandria, his death, and the resulting martyrdom of 30,000 faithful in Alexandria, see Ishak, *Christology and the Council of Chalcedon*, pp. 630-633. Also, Juvenal of Jerusalem, after having been a senior bishop for many years, was rejected by his own people after accepting the Definition and the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon to the extent that his return to Jerusalem occurred after two years and only with imperial military force. *Ibid.*, pp. 627-629.

serving that parish. However, those services have lay supervisors and several male and female servants in constant communication with the clergy. Therefore, the pastoral challenges, needs, and circumstances become readily apparent to both the lay servants and the priest. If the nature of the matter is pastoral, the priest may deal with this either individually or in conjunction with a lay servant or group of servants as appropriate. If the matter is administrative, it may be addressed through committee or the church board.

Servants in each parish includes a variety of ministries such as making the holy bread (korban), kitchen, festivals, special events, counseling, and construction projects. Each parish typically has various services provided for seniors, newcomers, and youth. The largest group of servants usually involves the Sunday school and youth meetings, which could reach well over 100 servants in a single parish.

The bishop of the diocese, as its shepherd, has the right to be involved in the pastoral matters. At times, there are situations in the parish that require the intervention of the bishop due to an unresolved disturbance or conflict over doctrinal, pastoral, or administrative issues. These matters are elevated to the bishop who, based on the situation at hand, may deal either personally or via reliable priests, deacons, or leaders, to resolve the issue for the sake of the faith and the peace of the congregation.

On the diocesan level, the metropolitan or bishop is often well-attuned to the circumstances of his flock from pastoral visits to parishes, families, and individuals, clergy meetings, debriefing by the priest and/or church board of a parish, as well as spiritual meetings and retreats with different groups and ages either for the whole diocese or in any parish.

Many dioceses also have an administrative board that is typically comprised of the metropolitan and/or bishop(s), priests, and prominent laity. This board exists purely for legal and financial purposes in the administration of the diocese. However, the metropolitan and/or bishop(s) meet regularly with the priests of the diocese to discuss spiritual, pastoral, and doctrinal matters that are pertinent on the level of the diocese. The decisions that are made in this diocesan synodal gathering are binding upon all the parishes and the faithful in that diocese. As mentioned earlier, this diocesan synod is bound by the

direction of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Apostolic Tradition, and the canons, rites, and practices of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Their authority and decisions lie only within the diocese and must be in agreement with the universal faith, canons, rites, and practices of the Coptic Orthodox Church at large.

Matters of doctrine, Coptic Orthodox Church canon, liturgy, pastoral concerns that involve the global church, or unresolved diocesan circumstances that are elevated to the secretariat of the Holy Synod, are dealt with on the level of the Holy Synod with the presidency of the Pope of Alexandria. The typical procedure that is used to determine which issues are to be discussed in the Holy Synod is that the Patriarch, metropolitans, and bishops submit topics of concern to the pope and/or the secretary of the Holy Synod who is elected from among the bishops every few years. The pope then determines which matters are to be assigned to the appropriate subcommittee for examination and discussion. The issues that are discussed in the subcommittees and are considered for further discussion and for a possible decision to be made are elevated to the general assembly of the Holy Synod. The decisions that are made in the Holy Synod are binding upon all the dioceses and the faithful globally, provided that they were under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and in agreement with the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Apostolic Tradition, and the canons, rites, and practices of the Coptic Orthodox Church throughout the centuries.

In its current membership, the Holy Synod is comprised of all the metropolitans, and diocesan, suffragan, and titular bishops in the Coptic Orthodox Church globally as well as the vicar priests of the patriarchates in Alexandria and Cairo.²¹ They all have an equal voice and vote in the decisions of the Holy Synod. Priests, deacons, and other laity who are specialists and scholars in any particular field may be summoned by the Holy Synod to address a matter that is under discussion, but they are not involved in the deliberations of the Holy Synod or the voting.

21. Historically, deacons and archons also attended councils.

Conclusion

While the term synodality is not typically used in the Coptic Orthodox tradition, similar ecclesiastical principles of the whole people of God involved in different levels of church administration readily appear when examining the principles of conciliarity and liturgy. While humanity is indeed fallible, the entire faithful submit to the one God of all, and labor to attain the fullness of Christ for their salvation through the direction of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scriptures, and the Holy Apostolic Tradition.

The priestly ranks serve the faithful out of love as fathers and the faithful are deeply involved in liturgical worship and the service of all in a loving obedience to God and to those whom God has appointed as shepherds and teachers over them. This intended harmony and interdependence of the seven orders of the Church of God create a structure and system whereby all are involved in and fulfill the proper doctrine, worship, and Christian behavior. Every morning in the first hour of the Coptic Agpeya, the faithful recall this principle of synodality written by St Paul:

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph 4: 1-6).

EXPERIENCES OF SYNODALITY – WORKSHOPS

“They Were All Together” - The Role of Laymen and Women in Synodality from the First Church to Our Church of the Present Time

Bishoy Sharkawy

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles is a Biblical reference to the dogma and rituals of the church since its very first centuries. It has been also a reference to help solving the problems that the church may face.¹ Therefore, we read parts of the Book of Acts in every liturgy of our Coptic Orthodox Church. We end the reading with “In this powerful way the word of the Lord was spreading and gaining strength,” (Acts 19: 20) which is a confirmation of the growing work of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

St Luke repeats the expressions confirming the oneness of heart and mind many times. This is because togetherness and oneness are considered a power activated by the work of the Holy Spirit that leads ministering, and it is precisely what the Lord Christ has asked for in the chapters of the Holy Spirit (Gospel of St John).²

“That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (Jn 17: 21)

The Coptic Orthodox Church arranged a kind of functional integration that occurs between the role of the laity and the Clergy institution.

1. <https://focusongod.com/Acts08s.htm>.

2. <https://www.koinoniachurch.info/2018/07/acts-1-early-church-christianity-unity/>.

Education

- Church education is a service that both, laymen, and women work out in the Coptic Orthodox Church.
- “When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miracles which he did, they listened in unity to what he said”. (Acts 8: 6)
- Sunday School teachers
 - Sunday school is considered a laymen’s project.
 - The Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church recognized the sainthood of Archdeacon Habib Girgis in 2018.
 - Service started with laymen then followed recently by women.
 - It was developed, had curriculums, structured to involve all ages till youth.
 - The Coptic Orthodox Church celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of Sunday Schools.³
- Theological Seminaries teachers
 - Theological Seminaries in our church are considered a historical continuity and extension of the historic Catechetical School of Alexandria of the 2nd and 3rd centuries.
 - The old School of Alexandria had deans from laymen:
 - Saint Pantaenus the Philosopher (181 AD): Greek theologians - had already evangelized parts of India by the late 2nd century.
 - Clement of Alexandria (190 AD): Christian theologian and philosopher
 - Origen of Alexandria (203 AD): (The greatest genius of the early church) Wrote roughly 2,000 treatises in multiple branches of theology
 - Didymus the Blind (340 AD): Taught for about half a century.⁴

3. <https://madareselahad.academy/>.

4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catechetical_School_of_Alexandria.

- The Coptic Seminaries are now more than 12 inside and outside Egypt. Teaching and learning are shared by laymen and women together with the clergy in those seminaries⁵.

Pastoral Care and Management

- Pastoral Care is a duty that both clergy and laymen and women work out in the Coptic Orthodox Church.
- “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.” (Acts 4:32)

Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical, and Social Services

- The Bishopric was established in 1962 to serve as the arm of the Coptic Orthodox Church (COC) in the field of Social Development.
- Most of the employees of the Bishopric are laymen and women of different ages and experiences (415 employees and 1200 volunteers).⁶
- Bishopric of Public, Ecumenical, and Social Services (BLESS) has a leading role in the diaconal services of the poor, underprivileged, and marginalized communities throughout Egypt.

1. Community development

- Primary health care program.
- Educational program: Literacy and improving the quality of education.
- Economic development program.
- Rural development program.
- Environmental program.
- Preventing violence against children program.
- Handicapped service program.
- Housing improvement program.
- Relief Program: Provides intervention to help victims of natural disasters.

5. <https://coptictheo.org/>.

6. <https://blessegypt.org/>.

2. Social Welfare

- Financial helping for widows.
- Patients of chronic diseases.
- Prisoners and their families.
- Orphans.
- Disabled individuals from elderly people who cannot work.

Church Schools, Hospitals, and Clinics

In the last 5 years more than 10 schools opened in Cairo and Upper Egypt.

Most of the dioceses in Egypt have their own hospital or even polyclinics, managed by a staff of specialized doctors aiming at serving all patients.

3. Decision Making

- Decision making is a responsibility that both clergy and laymen and women work out in the Coptic Orthodox Church.
- It seemed good to us, being assembled in unity, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul. (Acts 15:25)

Church Councils

The Role of the Church Council is:

- The participation of the priests in setting a vision and a plan for the Church in the financial and administrative fields.
- Overseeing church properties.
- Examining suggestions and complaints submitted and implementing decisions to resolve them.
- Appointing the employees.⁷

7. <https://st-takla.org/faith/regulations/church-council/duties.html> (translated to Arabic).

In the regulations of the Church Council formation:

- All the council members are laymen, and women to help priests of the church.
- The proportion of elected members shall be 70% of the total members, and the proportion of members appointed from the Ecclesiastical presidency shall be 30%.
- Its members have a diversity of expertise in the fields of engineering, legal, financial, administrative, and other fields.
- Women and youth must be represented in the council⁸.

Holy Synod annual seminar

It is noteworthy that the Holy Synod holds an annual seminar with the participation of experts whether clergy or laymen and women who present papers to the bishops explaining the main subject the seminar deals with.

Some of the important seminars were:

- Church Service: leadership and pastoral Care, 2013⁹.
- The Church: Towards a Better Future, 2014.
- Church Services and the Coptic Family, 2015.
- The Coptic Identity, 2016.¹⁰
- The Coptic Church and Other Churches, 2017.
- Our Coptic Church and A Future Vision, 2018.
- Bishops and Priests: Fatherhood and Sonhood, 2019.
- Towards a Developing Fruitful Church, 2021.

Counseling Courses for Priests

- Believing in specialization, the Coptic church has set up different institutes that provide specialized courses for priests, including family counseling and parenting advice on one hand, and church administration and leadership on the other.

8. <https://st-takla.org/faith/regulations/church-council/forming.html>.

9. <https://en.wataninet.com/coptic-affairs-coptic-affairs/coptic-affairs/the-holy-synods-decisions-during-the-past-year/940/>.

10. <https://en.wataninet.com/features/coptic-holy-synod-seminar-discusses-coptic-identity-sees-magnificent-coptic-library-open/26830/>.

- These courses are run by specialized laymen and women and many priests all around Egypt make use of those courses in the fields of service in their churches.

“If your gift is service, devote yourself to serving. If your gift is teaching, devote yourself to teaching.” (Rom 12: 7)

Experiences of Synodality of Women in the Coptic Orthodox Church

Odette Riad Abdelmeseh

*“There is neither Jew nor Greek,
there is neither bond nor free,
there is neither male nor female,
for you are all one in Christ Jesus”
Galatians (3:28).*

Thank you very much for your kind invitation to your esteemed conference. As the Coptic Orthodox Church, we are very happy to participate in such conferences to share our experiences with our sister churches, hoping to benefit from each other's experiences and visions.

Women in our Coptic Orthodox Church are blessed to live a very good life of synodality as their contribution to the church service is very wide and well-estimated. Women can play many roles in the church, from their teenage years to adulthood.

Here we will take a look at the pro-active role of women in the living synodality in our Coptic Orthodox Church:

First: In Sunday School

Young girls, and women in general, serve in Sunday schools where they can teach young children and teenagers; that is one of the women's most important role and services.

Many women also are heads of the Sunday school programs in each church.

Second In the Church Board

We find many women serving on the board of their churches, as they talk on behalf of women, they can tackle many problems concerning

many issues of women, and children and can be responsible for many things. Some boards have more than one woman representative.

Third: In the Council of Family Affairs

Women also exist on the council of family affairs; they can give advice and solve problems to help broken families to get back together. We have six councils inside and outside Egypt and there is a woman on each council; she is either a doctor or a lawyer.

Fourth: Nuns and Sisters

The nuns in the convents and the sisters outside convents are not only praying, as this is the main aim of their lives, but they are also helping their community as they can:

- a) Run schools and be responsible for teaching and raising young kids.
- b) They can serve in orphanages and take care of young orphans, dealing with all aspects of their lives (learning in schools, food, education, clothing, amusement, etc.).
- c) They also can work as nurses in hospitals.
- d) They do works in their convents related to food, sewing clothes, and embroidery by which they help needy persons and help their convents also.
- e) Nuns also have the right to vote in electing the Pope which was very clear in the election process of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II. They are nominated from their convents to vote for the election of the new Pope.

Fifth: In the Selection of Clergy

They have a large voice in the selection of each priest in a church. As the bishop/pope will hear from the people and receive acclamation from congregants before selecting a candidate for ordination. After selection, the bishop (or delegate) will ask the board members, Sunday school servants, and congregation members if they believe the candidate is worthy. During this exchange, many women voice their opinion and are well heard.

Also, we can see a large role women played in the selection of the Pope in 2012. Even the central committee that filtered the 5 candidates (from 17) had a woman representative.

Sixth: In Teaching

Now, women in the Coptic church can give lectures in the seminars of the holy synod, and they also have leading roles in giving lectures in the weekly meetings that are held in the churches to serve youth, women, and girls in the pre-marital period etc.

Seventh: In scouts

You can see girls and young women also serving in scouts where they can learn to take responsibility and are prepared to be future leaders. They have a very important role in arranging festivals, conferences, and meetings, even in the ones held by His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, one sees scouts arrange everything and His Holiness is very keen to encourage them.

Eighth: In Icon Writing

Now we can see many women and sisters who do icon writing in our church and this is a new field in which women can prove themselves.

Ninth: In Women's Meetings

Our Coptic church estimates the importance of women and gives them special attention as they are the core of the family and half of the society. We find that churches hold monthly or weekly special meetings for women that are served and attended by women to discuss all that is related to them: their spiritual lives, homes, problems, relations, raising children, work, etc. and they can study the bible and have many activities there.

Also, we see the wives of the priests who play a very important role in helping their husbands in their service as the wife of the priest is considered the mother of the people of the church. We know that His Holiness Pope Tawadros II when ordaining a priest, always asks his wife if she accepts that her husband be a priest, as her consent is very important. His Holiness is also very keen to make meetings with the wives of the priests like the ones made for the Gulf Priests' wives.

Tenth: In the Papal Residence

Also, in the Papal residence in Cairo, we can see five women working there as His Holiness Pope Tawadros II believes in the ability and importance of women. They are working as the Head of the papal office for projects that help in the health field by building hospitals, and in the education field by building schools, also responsible for the papal residence media office that serves in the official website of the Coptic Orthodox Church and its application, they are also responsible for the service of helping the sick people.

Eleventh: In the Parliament, and as Ministers

Christian women who are at the same time church servants, now serve our country in the parliament and as ministers, and that is considered as a great estimation for women from our motherland and from the church too.

Challenges we face

As in every field, we face some challenges as we need more women and girls to serve with us to reach more people, especially in the very far areas because it is as the bible says “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few,” (Luke 10: 2) but we are working on it to help women everywhere. Also, we need more efforts to be exerted to prepare young youth girls to be leaders.

As for Our Aspirations: We have great aspirations, one of them is that women in the Coptic Orthodox Church can have a more synodal life with other sister churches, especially in social activities, so we can benefit from each other’s experiences and deepen the relations between our churches and widen the scope of service so we can help more people.

At the end of my speech, I would like to thank you so much for your attention and time, and look forward to more fruitful discussions, and sharing together our opinions and experiences.

Experiences of Synodality from a Coptic Youth Perspective

Joseph Younan

Introduction

I would like in the beginning to thank you very much for the opportunity to give an ear to the Coptic Church, especially her youth, to share their views on synodality in the Coptic Church.

Synodality is an organic and natural feature of the Coptic Church. In other words, synodality is not a foreign intrusion or a new invention to the life of the Church, but it emerges from within the very nature of the Church.

Leading the next generation of leaders has always been at the heart of our Church, since the early Church of the New Testament. We see this in St Paul's advice to his disciple, St Timothy, the young bishop, to deal with the "younger men as brothers" (1 Tim 5: 1), and respect their personalities and thoughts.

Although the Coptic Church is a hierarchical Church, which means it has a Synod, Pope, bishops, priests, and deacons, its power comes from being a popular church. It is a church that comes from the people, and the power of the people is the youth. Wisdom, unity, and faith come from older generations, but energy, dreams, and hope come from younger ones.

Introducing some historical background

Historically, St Athanasius, the Apostolic 20th Pope of Alexandria was enthroned as the Pope at the age of 26 years old. In modern times, in 1946, Metropolitan Mikhail of Assiut was ordained at the age of 25 years old. In our current Holy Synod, some of our bishops got ordained in their mid-30s and even younger (Bishop Gregory, 38 years old; Bishop Basil, 33 years old, ordained in 2018). In brief, if the Church finds a

person capable of filling a certain leading position, their young age will not be a problem.

Current Situation

Some practical ways of the process and how youth are included in the decision-making takes place in real life. The Coptic Church gives special care for training and teaching the youth. This requires in her pastors the ability to speak and listen to the young generations in a way that helps them grow in Christ.

Practically speaking, in the Coptic Church, we live synodality organically in our daily life and I cannot confirm it with better proof than that the average age of employees and servants at the papal residence is 30 years old, among whom five of them are women.

Moreover, the youth in our local churches can choose their priests and vote for their members of church boards. The Holy Synod, led by H.H. Pope Tawadros II, changed the by-laws of choosing the board of each church, and it is stated now that the board of the church is formed by election and must include a youth representative.

Leadership is encouraged on small levels in local churches, especially in the Christian education sector (Sunday school movement). Our Sunday school programs depend on the youth of the church in all activities.

Another successful experience is the creation of a bishopric for youth. In 1980, His Holiness Late Pope Shenouda III saw the need to allocate an episcopate to serve young people (i.e., a Bishop for Youth Affairs). For that reason, Bishop Moses was ordained. Later, seeing the growing need, in 1997 Pope Shenouda ordained another one, Bishop Raphael, to assist Bishop Moses in serving the Youth. Later, Bishop Pavli was ordained to serve the youth of Alexandria. The Coptic Church established in 2014, the Coptic American Canadian Youth Bishopric to serve the Coptic youth there.

On the diocesan and parish levels, every church hosts weekly meetings for youth, yearly youth conferences and retreats. During these activities, there are spiritual talks, Bible studies, prayer meetings, as well as open discussion for their contemporary challenges and struggles. For

example, in 2018, the Coptic Church, under the guidance of H.H. Pope Tawadros II, hosted the first Logos Coptic Youth Forum for Coptic Youth from Egypt and all over the world. More than 200 youth gathered under the theme “Back to the Roots”. The 2nd Forum was held in 2021, and the 3rd Forum was held in August 2022. In July 2022 there was a Youth Conference for all of Europe (20th conference) that the Pope attended. In September 2022, there was a Youth Conference for North America Coptic youth. Most importantly, at the end of each forum, the Youth’s ideas and recommendations about the Church and our daily life problems and concerns are presented to the Holy Synod. This included their views, suggestions, and questions such as the Christian family, atheism, same-sex marriage, homosexuality, etc. These ideas are discussed in the Holy Synod of the Coptic Church in their meetings that are held twice a year, in May and November.

Challenges and Hopes

One of the pressing questions of the youth today is how can they face the different cultures they live in? Although the Coptic Church was founded in and has its home in Egypt, today there are thousands of Coptic churches all over the world, with millions of believers from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. After the church grew and the ministry consequently expanded, 2nd and 3rd generations have a new need for the youth to have a Coptic church accommodate their culture. According to the Holy Synod, under the pastoral care guidelines, if the new generation is in need of a church to accommodate their needs and culture, it is given to them to open a new church.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to share experiences of synodality from a Coptic youth perspective, and we are ready to learn from other church traditions and their synodality.

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them” (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Synodality in Coptic Monasteries

Mercurius Elmacari

Our Monasteries Today

At present, Coptic Monasteries consist of large communities of more than one hundred monks or nuns. Each are under the care of an abbot, and have a piece of land belonging to the monastery, which is generally in the desert, with few exceptions. The most common work for us is agriculture and raising livestock (monastics could perform this “miracle” of reclamation of the desert, which was the dream of Egypt along the ages), from which we sell the products in order to live from the income, and also assist poor families from this income. The farmlands are divided into small plots of land and a monastic takes responsibility for its cultivation along with some farmers, or could have another job or service inside the monastery.

The Daily Schedule

The daily monastic rule consists of prayer, meditation, and biblical studies, which is also balanced with work as well. Our daily life begins at 4 am, with 2 hours of common worship and praising God, mostly chanted in the Coptic language. Work begins after the morning prayers until our common meal at noon. Around sunset, the day ends with the Vesper prayers from the Psalms, after which we can go to bed early to be able to wake up early the next day.

Flexibility

Our daily life is flexible. Each monastic has their own job allowing them to use their time as they see. Some of us work hard for almost 10 hours per day, some 8, others 6, some 4 or 2 hours, and use the rest of the time in prayer, meditation, and spiritual readings. Others, for instance, the hermits, do not do physical work at all but spend their day on spiritual works. Everyone according to their gift or talent, with the agreement and

the blessing of the abbot, arranges their work schedule. It is common for a younger monastic, still in their twenties or thirties, to work longer hours and then slowly work less as they get older in order to pray and meditate more.

All of us live together in one monastery under the leadership of one abbot. We are in need of each other and complete each other. The hermits need those who work hard to provide for them something to eat and drink, and vice versa those who work hard need those who pray and meditate a lot to keep the main monastic target clear for them. Those who like to read need those who like to write and vice versa. Moreover, those who prefer a solitary life need those who welcome the families when they visit the monastery. Simply stated, we live together, we need each other, and complete each other.

The bond of the monastic members

With all this diversity in personalities and attitudes, we can ask: what unites or binds the community? The only bond that connects all the monastic members without any shade of doubt is *love* and it works like the thread which connects all the rosary beads together. If *love* is strong, the monastery would be like heaven. All are connected, happy, active, and feeling the fulfillment of their call. If it weakens or disappears, then monastics would suffer psychologically and spiritually, and many problems could arise among them.

How does this love remain and last?

All the monastic pioneers and fathers like the Egyptian Saints Anthony and Macarius, or the western Saints such as St Francis of Assisi and all the others have emphasized *love*. They knew and taught that the only way to maintain and keep this *love* alive is to keep our personal relationship with God alive and strong as much as possible.

As Christians, we believe that *God is love*, and know by experience that He is not only *love* but *the source of love*. If a monastic gets involved in their work or service more than their spiritual capacity, and thus neglects or disregards their personal relationship with God, they would find their capacity to forgive lessened bit by bit. They would not be able

to have room for the differences between themselves and others, finding themselves easily irritated, criticizing everything, seeing only the negatives of the situations, until the point that they would not be able to love anymore. Even those whom they loved in the past, now they see only their defects and faults, and in time, this poor monastic would change into a body of hatred, which burns themselves and those who are around them.

All of this could occur because of the absence of this sole factor; namely, the personal relationship with the source of *love*, who is God himself.

For each individual of the community, and on account of the monastic community as a whole, if the dominating quality is *love*, this monastic community will flourish in quantity and quality. On the opposite realm, though, if it decreases, this monastic community will certainly shrink, decline, and fade away over time.

Now, I can summarize my humble vision for synodality as love.

2.5. SYNODALITY IN THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX TEWAHEDO CHURCH

KEYNOTE

Understandings and Practices of Synodality in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

Daniel Seifemichael Feleke

Brief Introduction about the EOTC

The introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia began by the conversion of the Eunuch, the treasure high official of Queen Candace of Ethiopia, who went to Jerusalem to worship the God according to the long and existing practice of the Old Testament. According to the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 8:26-40, cf. Zephaniah 3:10). In this manner the seed of Christianity was planted, and gradually stretched out into the state of Axum in Ethiopia and its surroundings.

Eusebius, the church historian wrote that the treasure of Candace was the first fruit of Christianity throughout the world.

He ... received the mysteries of the divine word from Philip in consequence of a revelation, and having become the first-fruits of believers throughout the world, he is said to have been the first on returning to his country to proclaim the knowledge of the God of the universe and the life-giving sojourn of our Saviour among men... so that through him in truth the prophecy obtained its fulfillment, which declares that “Ethiopia stretcheth out her hand unto God” (Eusebius Pamphilus: Church History).

Irenaeus of Lyon also mentioned that Simon Backos preached to his countrymen¹, and the same witness is made by Origen of Alexandria.

The introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia is also attested in the story of the Apostle St Matthew who preached the Gospel in Ethiopia,

1. Irenæus Adv. Hær. III. 12. 8.

and spent his life in Ethiopia. The early church historian Rufinus and Socrates stated that “when the Apostles drew lots to preach the Gospel to the pagans, the Apostle St Mathias drew Persia and St Matthew Ethiopia ². On the bases of such evidence, numerous paintings and literatures developed, for instance in the Church of St Matthew found in Pisa, in northern Italy, there exist paintings depicting how the Apostle Matthew preached, lived and died in Ethiopia. These paintings were portrayed by an Italian artist Francesco Trevisan (1650-1740) and Marco Benefiale (1688-1764). Consequently, Christianity was persevered in Ethiopia by the inhabitants since the apostles’ time, until it was officially proclaimed in the 4th century, and fully constituted in all its canonical forms.

This is actually without mentioning the practice of Christianity of many Roman Christian merchants and long distant Caravan traders who adhered to the same apostolic Christianity, while doing their business temporarily or permanently in and around Axum, such as the Portal cities along the ancient trade routes. There are 2nd and 3rd century ruins of churches and temporal prayer houses in ports of Ethiopia such as *Adulis (Zula)*, where Christian merchants had openly practiced their religion. These have definitely impacted the citizens in many ways.

However, until now, we haven’t found evidence to confirm the full presence of the faith within the daily life of the citizens, and none of these stories have made permanent, sustainable and ground-based form of Christian religion in the country. Christianity was then officially installed and became the state religion in Ethiopia in 331 AD. The true feeling of the people who first received Christianity seems to have been expressed in the names they bestowed upon Frumentius, which are, “Abba Salama, Kassate Brahan (father of peace and revealer of light).

But the phenomenon was not branded a new beginning in the country. The new Archbishop named Selama (formerly, Frumentius, a Greek Citizen with Syrian Origin who was born in Tyre, Lebanon, though ethnically a Phoenician, according to Rufinus), had become a student of a certain Philosopher named Morephios. One day, while voyaging on the Red Sea, the ship he was on suffered major damage,

2. Socrates and Sozomenus Ecclesiastical Histories, p. 57.

though he and his partner, Aedeius, survived while their teacher died. Then, being made captive they became members of the royal court in Axum. When they were granted freedom to leave Axum, Frumentius passed by Alexandria to report the religious situation of Axum, by saying:

Ethiopians, they have FAITH but they don't have BAPTISM, they have DEVOTION but they don't have PRIESTHOOD, then he convinced St Athanasius Patriarch of Alexandria to send missionaries from His Place. St Athanasius convened His Synod, discussed with the Scholars as well as fathers and agreed to teach and consecrate Frumentius Himself as the Archbishop Metropolitan and send him back to Ethiopia.

This was a moment for the official introduction of Christianity as the State religion as well as the official connection of Ethiopian Christianity with the Alexandrian Orthodox Synod. It was the foundation for both the understanding and experience of Synodality in the Ethiopian Context.

Due to the active involvement of the leaders of the Kingdom, the staunch contribution of Scholars, the nature of the Capital City of the kingdom (Axum), in particular, as a very active city whereby more than at least three languages were spoken and written, Christianity quickly matured, even during the difficult time where the same Patriarch Saint Athanasius faced problems with the Arians, in 356 AD. The Arian Emperor Constantius, who sent a letter addressed to the two brother kings of Axum concerning the Archbishop Frumentius, after deposing Athanasius, installed Arian bishop George of Cappadocia in Alexandria. Theophilus of Socotora, who brought the message, reported that the kingdom is loyal to the faith of Saint Athanasius, and the request was rejected by the Ethiopian kings and Frumentius remained in Axum and continued the orthodox teaching.

By doing this, the Ethiopian Monarch demonstrated their strong loyalty to the creed of the Council of Nicea (325 AD) and their support to Saint Athanasius. Hence the King ordered the engraving of the Creed on the Stone in three languages and erected it in the center of the city.

Due to the strong connection with the Alexandrian Synod, especially before the invasion of Egypt by the Arabs, it has been proved

that all scriptures were translated, and Christianity was fully preached throughout the nation. The 6th century traveler Cosmas Indicopleutes (Κοσμάς Ἰνδικοπλευστής) who copied Greek 4th Century inscriptions of Ethiopia described Axumite Ethiopia as it was totally Christian. His book (Christian Topographies in 547/49) Χριστιανὰ τοπογραφία 547-49 provides a sketch map of Ethiopia, its Red Sea activity, and described the monument of Axum, two towns, churches, monuments and clerical buildings. These were achieved not only with one Archbishop sent from Alexandria, without a locally organized episcopal synod, but with an indigenously organized council of Scholars and monks, which I will elaborate more.

Understanding and Experience of Synodality

The Ethiopian Church believes that the nature of the Church is synodal; synodality is one of the central and most important parts of the Church which has been preserved since the time of the Apostles. It is both a theological and canonical foundation for the nature, constitution and mission of the Church. It has never been misplaced from its dignity and vitality in the history and tradition of the Orthodox Church, whereby its primacy and superior positions are also well-maintained. Synodality and its canonical structure is not limited to the highest Apostolic administration of the Church. It also touches the entire body of the Church, whereas the Apostolically-founded episcopal/Archepiscopal Synod is as the superior legislative, administrative and spiritual high-level jurisdiction is restricted to the Successors of the throne/see of the Apostles.

For the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the Holy Episcopal Synod is the spiritual body that works according to the leadership of the Holy Trinity. It is infallible and responsible for preserving the existing life of the Church, and bringing new directions for the future of the Church. Our understanding of the Holy Episcopal Synod is as a superior, governing authority of the Church, whereby all ecclesial matters are carried out, the existing canons are preserved, and new rules/canons are issued as part of the old one. The Holy Episcopal Synod is archive of all church property. For all properties and legacies of the church. The Church preserved the utmost importance of the

ecumenical and local synods of our Tradition, and most especially, the first three ecumenical synods have vital position in our tradition. Proclaiming the faith defined in these synods is also the center of liturgical, evangelical, theological and social life of the Church.

We believe that it is through the Holy Synod that Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ led the Church, where each member has important position equally. With the presence of the Lord, as he was with His Apostles, the Church proclaims its duty distributed to each member of the synod who have the same authority like the Apostles.

Synodality defines the life of the church in any generation as well as the continuity of ecclesial succession. It manages theological purity, it preserves the holistic memory of the Church from the very early time until today and also in the future. Furthermore, Synodality is the source of new canon, new life, new mission for every generation. Synodality is the breath of the Church that assures she is the eternal and mystical body of Christ; it is the single body that defines the unity of the Church.

While in the Creed we say we believe in One, Holy, Universal and Apostolic Church, the utmost meaning of the statement is realized in the synodal nature of the Church of Christ. The synodal structure maintains the dignity of the Church and protects the flocks from the wolves in one standpoint. Synodality also preserved the sacredness of all scriptural, liturgical, sacramental, and intellectual legacies of the Church, its properties and graces wherever it be. Synodality assures the spiritual and social responsibilities and cosmic duties of the Church.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church practiced the episcopal synodal structure from the See of Saint Mark. There was no episcopal synod or synod of bishops and archbishops led by its own patriarch that is based in Ethiopia until the 20th century, but the synodal structure was functioning in many ways through the entire life of the Church. The archbishop, or metropolitan assigned from Alexandria since the time of Saint Athanasius was a member of the Holy Synod of the See of Saint Mark.

Together with a single archbishop from Alexandria, the council of native scholars, devoted abbots of great monasteries, spiritual leaders of the Christian community have preserved the unity and mission of our

Church with all its dignity. In most cases, the role of the Alexandrian metropolitans who were assigned to Ethiopia from time to time - and sometimes their assistants (monks and sometimes episcopos - was limited due to several linguistic and cultural factors to the ordination of clergies and consecration of new churches/altars.

Consequently, there are locally organized councils of scholars and leading abbot monks who have very extended roles, even in leading the royal court legal, moral, and foreign activities of the nation. Therefore, Ethiopians were able to develop their own form of liturgical and hymnological traditions and monastic spirituality that constitute Alexandrian, Syriac, Armenian, and Cappadocian spirituality, with indigenous aspects. The Anaphoric or Eucharistic tradition that ranged from Hypolitus, Apostolic tradition, to Saint Basil, Saint John Chrysostom, the two Gregory's, and other Syrian literature including local compositions at large. They also developed a huge ecclesial tradition of scriptural interpretation, mystical poetry, unique iconographic and liturgical building tradition, various pilgrimage sites in and outside of the country (including Jerusalem and the Holy Land), and carefully documented martyrology and the like.

Two important things at least strengthen Ethiopian Understanding and Experience of Synodality

First: The Synodal Connection with Alexandria and spiritual ties with the entire Christian world, especially through our presence in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, our Monastery in Deir Sultan, and the official diplomatic connection of our Christian kings with the rest of the world, facilitated membership with the Synod of the See of Saint Mark that our faith is valid, our priesthood is acceptable, and all forms of worship, all sacraments are then valued and so guarantee our salvation. Hence, within the nation, the history of our church synodal structure involves kings, scholars, monks and laity.

Second: The present canonical books as the source of authority, are an addition to the Holy Bible, but also a part of the Holy Bible. For us, the Holy Episcopal Synod, after the Apostles, is the continuity of the synod from the time of the Apostles. All the decisions of which are preceded by the Apostles are important in the life and ministry of the

Church, to the extent they are the extensions and parts of the New Testament Books. Without contradicting the 27 books of the New Testament as enumerated by Saint Athanasius, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church also counts the eight books of Canon; The Alexandrine Sinodos (or Clementine Heptateuch) or collection of Church Orders of earlier texts dates from the 4th or 5th century³ four were translated from its Greek source as early as the 4th and 5th centuries. These are known in Ethiopia in different names. The first four are called the Books of SYNODOS: the book of Church order divided into 4 sections, Ser`atä Seyon (30 canons), Te'ezaz (71 canons), Gessew (56 canons) and Abtelis (81 canons). Sinodos MSS contains more material than this, and their content and order are rather variable. The Book of Clement (Qälëmentos) is arranged in seven parts. The Book of the Covenant (Mäshafä Kidan) is counted as 2 parts. According to Rogers Cowley, who studied their comparative content with other sources, stated that the Ethiopian Didascalia (Didesqelya) is a book of Church order in 43 chapters, distinct from the Didascalia Apostolorum, but similar to books I-VII of the Apostolic Constitutions. I brought this discussion not to speak about the history and the content of these venerable books which are counted in the New Testament canonical books of the Bible, but to speak of these books as our instructions which guide us how to be canonical and venerably synodal. *Based on the Apostolic Constitution Article 85:*

Let the following books be esteemed venerable and holy by you, both of the clergy and laity.... Constitutions dedicated to you the bishops by me Clement, in eight books; which it is not fit to publish before all, because of the mysteries contained in them⁴.

3. Bradshaw, Paul F. (2002), *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, Oxford University Press, p. 88.

4. According to the Apostolic Constitution Article 85 “Let the following books be esteemed venerable and holy by you, both of the clergy and laity. Of the Old Covenant: the five books of Moses – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; one of Joshua the Son of Nun, one of the Judges,

The canons in the books are living instructions that discipline our contemporary Christian life in the model of our predecessors, that guarantee we will end in the same paradise; that enable us to solve contemporary problems and affirm good things in the same tradition.

More than everything they are a living proclamation and affirmation to measure the good and bad action without the actual presence of the Episcopal Synod in the Nation.

The struggle to have Episcopal Synod in Ethiopia

The destruction of Ethiopian civilization at the dusk of the Axumite dynasty brought considerable damage in the historical antiquity of our country, but without any alteration of the national dignity the capital of country moved from Axum to Lasta Zagwe⁵. The rise of internal conflict for nearly forty years of persecution causes several problems in the service of the Church, through decreasing the number of clergies, persecution of the faithful, and the temporary termination of relationship with the Coptic Church of Alexandria. As a result, the usual appointment of the Archbishop from Alexandria was interrupted. This made the number of ordained clergies to be minimized. In fact, there are also times that some challenges happened that did not satisfy the requirements of

one of Ruth, four of the Kings, two of the Chronicles, two of Ezra, one of Esther, one of Judith, three of the Maccabees, one of Job, one hundred and fifty psalms; three books of Solomon – Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs; sixteen prophets. And besides these, take care that your young person's learn the Wisdom of the very learned Sirach. But our sacred books, that is, those of the New Covenant, are these: the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the fourteen Epistles of Paul; two Epistles of Peter, three of John, one of James, one of Jude; two Epistles of Clement; and the Constitutions dedicated to you the bishops by me Clement, in eight books; which it is not fit to publish before all, because of the mysteries contained in them; and the Acts of us the Apostles.”

5. Parallel to the fall of Byzantine Empire, and the massive expansion of Islam, the Ethiopian Axumite kingdom also fell due to several reasons. However, Christianity was preserved in the Horn of Africa, being isolated from its synodal and Patriarchal connection with Alexandria, which suffered the same fate.

the Alexandrian Church, especially when it was influenced by its provincial or Central Moslem Governors. The periods we stopped synodal structure were called “dark ages”, due to lack of spiritual leadership⁶.

During this miserable time, the Ethiopian Emperor’s request for an archbishop was deprived by the Alexandrian Coptic Church for about four consecutive Patriarchs following Patriarch Qosmos III. Hence, the Emperor in 965-1005, Jan Syum, sent a letter requesting the appointment of an archbishop through the mediation of the Nubian king George, the request was answered after so many years and Archbishop Abune Daniel was sent⁷.

The emperors of the Zagwe Dynasty thus tried their best to solve such problems. Especially Emperor Harbie Saint GebreMariam did his utmost effort to have our own native Archbishop. He realized that the archbishops who came from Egypt have many difficulties in understanding: on one hand, the Muslim governor’s interference to influence the country’s Christianity; on the other hand, problems related to the culture and language of the country, which isolate them from the people. The attempt to have a native archbishop, and the formation of Ethiopia’s own synod was first agreed, but soon the request was refused because of some non-canonical issues.

After Emperor Harbie, the next King and Saint Lalibela made considerable effort, he asked Metropolitan Michael of his time with his colleague to consecrate a bishop of the new Capital, Roha, the New-Jerusalem. Based on the Apostolic Constitution, in the course of time, with additional requests of the Queen, Saint Meskel Kibra Metropolitan Michael consecrated a bishop to the capital and named the bishop as Yirdea Michael. This was recorded in the Hagiography of Saint Lalibela,

6. John Baur stated that Ethiopian’s Dark Age is the time between the advent of Islam (640AD) and the restoration spiritual relationship with Alexandria.

7. Between 918-1002, the Ethiopian church could hardly get a bishop. This was due to the pressure from the Moslems in control at Cairo whose aim was to propagate the teachings of Islam in Ethiopia and elsewhere in the world.

as well as in the report of Metropolitan Michael to the Patriarch of Alexandria as soon as he returned back to Cairo after a few years of Apostolic ministry⁸.

In the course of time, many more efforts were made even after the 13th century. King Eskindir in the late 15th century asked for the appointment of numerous archbishops. He did this by referring to his grandfather, King Zera Yacob who brought two archbishops from Egypt. This was recorded by the Portuguese traveler of the time called F. Alvares. Emperor Yohannes IV (1871-1889) succeeded to make the first local synod with four Coptic archbishops. Although the Emperor asked for one archbishop and the consecration of several Ethiopian bishops, the Coptic Holy Synod decided to appoint four Egyptian bishops, appointed to give service in four dioceses.

In the early 20th century, Empress Zewditu sent the same request which was presented to Patriarch Kerllos V, who died before responding to the Ethiopian request. In 1928, Patriarch Yohannis XIX consecrated one Egyptian archbishop and several Ethiopian bishops. Finally, the 110th Egyptian Archbishop Kerllos appointed four Ethiopian Bishops in Cairo. The Coptic archbishops sent to Ethiopia lived in the country until their death. Unless there was a special condition, they were never to leave the country once they were appointed.

Soon after the Ethiopian archbishopric was given to indigenous scholars, the status of the archiepiscopate developed into the status of an autonomous Patriarchate. The first Patriarchate, His Holiness Abune Basilios, Patriarch of Ethiopia, consecrated numerous Ethiopian bishops, and was the first Ethiopian patriarch, followed by his Holiness's successor, His Holiness Abune Theophilos, who also consecrated Ethiopian bishops to serve the Ethiopian church all over the world. The tradition continued for the next five Patriarchs until now, and today we have the sixth Holy Patriarch, His Holiness Abune Matthias I, Patriarch of Ethiopia, Archbishop of Axum Echegue of the See of Saint Teklehaymanot, who is the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church all over Africa and the world. May the God of our holy fathers

8. A. Khater, O. H. E. Burmester, History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church.

preserve the unity, integrity, sovereignty and overall ministry of the Church.

Contemporary situations and final remark

The Holy Synod of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo church comprises archbishops and His Holiness the Patriarch. We thank God that the division that was caused by political regime changes is now solved, and that we now have one Synod. As His Eminence Khajag Archbishop Barsamian said: the parallel word to synod in Ethiopian is “Gubae”, and the Holy Apostolic Synod is referred as “Gubae Abew Papatat”. In the Creed of Nicea, Apostolicity is translated as “Gubae Zehawariyat”, Synod of the Apostles.

All bishops are members of the Holy Synod, and the Holy Patriarch is the chairperson who presides over the Holy Synod. The election and enthronement of His Holiness is not a separate ordination. We have only three levels of priesthood, and episcopal ordination is one of them. In the synod, the role of the Holy Patriarch is to lead the Holy Synod from the chair, and to represent the Holy Synod. According to the Apostolic Canon, the bishops are not to act without the primate, nor the primate without the bishops. There is no synod meeting without the Holy Patriarch.

Currently we have about seventy dioceses, one-third of which are oversees in diaspora and among people who adhere to the faith of the EOTC. All bishops and archbishops are members of the Holy Synod. According to the decision of the Holy Synod, members can change their diocese which they were originally assigned, and they also can lead institutions such as monasteries, universities, and the development of organizations.

The Holy Synod follows its canonical tradition as a source of authority and also issues the constitution that defines its position in the Church and in the world. Accordingly, the Holy Synod is the assembly of bishops and archbishops, chaired by the patriarch, and not accountable to any super social or governmental power in the world and the like.

The Holy Synod has two types of assemblies: the general assembly of the Episcopal Synod, which happens regularly twice a year, and anytime whenever necessary.

The permanent Synod, or the standing episcopal synod, meets every week, collecting all agendas from all walks of Church life. It lives and works together with all hierarches and structures of the Church. Matters that need the attention of the general synod will be forwarded to the general episcopal synod.

In October of every year, one of the annual assemblies occurs (our liturgical year is from September – August – Pagumen). A week before the assembly of the Holy Episcopal Synod there is a general assembly that involves all Church diocesan representatives of the laity, youth, evangelizers, parish council vice administrators (usually laity), etc. The resolution of the general assembly will be endorsed by the synod and will be part of the decision of the General Synod. Actually, every diocesan bishop/archbishop must perform in the respective bishopric's diocesan council as input to these global meetings.

At the parish level, we have a parish council that is based on the assembly of believers within parish life, which is the most important spiritual/social formation of the Christian community. This creates “Atbia” (or parish), and means the smallest assembly whereby all the villagers - and at least a single church - must be there. This will form the “parish administration council” that comprises the clergy, the laity, and the youth. It models the early life of Christian sharing and caring.

There are particular responsibilities of the Synod apart from Legal, Administrative, Canonical primacy such as the election and consecration of bishops, the consecration of the Holy Myron, authorization of holy books, and the like. The Holy Spirit is always the guide to all works of the members in formulating all consensus and voting. And the part of the members their communion is expressed as “One Heart and One Mind and one Word” (እንደ አንድ ልብ ሙከረ እንድ አንድ ቃል ተናጋረ).

Structurally, the head office or the patriarchate is like the executive body under the Holy Episcopal Synod. There, we have a General Patriarchate without using the term “synod”, the executive council made

up of all important departments, institutions, and organizations, led by an archbishop appointed by the synod every three years.

There are important assemblies in the patriarchate, such as a scholar's council, a spiritual court assembly, a monastic council concerning important ancient monasteries, and the like. These assemblies and institutions, such as academic centers and the development commission, are directly accountable to the Holy Synod.

Finally, the Holy Synod is also responsible for Church ecumenical life, to the relationship with other faith-based organizations as dictated by the Holy Synod, and we have a very close relationship with all oriental Orthodox Churches.

Since the 1950s, there has been a synodal mutual participation between the Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The protocol agreement is renewed during the patriarchal leadership of His Holiness Abune Paulos I (Ethiopian patriarch) and His Holiness Pope Shenuda III (Coptic patriarch) that involve participation with voting during the election of Patriarchs in both Coptic-Ethiopian Synods, and as concerning the sacraments, like the Blessing of the Holy Myron. In the same way, we have a deeper relation with the Malakarian Syrian Orthodox church of India. Hence, synodality is not limited to the one Oriental Orthodox Church. In our case, it also involves the family of the Ancient Oriental Orthodox Churches. The Oriental Orthodox Heads Meeting in Addis Ababa in 1965, facilitated by His Majesty Emperor Haile Sellasie, can be mentioned as one outstanding example that enabled all Heads of the Oriental Orthodox churches to meet almost 1600 years since the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in the 5th century and we hope to continue the same journey in the future.

EXPERIENCES OF SYNODALITY – WORKSHOPS

Synodality in the Experience of the Laity in the Context of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC)

Nigussu Legesse

1. Introduction

Ethiopia was introduced to the Christian faith by the Ethiopian eunuch who was baptized by the apostle Philip (Acts 8). The Ethiopian Orthodox Church was founded on a synodal level in 331 AD. The first bishop of the church was Frumentius, a Syrian by birth, brought up in Ethiopia in the palace of Axum. He went to Alexandria and returned after being consecrated as bishop by Saint Athanasius. The faithful in Ethiopia call him Abba Salama Kassate Berhan (Father of Peace and Revealer of Light). Nine saints from the Middle East and Asia Minor migrated to Ethiopia 150 years later. They introduced monastic life, translated many religious books from Greek, Syriac and Armenian into the Geez language. Since the schism of 451, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church shares the same faith with the Coptic, Syrian and Armenian Orthodox Churches and the Syrian Orthodox Church of India (Tewahedo is a word that reflects the Ethiopian understanding of one nature).

The church has suffered greatly from various religious persecutions down the centuries. The reign of Yodit in the 9th century lasted for nearly forty years and caused great damage to the life of the church. The invasion of Mohammed Gragne (the Left-Handed) in the 16th century was even more destructive. Again, during the 17th century, the church suffered persecution at the hands of the Jesuit missionaries led by Alphonzo Mendez and his followers. During the fierce five-year struggle against the invasion of Mussolini from 1935 to 1940, several bishops,

many priests, and thousands of faithful lost their lives. More than 2,000 churches were destroyed and numerous church manuscripts were looted.

Since 1950 the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has been autocephalous. The church has 81 canonical books and 14 anaphoras used frequently during the liturgical calendar. The language of the divine service is Geez, the ancient language of Ethiopia. Today, however, portions of the liturgy are also rendered in Amharic. There are seven official fasting periods: (1) all Wednesdays and Fridays (except during the 50 days after Easter); (2) the Lenten fast; (3) the Neneh fast; (4) the vigils or Gahad of Christmas and Epiphany; (5) the fast of the apostles; (6) the fasting of the prophets; (7) the fasting of the Assumption.

The supreme authority in matters of church administration and justice – legislative, administrative and judicial – belongs to the holy synod which meets twice a year, under the chairmanship of His Holiness the Patriarch. The diocesan archbishop is the chairman of the diocesan parish council. The national parish council meets once a year in the patriarchate, also under the chairmanship of the patriarch. The church has two kinds of clergy: the regular married priests, who administer the sacraments in every urban and rural parish, and the monastic clerks, who are mostly serving in the monasteries. There are lay scholars and ordained clergies who are entrusted with the chant of the church offices and teaching in the schools. There are more than twenty clergy training centers, one theological seminary, four theological colleges, thousands of traditional ecclesial schools and one Theological University.

The current administrative structure has been most conducive for both the clergy and the laity to meet the vital needs of the whole human being and to work together for the development of the church, both spiritually and socially, through the respective parish councils. The Sunday school program unit is very active.

2. The Hierarchy

The hierarchy of the Ethiopia Orthodox Tewahedo Church is directly related to the early tradition and within the living tradition of the ancient Apostolic Orthodox Church. As such, it is continuous with the tradition

born witness to in the Scriptures and the hierarchy of the early Church. According to the apostolic leadership structure of the EOTC, the Holy Synod is the highest governing body. It is responsible for all affairs of the church in the spiritual, social and developmental engagements of the church. The synod is mandated for the issuing of all rules, regulations and the organizational nature of the church.

The hierarchy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church consists of the traditional three orders of episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate. Of these three orders, the episcopate is most central/top, and it is by the same that hierarchical continuity is preserved in the Church. The administrative structure, as defined in the Qale Awadee (Ecclesiastical Constitution or a bylaw of the Parish Council), is issued by the Holy Synod to be instrumental for the formation and regulation of a parish. From this perspective the laity has three seats in the parish leadership within the parish council.

3. Episcopate

The Episcopal continuity is the primary factor in the apostolic succession of the Church. It signifies the call and commission of the Apostles by our Lord, as well as the transmission of the apostolic faith. The Church is a Church of all ages and the apostolic succession is the link that binds them all to our Lord. Since the Church maintains the Apostolic faith and is 'sent' by the Lord to proclaim it (Mt 28:19-20), the Church itself is Apostolic. The Apostolic ministry of preaching and of administering the sacraments is exercised in the Church. The episcopate is a concrete symbol of the Apostolic succession, and it keeps the Church united on the principle of ministerial leadership.

4. The Hierarchy and the Laity

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church shares with many other Churches the belief that the Royal Priesthood of Israel and the Aaronic institutional priesthood was one of the backgrounds of New Testament priesthood. God chose the tribe of Levi to be distinguished from the eleven tribes – to be specific, on the priesthood. Our Lord also chose his apostles to carry the Gospel into the rest of the world. Yet, just like the people of

Israel called to serve God, in the same way the people of the New Covenant constituted in daily life and ministry of the church are also called to serve in various capacities within the formal canonical and administrative structure of the church as defined by the Holy Synod. All those who are baptized within the Church are members of this mission of the Christian community.

Following the ancient custom of the Church, in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the laity have never ignored the life and mission of the church. The Ethiopian Church tradition teaches that there is no complete mission and administration of the Church without the active participation of the laity. Until today, the major as well as executive constitution, guidelines, and policies of the Church, boldly acknowledge the importance of laity in the mission, synodal life, and administration of the church. The canonical collection of the church “Fitha Negest” also devoted one full chapter to the laity and their role.

5. The Laity and their roles: The Meaning of “Lay”

The words lay, laity, layman come from the Greek word *laos* which means people. “Laikos,” layman, is the one who belongs to the people, who is a member of an organic and organized community. It is, in other words, not a negative, but a highly positive term. It implies the ideas of full, responsible, and active membership, as opposed, for example, to the status of a candidate. Yet the Christian use made this term even more positive. It comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament where the word *laos* is applied ordinarily to the *People of God*, to Israel, the people elected and sanctified by God Himself as *His* people. This concept of the “people of God” is central in the Bible. The Bible affirms that God has chosen one people among many to be His particular instrument in history, to fulfill His plan, to prepare, above everything else, the coming of Christ, the Savior of the World. With this one people, God has entered into a “covenant” – a pact or agreement of mutual belonging.

Similarly, in the EOTC the laity are the people of God and are responsible for preserving the integrity of the faith as much as the bishops. The laity are called to live by the same Christian moral standards as the clergy. They both are expected to participate in all the worship

services and keep the various days and seasons of fasting and feasting. The clergy are the sacred priesthood, where the laity are among the royal priesthood. The clergy cannot conduct formal worship services without the participation of the laity, and the laity cannot perform the same services without the clergy to lead them. Each play a very important role in the liturgical and administrative life of the church.

In the EOTC context, the parish council is the leadership regulation named as “Qale Awadee”, and literally represents “the sound of the bell ring”. It is the main document published under the supervision and approval of the Holy Synod to be used in every parish. Accordingly, the laity have two major roles in this aspect. The first one is to fully utilize the three seats in the parish council, and the second is to be elected as the deputy chairperson of the parish council, a position next to the head of the parish, which is the seat reserved for the participation of the laity. In every parish within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the lay person leads the parish church next to the Head of the parish who is an ordained priest. The council, which is elected every three years, comprises basically the clergy, the lay, and youth representers. Among these administratively elected seats, three members are from the lay, and the representative of the youth, usually from the Sunday school, may or may not be lay.

In addition, the laity have the right and obligation to participate in the two major committees of the parish, including charity, all socio-economic developments, as well as other important positions within the life of the parish. In such a manner, lay participation is mandated by the Holy Synod, allowing the laity to have a strong connection in the life and mission of the synodal church. Such a line allows the laity to have a direct link with the synodal structure, as well as to play a role in the synodal leadership as the executive body of the church. In the same way, during the weekly meetings of the parish life, the lay play an important role in all decision making. It has to be noted that those lay positions do not exclude the participation of women. The lay person can be man or woman. During the quarterly or periodic meetings of the district council, whereby selected members of various parishes in the same district meet, the lay quota is preserved. This is also practiced in the biannual diocesan meeting, chaired by the diocesan bishop or Archbishop, as well as in the

annual global council meetings of the church. They are represented from all dioceses.

6. The lay members of the parish Council

The Parish Council of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) is the governing administrative and executive membership of the church. According to the constitution (Kalawadi, the parish council has various objectives, including to care for the apostolic mission, social service, and development participations of the Holy Church, and to expand and enrich her services in order to encourage her followers to hold firm to the faith and morals of the Christian life. Its vital roles extend toward the maintenance of proper administration of the finance and property of the church, to register the clergy and laity, to ensure the proper performance of all spiritual services, the safety and survival of the clergy, and the provisions of the poor. Finally, it is concerned with the proper utilization/control of income and expenditure, as in accordance with the budget, as well as the preparation of financial and activity reports at the Annual General Meeting. The Parish Council is accountable to the Archbishop of the Diocese and to the Global Parish General Assembly of the EOTC.

Therefore when the laity participate in all levels of such councils, they will carry out responsibilities such as to preserve the holy church and perform its services, to organize the church servants' activity, to improve the lives and living standard of the church service, to play a role in the evangelical mission to increase the number of followers and to see the followers being developed by spiritual knowledge, ethics and Christian life, and to improve the church administration in order to make the church independent.

Furthermore, the council ensures inclusivity of men, women, youth, the disabled, and the marginalized, in the life and mission of the church where the laity plays a better role. Also, the laity are instrumental in church expansion, church growth, construction of church buildings, fundraising, and developing a monastery. The laity are also instrumental in mobilizing and organizing the different segments of the orthodox population through their interventions in various structures of the church, including the parish council, Sunday schools, Abinet (traditional

church schools), youth organizations, women societies, etc. Furthermore, their participation and leadership in the family, parish council, Sunday schools, etc., is indispensable.

Along the vertical structure of the church, the laity also has the right to take important positions within the Dioceses, Archdiocese, and General Patriarchate. The lay professionals have always been in various important positions; for example, there are professional positions such as finance, development, audit, legal counseling, printing press, media service, general service, human resource administration, and the like, which are mostly carried out by lay members of the church. This position will allow the laity to participate in the administration council at all levels.

Experiences of Synodality with Regard to Women in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

Elizabeth Amde Teklearegay

This paper attempts to discuss ‘Experiences of Synodality with Regard to WOMEN in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church’ (EOTC), one of the oldest churches in the world, which dates back to the acceptance of Christianity by the Kingdom of Aksum in the year 330 AD, under the auspices of the Holy Synod¹.

About 50 million Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia, by many measures have a much higher level of religious commitments and participations. As such, 78% of them attend church services at least once a week, 65% pray daily, 98% say ‘religion is so important in their lives’ and 87% fast during Lent. Accordingly, women comprise slightly more than 50% of the total Orthodox population².

Experiences of Synodality with regard to women in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, has long been manifested through their apostolic duties and assumptions, ranging from ordained deaconate services to divinely glorified sainthood activities. It should, however, be noted that since time immemorial, they have been restricted from becoming deaconesses. The status quo, however, might need to be critically examined by the Holy Synod.

Apart from those, in the day-to-day apostolic duties, there is also a good number of women laities experiencing synodality in various social and religious structures of the Church. Women’s experience in synodality in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church has yielded

1. Arada Ghelawdewos, *The Ethiopian Orthodox: History, Doctrine, and Challenges*, 2017, pp. 2-3.

2. Aba Gorigorios, *የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋህዶ ቤተክርስቲያን ታሪክ*, Tinsae Zegubae 1984, pp. 11-25.

positive contributions to the evangelical services the Church is conducting locally and worldwide.

Female Laities Involvement in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

Experiences of synodality regarding women in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) goes back many centuries. Their involvement and participation, however, have long been within the canonical framework of the Church. Their roles have been limited to non-major clerical duties. As such, diaconate, priesthood, and all other clerical assumptions and duties alike, are not bestowed upon them.

It is to be noted that the experiences of synodality of women in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is highly characterized by apostolic traditions of the Church and always under the auspices of the Holy Synod.

1. In the Holy Synod

The Holy Synod involves women's role in the realization of its aims and objectives in the following main ways:

Mobilizing and organizing various sectors of the Orthodox population through their intervention in various structures: i.e., Parish council, Sunday schools, Abinet schools, Youth organizations, Women societies, and so on.

In addition to the above, women play a very important role in the nomination and voting of candidates in the Holy Synod. As mentioned earlier, they comprise a little more than 50% of the total Orthodox population. Hence their positive impact in this regard is quite high. Besides doing so, they are very much glorified in choosing their spiritual fathers.

2. The Church's Canon

According to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church canon, there are three specific categories in which women could experience synodality. These are:

Office of Deaconess

As mentioned above, the services of women as deaconess has long been interrupted and can no longer be referred to.

Office of Widows

The status of widowed women could sometimes extend to becoming nuns, and their services could also change accordingly. Their ministries normally range from common services like prayers and charitable works to those specifically assigned by nuns residing within the premises of the church, usually performed by virgins as describe below.

Widows could also participate in various church structures such as the Parish council. It should also be noted that widows are not ordained assumptions. They are joined by personal vow.

Office of Virgins

Virgins are also joined by personal vow – they are not ordained duties. Their experiences of synodality are also numerous. Virgins differ from widows in their nature of intervention. They are mostly full-time, dedicated duties in and around the church. They could confirm more or less similar duties like participation in the Parish council, as widows. However, there are some specific duties to be performed by virgins only as per the rituals of the Church, and they should shoulder their responsibilities and carry on their duties through their entire nunhood. Here are listed and elaborated some of their special duties specifically assigned to them:

- Assignments in managerial and related duties at various offices of the patriarchate, regional apostolic offices and charitable organizations.
- By virtue of their nunhood and full-time dedication to the church, or rather lifetime dedication, they will be assigned to perform the following duties which strictly require them living permanently in the church. They assume a title known as ‘Aqabit’.

Their duties are:

- Firstly, preparing consecrated bread and wine to be used for communion.

- Secondly, preparation of daily or weekly bread.
- Thirdly, preparation of the holy water to be used after the usual church services.

3. Traditional Apostolic Schools (Abinet schools)

The virgins sometimes undergo theological training and education that take quite a number of years and so specialize in specific studies. Their educational accomplishments are usually approved by a jury of experts in that specific field of study for accreditation by the church. They will then become qualified teachers.

4. Monastic Services

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church organized and established women's convents and monasteries. Most of the virgins may tend to lead monastic life; besides doing the usual prayers they have rooms within the premises where they help orphans and elders. To accomplish this, they generate income by making use of their various skills, such as handcrafts, paintings, fundraising events, and so on.

They usually display their products for sale within premises, and also distribute to traders in the market, or do so through women and youth associations during monthly and annual church celebrations in different parts of Ethiopia.

In conclusion, as discussed above, women exercise synodality in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC) in many ways. The role they play in participation and leadership, in family, Parish Council, Sunday schools, and so on, is indispensable.

By virtue of God, women are better positioned to link their families with the Church, starting from the baptism of their babies at the 40th and 80th day for baby boys and girls, respectively, after birth.

They are the caring wives, nurturing mothers, valuable leaders, at Parish councils and beyond. They are also good motivators and organizers. As such, they do a lot of apostolic services at the grassroots level. In fact, they have the opportunity to interact with a wide network of society, and thus make a positive contribution so as to fulfill their

charisms and spiritual values. They are highly instrumental in the realization of the decisions and directives of the higher body of the Church and the Holy Synod.

To round up, the visibility and presence of consecrated services of women in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church reveals the high level of experience in which synodalism is reached, and it's considered to be a prime factor in the Church.

Participation of Youth in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

Alula Lemma Habte

Introduction

The word synodos is a Greek word meaning “syn,” “fellowship,” and “odos,” “way” or “journey.”¹ A synod is a gathering of many people, and in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church context, it means an assembly of bishops and archbishops. Since the church is one body of Christ with many members, the synod describes the journey of unity and harmony of these members on the same road. In Orthodox Christianity, one Lord is worshiped, we are born in one baptism, and we live in one hope. This faith is expressed in the Holy Synod, a meeting made by God so that the unity of the believers who believe in Him and travel to His kingdom will not be polluted by the thoughts and ideas that arise from the world.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is a synodal church. This means the EOTC is a church whereby all members of the church, from laymen up to the level of the archbishops, come together in accordance with their authority and ranks to discuss the religious, administrative, and spiritual services of the church. The Holy Synod, that is to say, the “Episcopal assembly”, is the highest authority that has the final say on matters of church affairs. Accordingly, every member of the church plays a part according to their abilities and ranks and is involved in the implementation of the decisions passed by the highest bodies of the church hierarchy.²

1. Kalistos Ware, Synodality and Primacy in the Orthodox Church, *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 10:1 (2019), p. 23.

2. The structure of the church hierarchy is divided into four parts. The first is the Holy Synod. This body is led by His Holiness the Patriarch of the EOTC and

The traditional church scholars of the EOTC comment on the foundation of the Holy Synod as it was started when our Lord Jesus Christ gathered together with the Apostles on different occasions. Moreover, the three sequential meetings of the Apostles after the resurrection of Jesus Christ are also considered the first synods.³ These are:

- The gathering that takes place to appoint an apostle in the place of Judas. (Acts 1:15-16)
- The meeting to ordain the seven deacons. (Acts 6:1-6)
- The council that was done to solve the problem that arose between the Gentiles and the Jews. (Acts 15:1)

One of the main missions of the Orthodox Holy Synod is to nurture the young generation faithfully and morally, thereby narrowing the gap between the old fathers of the church and that of the new generation. Therefore, the fact that one of the objectives of the church is to focus on

adopts decisions regarding the overall affairs pertinent to the Church, enacts laws, and is the successor to the Seat of the Apostles, which is led by the Holy Spirit. As such, it is the last and highest authority, or the most authoritative body, in the EOTC. The second is the Head Office of the Patriarchate, which has the power to lead or oversee the executive and administrative functions of the Church. It is the highest authority of the church and is bestowed with the power to oversee the implementation of the decisions passed by the Holy Synod, deal with administrative matters, and coordinate spiritual services. As such, it is one of the highest organs in the church hierarchy. The office has more than 15 departments and organizations. It analyzes and presents religious and administrative matters that need to be considered by the Holy Synod. The third body is the diocese's office, which is entrusted with the task of coordinating the activities of parish churches, follows up on their work, and is composed of many departments. The last one is the parish church council, which is administered by representatives of the priests, laymen, and youngsters that follow up on or oversee the spiritual, and administrative issues of parish churches and oversee the execution of various decisions.

3. Archbishop Gerima, *Teachings of Doctrine*, 2013, pp. 289-290.

the young generation is something that has been enshrined in the bylaw of the Church. It says:

Laymen and particularly youngsters who have inherited the religion, dogma, traditions and rituals from their forefathers are expected to protect and uphold these heritages and promote them through Sunday schools as well as the modern schools.⁴

A church that does not take care of the young generation may have its future jeopardized. As such, the church is conducting educational programs to help youngsters learn about their church and understand its true nature.

To this end, the EOTC Holy Synod has been helping youngsters organize themselves and promote their religious activities through Sunday schools.⁵ This objective has been promulgated in accordance with Article 15 of the church law. It has also established departments headed by an archbishop so that young people could discuss their issues with clergies and help the church, as well as learn from their synod activities through experience.

The objective of this paper is to elucidate the experience and participation of youth in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. I consider three areas to be the experience of youth in synodality; namely, administrative, canonical, and worship. In addition, the purpose of this article is to review the administrative structure of the EOTC and demonstrate the involvement of the youth in the synodal structure.

Administrative

One of the experiences of youth in synodal affairs is administrative participation. It is known that the administrative responsibility of the church is focused on expanding the true religious life, changing the lives of the believers, and maintaining their spiritual life. Although the service

4. Article 15, 2014.

5. The Sunday School service in the EOTC was started during the time of the 2nd patriarch, when he was administrator of the Holy Trinity Cathedral in 1944. It was organized under a central office at the level of a department in 1971 under the same patriarch, His Holiness Abune Theophilos.

provided by the church organization and hierarchical management and the work performed are different, as long as it is based on the law of God and the order of the church, it is in the service of a church. One of those who implement this responsibility of the church is the Sunday School Coordination Department.

The Sunday School Coordination Department is one of the members of the administrative committee that is following up on the day-to-day activities conducted by the main office of the administrative body. It examines and presents issues related to the education, service, and spiritual life of young people to the Holy Synod. It is also one of the bodies that is entrusted with the implementation of decisions taken by the Holy Synod.

This function is also repeated similarly at the parish church, where the youth representative is among the members of the parish council that manages the parish church. The task is to make spiritual education accessible to the youth by strengthening the Sunday school, monitoring the spiritual life of the youth, and giving joint advice and making joint decisions on issues that need a step-by-step decision. It is a place where experience is gained in resolving issues through mutual consultations, which is standard practice. It is also a place where Sunday schools are consolidated, the spiritual life of young people is given attention, and matters that require decisions are resolved. During the national annual general assembly of the Parish Council, Sunday school delegates of all parish churches speak for the youth and have an important role in the decisions taken by the assembly.

Canonical

The second expression of youth participation is in the area of canon. Young people play a big role in implementing the decisions of the Holy Synod concerning synodal matters that are brought to its attention and in accordance with the prevailing structure.

These young Sunday school students have a decisive role to play in exposing members who were hidden within their organization while working for Protestants and are carrying out negative activities that hurt the church. They also have an important function in bringing to the

attention of the Holy Synod documents and pictorial evidence that will be used whenever the need arises for taking decisions according to church dogma. This will increase the participation of young people by setting up mutual learning platforms so that the beliefs and canons of the church are protected. They also take part in the voting during the election of the patriarch and the recruitment of archbishops by identifying potential candidates to be nominated.

Worship

Last but not least, one of the activities of the young people is to participate in worship. It is known that worship is a universal manifestation of the Orthodox Church. In this regard, the participation of Sunday school youth is extensive. On the one hand, they participate in the worship of the Sunday church, evangelism, and monthly and annual holidays by providing spiritual service on a regular basis.

During monthly or annual religious celebrations, these young people take part by chanting religious songs and hymns in their choirs, studying together in groups, preparing religious costumes, and staging spiritual shows for the occasions. In addition to this, young church members are engaged in public celebrations by adding light and color to the occasions. The actions carried out by the young members of the church have, in addition to their spiritual values, contributed to turning these actions into international attractions as intangible world heritages.

Conclusion

In conclusion, despite the fact that young people take part in church activities in a variety of ways, the aforementioned three instances highlight their synodal involvement with the EOTC. In order to increase their participation, it is thought that a series of awareness-raising activities and trainings on the idea of synod and the administrative framework of the church can produce positive effects.

Experience of Synodality in Monastic Life in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

Daniel Seifemichael Feleke

Monasticism was introduced in Ethiopia not long after its creation in the deserts of Egypt by Saint Antony the Great. The tradition has a very deep respect and highly venerable position within the social, political, educational, artistic, spiritual, moral, theological, etc., life of the Church.

The first bishop of our country was also the first to introduce monasticism to the nation, immediately after his consecration as an archbishop metropolitan to Ethiopia by Saint Athanasius of Alexandria. Soon, Ethiopian monasticism was linked to Syriac, Armenian and Eastern Constantinople monastic traditions through various mechanisms. The continuous pilgrimage to Jerusalem by the Ethiopian Orthodox faithful, and the coming of various monastic groups, played the most significant role to enrich Ethiopian monastic traditions.

Many monasteries, due to their excellent academic status and influential social position, were favored by the then emperors and rulers. On the contrary, there were a group of monks who were very strictly following the rule of Pachemious and other archaic forms of monastic regulations, such as the communal regulations of Saint Baselios the Great and other leaders.

The most dominant monastic houses of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church were founded by indigenous (Ethiopian) monks; namely, those of St Abune Iyesus Mo'a of Debre Hayq, St Abune Tekle Haimanot of Debre Libanos, and St Abune Ewastatewos of Sarae. Later, the monastery of Waldiba was founded by St Abune Samuel. All of these and other monasteries derived their origin from the nine saints.

Monasteries are commonly identified as centers of communal living and of spiritual development. Gubae or mahibeer is the common word used. It refers to the communal life, prayer, work, spiritual learning, and worship. During Gubae, all the monks assemble each time periodically. Any member who is absent on that day is considered as having died,

fallen sick, or deserted as a traitor. Therefore, they hold prayers for the dead and for the return of those who have gone away. They discuss, and after having kissed each other, they return to their places of retreat.

Monks living at the monastery masters of Sewatiwa Zema (hymnology and liturgy, religious literature and poetry), learn and serve together with those who learn the Mass of the liturgical offices, and with virgins and assistants preparing themselves for monastic life.

a - Some were separated from their parents and have been students of church schools since childhood; instead of returning to their birth places they stayed in some monastery.

b - Some studied only the book of the Mass and parts of the liturgical offices and served in their region and church as deacons and priests.

c - Some studied Sewatiwa Zema, book of mass, books of Interpretation and of poetry as well as their usage, and had served at different monastery churches and rural churches or became teachers.

After serving the community and the house of God for many years as assistants, on their own will and with the permission of the community, they are released from different activities at the monastery and live in their houses, pit and cut out trees, and lie on sand. They are secluded from people, and during daylight they recite the Psalms of David and different books of prayer, while at night they prostrate, supplicate, fast and pray. They pray for themselves, their brothers and the country. They take food every three or eight days, according to their own program.

It is very limited and serious to practice extreme solitude, under the guardian of the community. The monks, called hermits, are divided into two classes: the qualified hermits called also “perfect” and unqualified hermits. The watanyan are those who make the transition from assistantship to hermitage, and live by fasting and praying, prostrating and supplicating.

A person who comes from school to the monastery, and who is a virgin, will be allowed to become a monk after serving for three years as an assistant. If he has been a monk for a long time in other monasteries, he can be accepted quickly.

There are two types of prayer: individual and collective. Individual prayer is accomplished at home, at any time depending on individual preference. A person who has served old people in the monastery by tending the garden, farming and cooking, would not be prevented from becoming a hermit if he has served for at least ten years (usually twenty or more). Once he becomes a hermit, he would not be forced to do the community jobs. He can settle at a place of his preference, and an assistant would be designated to bring him food and drinks.

Every member must obey the instructions of the officials of the monastery. Members must regard each other with love and understanding. Quarrel, arguments, insults and backbiting between members are strictly forbidden. If a hermit comes back from work outside or from a journey, somebody must wash his feet. It is an obligation to help the elder. No member is allowed to go out of the monastery and its designated surroundings without permission. If he does, he is tied to a log for seven days. If he brings about division in religious matters and frequently disobeys, he is expelled from the monastery.

Monastic life is modeled by the synodal structure: monks live together, pray together, learn, serve, and work together. Everything is shared property. They administer everything together. Monks decide by very deep discussions and understandings.

Communal monasteries are those parallel with Coenobitic life, where everyone lives according to the rule of a community. The episcopal synod is the result of monastic life. The episcopal synod is the guardian of all monasteries. Monastic leadership is organized as a synod. Monastic schools are very communal. Monastic life is communal (live, work, pray together) – even a needle is shared.

Monastic tradition kept the canonical foundations of synodal life “the book of synod”. Jerusalem is the most important part of Ethiopian monasteries. Jerusalem is typical of connecting monastic tradition with other churches’ monastic life. Monks and monasteries have a very strong connection with the synodal life of the Church as well. Apart from their own communal journeys, they always lead and support the mission of the Church.

2.6. SYNODALITY IN THE MALANKARA ORTHODOX SYRIAN CHURCH

KEYNOTE

Collegiality and Synodality: Malankara Orthodox Perspectives

Baby Varghese

Introduction

First of all, I express my sincere thanks to the Pro Oriente Foundation and the Organizers of this conference for inviting me. It is my great privilege and honour to be here. I may be permitted to make a few observations on the exercise of Synodality/Collegiality in the early Church. This may help us to understand better how synodality was exercised among the St Thomas Christians of South India and how priests and lay people participated in it.

1. Biblical foundation of Synodality

The word 'synod' (from Greek *synhodos*) its derivatives *synodality* or *collegiality* (both are neologisms) do not appear in the New Testament. The Greek word *synodos* (*syn* + *odos* = *same path*) can also mean *coming together* ¹. In the New Testament Church is a *koinonia* (communion) which found its fullest expression in the coming together (*epi tou autou*) for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. There the Church is manifested as one community united as a body. *Conciliarity* is the extension and expression of the *koinonia* and *symphonicity* of the Church. In fact, the *koinonia* found expression in every aspect of the life of the apostolic Church.

1. The Greek word *synodos* derives from *syn+hodos*, meaning same way or path. Hence it means travelling/coming together.

The Twelve formed a *koinonia* around Christ. The *koinonia* was expanded by the addition of new members. Mathias was elected by this *koinonia* of eleven apostles and the first community of about 120 believers. On the day of Pentecost about 3,000 new members were added to it. They were of “one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32). ‘The multitude of disciples’ elected seven to serve at the daily distribution of food, a ministry of *koinonia*. In the election of Mathias and the appointment of the seven, the whole community was involved. ‘Collegiality’ has its foundation in this ‘togetherness’ of the first Christian community. In the case of the seven, the community elected the candidates and set them before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. Ordination was preceded by election by the community, a custom which was continued for a few centuries and became obsolete in several ancient Churches. As we will see below, Malankara Orthodox Church has retained this apostolic tradition.

The participation of the “whole multitude” in the deliberations was soon limited to the leaders of the community, obviously for practical reasons. Thus “the apostles and the elders” gathered in Jerusalem to make an important decision regarding the ‘disciples’ converted from the gentiles. Here also, the apostles could have dictated a solution, but the issue was brought before ‘the assembly of the apostles and the elders’ (Acts 15:6). Peter rose and addressed the assembly. Then Barnabas and Paul gave a report of their mission. And finally, James, head of the Jerusalem community, pronounced his judgement (15:19). The decisions of the ‘Council’ were conveyed to the Church in Antioch by a letter written by the ‘apostles and elders’ (15:22-24) with the striking words: “It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (15: 28; cf. ‘It seemed good to us/apostles and the elders’, Acts 15:22; 25). [This may be regarded as the prototype of the synodal letters].

Here we can find a development in the exercise of collegiality in the apostolic Church. The collegiality belongs to the whole Church and for practical reasons, leaders exercised it in the name of the whole Church.

2. Collegial character of the ministry

In the New Testament period there existed different types of ministries, which gradually became more or less uniform. The ministries in the NT can be listed into two types: travelling ministers (Apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers) and resident ministers (*Episkopoi*, *presbyteroi* and *diakonoi*). These ministries were exercised by groups, that is collegially. [e.g. The Twelve ('apostles': Lk 6:13); 'Prophets' (Acts 11:27; 13:1), teachers (Acts 13:1)]. Likewise, the resident ministers also formed a college. Thus, James and the elders led the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 21:18). The Acts of the Apostles speak of the elders of Antioch (11:30). James exhorts to call "the elders of the Church" to anoint the sick (5:13). The author of the first Epistle of Peter, identifies himself as a "fellow presbyter" (1 Pet 5:1 – *sumpresbyteros*). Paul and Barnabas "appointed elders in every church" (Acts 14:23). During his second missionary journey from Miletus, Paul called to him the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:17) and addressed them *episkopoi* (20:28). Titus was instructed to appoint elders in every city (here elders are called *episkopoi*, Titus 1:5-7).

Ordination was also done collegially ('the apostles laid their hands' -Acts. 6:6). It was probably 'the prophets and the teachers' in Antioch who laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul before their first missionary travel (Acts 13:1-3).

The use of the titles *episcopos*, *presbyteros* and *diakonos* implies the collegial character of their ministries, a fact overlooked by most studies. The titles as well as the ministry imply a community of which they are part and which they serve. *Episcopos* (*overseer*, *president*, *proestos*) is the one who presides over a community. He is shepherd (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2), father of the household (1 Tim 3:1-7) and God's steward (Titus 1:6). [St Paul speaks of his ministry as stewardship (1 Cor 4:1)]. The author of the First epistle of Peter speaks of the nature of the relationship between the elder and the community: "Tend the flock of God that is in your charge, [*exercising the oversight – ancient authorities add*] not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock," (1 Pet 5:2-3).

In the New Testament period, *episkopoi* and *presbyteroi* most probably referred to the same office bearers (Acts 20:18; 28; cf. Tit 1:5-7). *Episcopus* is the president of the community. Likewise elder/presbyter (*qashisho*: Syr) is part of the community and was probably a ‘senior member’. *Episkopoi/presbyteroi* do not exist without a community. Thus, in the East, there is no titular bishop (‘absolute ordination’). One is ordained for a community which is duly named in the ordination service.²

3. Ministers and the community

It is important to note that in the earliest references to the ministers, the community was duly mentioned. The bishops and deacons were appointed by the apostles for the community (cf. *Clement* Ch. 42).

The *Epistle of Clement* addresses the tensions between the believers in Corinth and their bishops/presbyters. The Church in Corinth had ‘evicted’ bishops/presbyters from their office’. The bishop/presbyter was part of the Church (in Corinth) and was not above it. They were appointed *with the full consent of the Church*. The author points out that the apostles made provisions to appoint successors when a bishop falls asleep (Ch. 44).

The author expresses his displeasure and disagreement in removing the ministers “who have been performing their duties with impeccable devotion” (Ch. 44). He respects their decision which was taken collegially. (“You however, as we notice, in more than one instance have turned men out of an office in which they were serving honourably and without the least reproach,” (Ch. 44).

The importance of the *Epistle of Clement* is that it bears witness to the custom prevailed in Rome and Corinth, two important communities in the Roman Empire. Collegiality was not limited to the leaders of the community but extended to the entire community of believers.

The ministry of the *episcopus* was primarily liturgical and he presided over the celebration of baptism and Eucharist as well as other

2. I do not forget the fact in modern days in some Eastern Churches bishops are consecrated without the charges of dioceses.

liturgical and sacramental celebrations. Presbyters and deacons had their own functions in the liturgical celebration in which the whole body of the believers was present. This is highlighted in the *Didascalia of the Apostles*. As in the Corinthian Church, there were rebellions against the leaders of the community and consequently the compiler underscores the significance of various ministries in the Church. He compares the ministers in the Church to the Old Testament priests and Levites. But he never ignores the importance of the community of the believers (Ch. IX).³

Chapter IX exhorts the people that they should honour the bishop. We can assume that as in Corinth there were criticisms and disagreements regarding their ministry and dispensing the resources to the orphans and widows. The exhortation regularly repeats the words, 'you and your bishop'. The bishop's function is not presented in terms of 'monarchical episcopacy'. He is celebrant of baptism and Eucharist ['bishops through whom you were made a son of God...who have loosed you from sins, who established you with doctrine...who confirmed you with admonition, and made you to partake of the holy Eucharist of God, and made you partakers and joint heirs of the promise of God'].⁴

The Church is a household and various ministers work together "to the service of the house". *Didascalia* compares the bishops to the kings of the people of Israel⁵ and says:

So now does the bishop also take for himself from the people those whom he accounts and knows that they deserve him and his office, and establishes unto himself presbyters as counselors

3. A.Vööbus, (tr.) *Didascalia*, Ch. IX The *Didascalia Apostolorum* in Syriac Vol. I: Ch. 1-IX, (tr). CSCO 402; SS 176 (Louvain, 1979), pp. 99-100.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106. Elsewhere in the same chapter, it is said that the bishop is "your mediator with the Lord God"; "he "fulfills his stewardship" by distributing the 'tithes, first fruits and oblations' (p. 109).

and assessors, and deacons and sub-deacons, all as it is required for him in relation to the service of the house.⁶

Apparently *Didascalia* is a compilation of documents of various origins. Deacons seem to have shared in the administration like the presbyters (XI):

Endeavor, then, O bishops, together with the deacons, to be right with the Lord [...]. Let the bishops and deacons, therefore, be of one mind. And shepherd the people diligently – in one accord.⁷

The same tradition may be attested in Ch. XVI:

Therefore, O bishop, appoint yourself workers of righteousness, helpers who cooperate with you unto life. Those that please you out of all the people, you shall choose and appoint deacons; on the one hand, a man for the administration of the many things that are required, on the other hand a woman for the ministry of women.⁸

However, the above texts attest that sometimes deacons also shared in the collegial ministry of the bishops and the presbyters. The same chapter directs: “And know that it is required of the bishop with the presbyters to judge circumspectly...”⁹

Though the bishops were compared to the kings of the people of Israel, they were not rulers, but assured stability and unity to serve as “ministers of the everlasting kingdom,” an indication of the eschatological dimension of the synodality:

You, however, the bishops, be not hard, not tyrannical, nor irascible, and be not indignant with the people of God, which is

6. Ibid., pp. 106-107.

7. Ch. XI. A. Vööbus (tr), *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*. Vol. II. Ch. XI-XXVI, CSCO 408; SS 180, (Louvain, 1979), pp.119-120.

8. Ch. XVI, *ibid.* p. 156.

9. Ibid. p. 121.

delivered into your hands. And dissolve not the Lord's house nor scatter His people, but convert every man, that you may be helpers with God. And gather the faithful through much humility and longsuffering and patience, and without anger, and through instruction and intercession, as ministers of the everlasting kingdom.¹⁰

The collegiality found its fullest expression in the assemblies gathered together to celebrate the Eucharist. There, bishops, presbyters, and laymen gather together according to the places assigned to each of them:

But in your congregations (*knustho*) in the holy churches hold your assemblies (accordance with) all good manners, and fashion the places for the brethren carefully in sobriety. And for the presbyters let there be separated a place on the eastern side of the house, and let the bishop's chair (*thronos*) be among them and let the presbyters sit with him. And again, let the laymen sit in another eastern part of the house. For thus it is required that the presbyters shall sit in the eastern part of the house with the bishops, and afterwards the laymen, and then the women; so that when you stand up to pray, the leaders (*mdabrone*) may stand first, and after them the laymen, and then also the women.¹¹

We can assume that this assembly functioned as the 'synod/council' in the sense it was understood later and made judgments regarding discipline and stability (cf. 1 Cor. 5:12-13; 2 Thess. 3:14).

4. Role of the people in the election of the episkopoi

Until the end of the fourth century, in several places the bishops were elected by the people and the bishops from the neighboring dioceses

10. Ch. XII, CSCO 408, p. 130.

11. Ch. XII, *ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

consecrated them. We shall point out a few examples attested in the early Syro-Antiochene tradition.

According to the *Didascalia of the Apostles* bishops, presbyters and deacons are elected by the people.

Let the bishop be appointed (upon) being elected by all the people according to the will of the Holy Spirit.¹²

Likewise a presbyter be ordained upon being testified to by all the people on those things that were said before about bishop.¹³

Let the deacon be ordained after he has been elected according to these things which have been said before...¹⁴

Apostolic Constitutions quote the text from the *Didascalia*.¹⁵

The same tradition is attested by the *Testament of our Lord* (TD: c.500 AD): "...the bishop shall be appointed, elected by all the people according to the will of the (Holy) Spirit".¹⁶ He is ordained by the bishops from the neighbouring dioceses. The people endorse the election by a threefold acclamation: "He is worthy". The corresponding Greek word is *axios*, an acclamation still made in the ordination of a bishop in the Syro-antiochene tradition.

As in the *Didascalia*, the presbyters and deacons were also probably elected.¹⁷

12. *Didascalia*, ch III, 1; CSCO 402, SS 176, p. 27.

13. *Didascalia* III, 2, CSCO 402, p. 28.

14. *Didascalia* III, 4, CSCO 402, p. 29.

15. AC VIII, 4, 2-5.

16. *Synodicon* Vol I, CSCO 368, SS 162, p. 35; I. Rahmani, *Testamentum Domini, Nostri Jesus Chrsti, Mongunitae*, 1899, I, 20, p. 26 (syr).

17. "A Presbyter shall be ordained when testified to by all the people", *Synodicon*, I, p. 39; "But the deacon shall be appointed, chosen in accord with the things which have previously been mentioned" (TD). *Ibid.*, p.41.

5. Synodality among the St Thomas Christians

Very little information regarding the history of the St Thomas Christians of South India before the Pre-Portuguese period has come down to us. However, there is a general agreement among the historians which can be summarized as follows: (i). There were intermittent relations between the Persian Church and the Indian Christians of St Thomas at least since the fourth century. (ii). The Church on the Malabar Coast was usually headed by a single bishop and continued as a single diocese. Thus, the system of administration by an Episcopal synod probably did not exist in South India. In the beginning of the 16th century five East Syrian bishops were present in Malabar. But the diocesan system was not strictly implemented.¹⁸ (iii). In important matters, ‘the General Assembly’ (*Malankara Pally Yogam*: Association of the parish churches) gathered together to take decisions. No information is available on such assemblies before 1599. (iv). Parish Assemblies (*Edavaka Yogams*) elected the candidates for priesthood, a custom which prevailed in the Malankara Orthodox Church (MOC) until the middle of the 20th century and is still followed in a few parishes in the Malankara Syrian Orthodox (‘Jacobite’) Church. (v). Often no bishop was present for long time and the Archdeacon served as the head of the community. But historians have not given sufficient attention to the fact that the office of the Archdeacon is attested since 1562.¹⁹

18. See B. Varghese, “East Syrian Mission to the Malabar Coast in the Sixteenth Century”, Li Tang & Dietmar W. Winkler (eds), *From the Oxus River to the Chinese Shores. Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia*, (LIT Verlag, Berlin, 2013), pp. 317-340, here pp. 317-318.

19. B. Varghese, *op. cit.*, pp. 330-331. Using secondary literature, Jacob Kollaparampil [The Archdeacon of All India, Rome, 1972] argued that the office of the Archdeacon existed since the early centuries. However, his argument is less convincing. It is important to note that after the consecration of Mar Thoma I in 1653, the office of the Archdeacon was not continued among the St Thomas Christians. The Romo-Syrians appointed Parampil Mathai as Archdeacon (1678), but soon discontinued it. The Niranam Grandhavari, a 19th century chronicle, claims that the archdeacons were the head of the community since 345. Its historical value is limited.

Synod of Diamper (1599): Archbishop Alexis Menesis of Goa convened a 'General Assembly' ('Synod') in Diamper (near Cochin) to bring the St Thomas Christians under the Catholic Church. Most of its participants were laymen. Menesis, a bishop of the post Tridentine Catholic Church understood the significance of the *Pally Yogam* (General Assembly of the churches), and was very well aware of the fact that without the consent of the *Pally Yogam*, the St Thomas Christian Community cannot be brought under Rome. The decrees of the Synod are silent on the *Pally Yogam* and the office of the Arch-deacon. [The decrees as we have today were corrected/composed later by the Portuguese].

Francis Roz, the first bishop of the St Thomas Christians after the synod of Diamper convened a 'Synod' (*Pally Yogam*) in Ankamaly in 1603 to bring the community under him. The proceedings of this 'Synod' have not come down to us. However, Roz composed a 'Diocesan Statute' (in 1606), probably on the basis of the decisions of the *Pally Yogam* held in 1603. He has also introduced a 'revised order of the Mass' which was used in the Syro-Malabar Church until the eve of the Second Vatican Council. [The non-Catholic Syrians also used it until the gradual introduction of the West Syriac liturgy].

Synods of Diamper and Ankamaly were the last *Pally Yogams* of the St Thomas Christians before they were divided into two Churches: *Puthencoors* and the *Pazhayacoors* or New and Old Rites. They are important witnesses to the way in which Synodality/collegiality was exercised among the St Thomas Christians. Priests and leading laymen gathered together to discuss and to deliberate on important matters related to the life of the community. The *Pally Yogams* continue to have the traditional importance among the non-Catholic Syrians until today, but lost significance among the Catholic Syrians and gradually disappeared under the European prelates who ruled them until the end of the 19th century.²⁰

20. On the *Pally Yogams* and *Padiyolas* among both Catholics and non-catholics: P. C. Mathew, *Padiyolalal*, Kerala Sahitya Academy, Trichur, 2018. (But the dates and details need to be checked with other sources).

6. Malankara Pally Yogam or the General Assembly of the Parishes

For centuries, *Pally Yogams* were held according to unwritten laws known in Malayalam as *Edathile maryadakaal* ('local customs'). Apparently, they were not held regularly. The priests of leading parishes were invited and they took part in them with a few leading laymen. The participants reached the venue by country boats and the sessions lasted for several days. The first sessions discussed the agenda. At the concluding session, the participants put their signatures, approving the decisions. As palm leaves were the usual writing material in Kerala, the documents have rarely survived. Exceptionally copper plates were used ((eg. *Arthattu Padiyola*). In all *Pally Yogams*, laypeople represented the majority, showing their participation in the synodal life of the Church.

We shall discuss some of the important *Pally Yogams* held between 1653 and 1876. Some of them were held when the Malankara Church had no bishop. Priests played leading roles and sometimes laymen's role was more significant. (*Coonen Cross Oath* (1653)). On January 3, 1653, the most important *Pally Yogam* in the history of the St Thomas Christians was held at Mattanchery, in Cochin. Ahattallah, an Antiochene prelate who reached Malabar was arrested by the Portuguese. About 25,000 Syrian Christians under the leadership of the Archdeacon Thomas assembled in Cochin and asked for his release. But the Portuguese authorities murdered him by drowning in the sea. [According to another source, he was taken to Goa for trial before the Inquisition or to be deported]. The group assembled around a granite cross and holding the rope attached to it, the participants took an oath rejecting the 54-year union with Rome imposed on them at Diamper in 1599. Following this event, more than 90% of the St Thomas Christians broke away from the union.

In February 1653, the Assembly met again and the Arch-deacon was accepted as the spiritual head (*Veda thalavan*), as no bishop was present among the non-Catholics.

In May 1653, *Malankara Pally Yogam* again met in Alengadu, near Ankamaly and resolved to raise Archdeacon Thomas as bishop with the name Mar Thoma I (1653-1670). He was consecrated by a group of 12 priests who placed their hands on him. A council consisting of four

priests was elected to assist the new bishop in the administration. The Catholics held that Marthoma I was consecrated 'un-canonically'. This created confusion and a considerable number of Syrians joined the Catholic faction.

Non-Catholic historians always found it difficult to explain why the *Pally Yogam* had taken such an unusual decision. Often they have explained it as an 'interim arrangement' with the intention of getting the consecration regularized by a foreign bishop who will visit Malabar.

However, it was not unlikely that it was a custom existed among the St Thomas Christians in the pre-Portuguese period. Mar Thoma I was elected by the *Malankara Pally Yogam* first as the 'spiritual head' and then was made bishop by a college of twelve priests and made arrangements to administer the Church with the co-operation of a council.

Similar custom has been attested in the early Alexandrian Church, a fact almost never noticed by Indian historians. This custom has been attested by St Jerome. After denouncing the audacity of certain people who would give to deacons the precedence over presbyters, that is over bishops, and giving scriptural proofs of the identity of the two, Jerome writes:

At Alexandria, from Mark the Evangelist down to the times of the bishops Heraclas (233-249) and Dionysius (249-265), the presbyters always nominated as bishop one chose out of their own body and placed in a higher grade: just as if an army were to appoint a general, or deacons were to choose from their own body one whom they knew to be diligent and call him archdeacon.²¹

J. B. Lightfoot was the first to bring this text to scholarly attention. A few years later, the famous Syriac scholar E.W.Brooks published a

21. Jerome, Epist. cxlvi ad Evag. (I, p. 1082), quoted by J.B. Lightfoot, St Paul's Epistle to the Philippians: A Revised Text, (London, 1888). Appendix I: The Christian Ministry, pp. 230-231.

note in *the Journal of Theological Studies* and brought further evidence to this custom.²² Brooks quotes a letter by Severus of Antioch (512-538), who in a letter addressed to 'the Orthodox in Emessa', wrote of this custom. Severus deals with the case of a certain Isaiah, who was consecrated by a single bishop and maintained that his consecration is valid. Severus maintained that this was an obsolete custom:

And the bishop also of the city renowned for its orthodox faith, the city of the Alexandrians, used in former days to be appointed by presbyters; but in later times in accordance with the canon which has prevailed everywhere the solemn institution of their bishop has come to be performed by the hand of bishops, and no one condemns the strictness which prevails in the holy Churches and has recourse to the former practices, which has yielded to the later clear, strict, approved and spiritual ordinances.²³

This custom is attested in the story about Poemen the Egyptian hermit (towards the end of the fourth century).²⁴ Some heretics are said to have visited Poemen and 'spoke against the archbishop of Alexandria as having received ordination from presbyters.' The monk because of his meekness made no response.

In the 10th century the Melkite patriarch of Alexandria, an Arab named Sa'id Ibn Batrik (who took the Greek name Eutychius), says that up to the time of Alexander (313-326), the bishop of Alexandria was ordained by the presbyters.²⁵ This was known to the ninth century Latin

22. E. W. Brooks, *The Ordination of the early Bishops of Alexandria*, JTS 2-No.8 (July, 1901), pp. 612-613. See also E. Kemp, *Bishops and Presbyters at Alexandria*, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 6 (1955), pp. 125-142.

23. Syriac text and English tr. *ibid.*, p. 612. See Severus: E.W. Brooks, *The Sixth Book of the Select Letters of Severus Patriarch of Antioch*, Tr. 1903, II-ii,3, p. 213.

24. Brooks, p. 613, note 1; Brooks refers to a quotation by Dom Butler, in his edition of the *Lausiack History of Palladius* (text and Studies, vi, I, 1898, p. 213) from the apophthegms of Poemen, *Patrologia Graeca*, 65: 341.

25. *Patrologia Graeca*, 111: 982, See Brooks, p. 612.

writers.²⁶ This custom seems to have continued in some places in Egypt and elsewhere as late as the sixth century.

The Syrian Orthodox Chronicler Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mehre reports that the kingdoms of the Ethiopians, Himyarites, and the Indians had great troubles because of the lack of priests. They sent envoys to Emperor Justinian every year requesting for non-Chalcedonian bishops. According to him, they continued it for 25 years and Justinian asked them to get priests from the Chalcedonian patriarch of Alexandria. He adds:

When they became wearied by many (efforts) and failed to receive a bishop who did not adhere to the Council (of Chalcedon), they went so far as to transgress canonical rules, deciding that priests should gather and put the Gospel book upon the head of one of them and behold, so he was made bishop.²⁷

[Here Indians may not mean the Christians of South India, but probably the communities in the Arabian Peninsula]. However, in the consecration of Marthoma I, the Indian Christian community was following an ancient custom of practicing the synodality in the ordination of bishops.

Francis Ros, the Latin Bishop appointed by Menezes, writes that the Archdeacon ordained priests for the St Thomas Christians: "And there was a time when in Malabar there was none else but a single deacon, and the Christians, being ignorant and having no prelate, made him say Mass and even to ordain other".²⁸

26. See Charles Gore, "On the Ordination of Early Bishop of Alexandria" JTS 3-no. 10 (Jan. 1902), p. 278-282; here 279. Eg. Amalarius, *de eccl. Office*, ii, 13; PL cv, 1090; Pseud. Alcuin, *de divin office*, 37, PL. ci, 1237. I owe these references to Gore.

27. Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mehre, *Chronicle Part III*, translated with notes and Introduction by Witold Witakowski, Liverpool University Press, 1996, *Translated Texts for Historians*, Vol. 22, pp. 100-101.

28. "A Report on the Serra by Francis Ross", in George Nedungatt (ed.), *The Synod of Diamper Revisited*, Kanonika 9, Rome, 2001, pp. 299-367 (Appendix IV), here p. 317.

Francis Ros refers to the office of the Archdeacon, who served as the head of the St Thomas Christian Community with the privileges of a prelate. But in almost everything, he consulted the *Pally Yogams*.

The next important *Malankara Pally Yogam* was held at Chenganoor in 1686, in which West Syrian theology was formally accepted. Mar Ivanios Hidayatullah (d. 1694), a visiting Antiochene prelate, had convened it. Apparently Marthoma III (1685-1688) was also present for it.

A *Pally Yogam* held at Mavelikara in 1789 (ME 964) partially accepted the West Syrian Liturgy. It was resolved and an agreement (*Padiyola*) was signed to follow West Syriac Eucharistic liturgy, ordination rite and to introduce west Syriac liturgical vestments. It was agreed to follow 'the existing customs' (i.e., East Syriac rites) in baptism and marriage.²⁹ This was aimed at maintaining unity in the Church, as several priests followed the East Syriac rites as in the Syro-Catholic Church.

The *Malankara Pally Yogam* held at Kandandu in 1809, adopted 11 resolutions (*Kandanadu Padiyola*) endorsing the use of West Syrian liturgy. 54 churches were represented in the assembly. The *Yogam* formally accepted Marthoma VIII (1809-16) who was consecrated by his predecessor Marthoma VII (1808-9) on his death bed, before breathing his last. This caused a controversy and the *Pally Yogam* settled the dispute, nominating two monks to stay with the new bishop to assist him in the administration of the Church. One of the main decisions of the *Kandanadu Yogam* was to prepare enough manuscript copies of the *Andu Taksā* (Rites of the Feasts of the Liturgical Year).³⁰ The same *Yogam* resolved to start two seminaries (*Padithaveedu*) for the training of

29. This is reported by the Niranam Grandhavari ('Niranam Chronicle'), M. Kurian Thomas (ed.), Niranam Grandhavari, Sophia Books, Kottayam, 2000, p. 97.

30. Resolution 9. See, Pukadiyil Ittoop Writer, Malayalathulla Suriyani Christianikalude Sabha Charitram, History of the Church of the Syrian Christians in Malayalam, Kottayam, 1869, Reprint 2004, p. 175.

the clergy and deacons shall be ordained after getting letters from the malpans.³¹ The minimum age of a girl for marriage was fixed as 14.³²

Following the foundation of the Syrian College in Kottayam in 1815 (the present Orthodox Theological Seminary), Low Church Anglican Missionaries worked among the Syrians with the intention of reforming the liturgy according to their theological interests. Naturally, this led to tensions a *Malankara Pally Yogam* was held in 1836 at Mavelikara (*Mavelikara Synod/Padiyola*). The Missionaries presented their plan to reform the Syrian Church which was rejected by the *Pally Yogam*. The *Yogam* made it clear that the Church “would not follow any faith or teaching other than the Orthodox faith of the Jacobite Syrian Christians”. Two native bishops, fifty priests and a few hundreds of laymen participated in the *Yogam* (‘Synod’).

In 1842, Palakunnathu Mathews Mar Athanasius, the first bishop of the Reformed group (later called themselves Marthoma Syrian Church), was consecrated at Mardin by Mar Elias II, Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch. [Mar Athanasius was the first Indian bishop consecrated directly by the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch]. In fact, the consecration was done without the knowledge and approval of the Malankara Church. Soon after his return to India, Metropolitan Cheppau Mar Dionysius convened a meeting of the Church representatives at Kandanadu (August 15, 1843),³³ where the consecration was reported. But the meeting did not accept the consecration and the *Sthathicon* (letter of Consecration from the Patriarch) was not permitted to be read. Thirty days later,³⁴ some priests and representatives of 22 churches who supported Mar Athanasius met at Kallungathra (near Kottayam) and a *Padiyola* (agreed *statement*) was drafted (*Kallungathra Padiyola*), highlighting the authority of the patriarch in Malankara. In fact, the Kallungathra meeting was held by the supporters of Mar Athanasius to claim that the new bishop has been

31. Resolution 8, *ibid.*, p. 175.

32. Resolution y, *ibid.*, p. 174.

33. Malayalam Era 1019, Chingom, 3 (Calendar followed in Kerala, until the middle of the 20th century). The date corresponds to AD 1843, August 15.

34. Malayalam Era 1019 Kanni 3.

accepted by the Malankara Church and to get royal recognition from the King of Travancore.

These two meetings show that the bishop consecrated by the patriarch needed the approval of the community to exercise his office.

In 1851, Mathews Mar Athanasius convened a meeting of the *Malankara Pally Yogam* at the Old Seminary, Kottayam and adopted 101 rules (*Chattavariyola or rules*) regarding the administration and liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. This was also a meeting of the supporters of Mathews Mar Athanasius. The rules were read before the assembly and the representatives of the churches gave their consent in writing to follow them. This set of rules represents the first attempt to bring the parishes under the control of a bishop.

The rights and privileges of the *Pally Yogam* were similar to that of a Synod (in fact they are often called Synods). The Portuguese prelate Menezes used it to bring the St Thomas Christians under the Catholic Church. Francis Roz, the first bishop appointed by Menezes convened a *Pally Yogam* seeking its acceptance to rule the community and to introduce a liturgy revised by him. In the next 300 years several *Pally Yogams* were held in the Syro-Catholic Church, but almost always with limited authority.

Among the non-Catholics the *Pally Yogams* continued to be the most important decision making body. Thus, the Union with Rome imposed on them was rejected by a *Pally Yogam*. Then Mar Thoma I was consecrated by twelve priests by the decision of the *Pally Yogam* held at Alengadu. Visiting West Syriac and East Syriac prelates sought the approval of the *Pally Yogams* to administer the Church. West Syriac liturgy was adopted by the *Pally Yogams* (Mavelikara 1789 and Kandanadu 1809). The relationship with the Anglican Missionaries was broken following the decision of the *Pally Yogam* held in Mavelikara.

7. From Pally Yogams to the Malankara Syrian Christian Association [MSCA]

Pally Yogams, as we have seen, were the traditional general assembly of the Malankara Church and were held to address particular issues or developments. They were aimed at reaching consensus among parishes

and to maintain unity and order in the Church. Apparently, all the parishes were not represented in several such meetings. There were several reasons for the absence of parishes. The parishes were independent and were not under strict Episcopal control. The communication was not very well organized to assure the participation of all the parishes. The usual way of travel was by country boats and heavy rains or floods made regular travel difficult.

But by the middle of the 19th century things began to change, following the challenges raised by the Reform movement led by Mathews Mar Athanasius. In 1876, Patriarch Ignatius Peter IV convened a General Assembly of the Malankara Church at Mulanthuruthy ('Mulanthuruthy Synod') and established the administrative system currently followed in the MOC.³⁵ The Synod was held from 27 to 30 June 1876, in which 118 priests, 11 deacons and 150 laymen participated. It adopted 18 resolutions ('canons'). The Synod took two important decisions:

It instituted 'Malankara Syrian Christian Association' (the General Assembly for the whole Church) in which each parish is represented by a priest and two lay men; (ii). A Managing Committee consisting of priests and lay people was constituted. Thus, for the first time the Malankara Church was brought under a central and permanent structure. Both 'Malankara Association' and 'Managing Committee' under the authority of the Episcopal Synod, became the two important pillars of the administration of the MOC. The Synod of Mulanthuruthy decided that the Malankara Metropolitan shall be the president of both bodies.

After the Synod of Mulanthuruthy, the patriarch unilaterally divided the Malankara Church into seven dioceses and six more bishops were consecrated. Till that date, MOC was led by a single bishop, having practically no control over the parishes. In case the bishop changes his doctrinal stance, this could create confusion in the community. The patriarch wanted to put an end to the monepiscopal/monarchichal leadership of the Malankara Metropolitan (*methrante ekanayaka sakethi*:

35. B. Varghese, "Synod of Mulanthuruthy", THE HARP XXXII (2017), pp. 215-234

single leadership system) and the Church came under an Episcopal Synod. But still the Malankara Association and the Managing Committee have a voice in the administration of the Church, especially in the election of the head of the Church and bishops.

8. Constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Church

In 1934, the *Malankara Syrian Christian Association* (MSCA) adopted the Constitution of the Church, which has laid down regulations regarding the administration of the Church at three levels: parish, diocese and the Church as a whole. It has been often pointed out that the Constitution envisages an administrative system taking into account the Episcopal authority and the democratic principles. However, the Episcopal Synod has the final say in the administration of the Church. All bishops are the members of the Episcopal Synod, presided over by the Catholicos who is also the Malankara Metropolitan, the traditional head of MOC.

In the Malankara Syrian Christian Association, each parish is represented by a priest and one or more laymen, elected by each parish assembly (for a period of five years).

The Managing Committee (MC) is elected for five years by the MSCA. Each diocese is represented by one or more priests and two or more lay people. In addition to the elected members, the Catholicos can nominate a certain number of priests and lay people to the Managing Committee. The MC shall meet at least twice a year.

The association has the authority to increase the number of the members when new dioceses are created. On August 4, 2022, the Association elected 141 members to the MC (47 priests and 94 laymen). The Malankara Metropolitan nominated 33 members to the MC (11 priests and 22 members). [This number was decided by the MSCA held in March 2012].

Bishops, Managing Committee members are also members of the MSCA.

The Malankara Metropolitan/Catholicos is the president of the MSCA and the remaining bishops having administrative charge of Diocese shall be Vice-presidents of MSCA.

The Managing Committee elects a secretary (often a layman) who maintains the accounts of the Church. Malankara Metropolitan is the Trustee of the Church properties. There are two co-trustees – one priest and one layman – who with the Malankara Metropolitan, receive the interest of the Trust Fund (*Vattippanam*) deposited in the Government treasury in the beginning of the 19th century. The co-trustees are also to be in charge of the properties of the Seminary in Kottayam. Though they have limited power in the administration of the Church, the co-trustees are members of almost all committees and generally held as leaders of the community.

The Catholicos and the bishops are elected by the MSCA. In the election, the candidates must have won more than 50% of the votes of the priests and lay members present in the Association (separate minimum is needed]. The election shall be approved by the Episcopal Synod.

To make it clear, I shall explain how seven new bishops were elected in February 2022. In consultation with the Managing Committee, the Synod announced that the Church needs seven new bishops to fill the vacancies. The Catholicos, in consultation with the MC announced the date of the MSCA. 40 unmarried priests presented their candidature. The nomination paper of each candidate has to be signed by 30 members of the MSCA. In the case of a few candidates who did not submit a nomination paper, the bishops suggested their names and with their consent, the nomination papers were submitted.

A screening Committee appointed by the Synod selected 25 candidates (from the 40 aspirants). Then the screening committee, after careful inquiries, prepared a list of 14 candidates and presented it before the Managing Committee with the approval of the Catholicos. The Managing Committee meeting (on 11 Feb 2022) held a secret vote and final list of 11 candidates was prepared. This list was presented before the MSCA met on 25 February 2022 (online) which elected seven bishop candidates. The Episcopal Synod approved the election and the list and the candidates were professed monks on 2 June 2022. After having spent three months in prayer, retreat, and training at the residence of the Catholicos, on 28 July 2022, they were consecrated bishops. The Synod, in consultation with the Managing Committee and

recommendation of the Episcopal Synod, assigned dioceses to the newly consecrated bishops.

Likewise, the Catholicos was elected in 2021. On 12 July 2021, Catholicos Baselios Paulose II entered into eternal rest. Before his demise (following lung cancer), he had announced the date of the MSCA in consultation with the Managing Committee and appointed a committee, with the senior-most bishop as its president, to administer the Church in case he will be incapacitated. The Synod met and held a secret ballot with a consensus that the bishop who gets the maximum votes shall be presented as the sole candidate before the MSCA. The Episcopal Synod met on 16 September 2021 elected Metropolitan Mathews Mar Severios as the sole candidate. The MSCA met on October 14, 2021 and unanimously elected Mar Severios as the Catholicos designate. The Synod met on the same day and approved the election. On 15 October, the new catholicos was installed in a service presided over by the Senior-most bishop.

According to the Constitution of MOC, the Episcopal Synod has authority to decide matters concerning faith, order and discipline. However, in most of the cases, the Synod consults the Managing Committee.

Conclusion

According to the 1934 Constitution of MOC, women have no role in the administration of the Church. However, in 2011, the Constitution was amended to respect gender equality. Now women have equal rights in the parish assembly and are elected as Trustee/Treasurer, Secretary or as Committee members. They are not elected to the MSCA or to the Church Managing Committee, or to the administrative functions at the Diocesan level. But there is the possibility to amend the Constitution to include them in MSCA or the Managing Committee.

MOC has retained the early Christian tradition of exercising Synodality/collegiality, in which the priests and the lay people share. It is possible in MOC because of two reasons: one MOC has a membership of less than 1 million and has about 1500 parishes across the world. All belong to the same ethnic group of Indians and the majority speaks

Malayalam. I am not sure this may be applicable in the case of bigger Churches. The Constitution requires the physical presence of all elected members in the MSCA and MC. But the elections of the present catholicos (in October 2021) and the new seven bishops (in February 2022) were held online because of the Covid Pandemic. This has opened a new possibility for the meetings of MSCA in the future.

The system of *Pally Yogam* is a tradition common to all Indian Christians of St Thomas, Orthodox or Catholics. I have limited my discussion to the MOC. Though the Syro-Malabar Catholics were under the Latin hierarchy between 1599 and 1900, *Pally Yogams* were held several occasions to address specific problems. I have not discussed the impacts of such *Pally Yogams* in the life of the Syro-Malabar Church. Between 1850 and 1900 the Reformed group of Syrians ('Marthomites') held several *Pally Yogams*. Now the Marthoma Church follows an administrative system similar to that of the Orthodox. But the Church General Assembly (*Sabha mandalam*), in which the laypeople have majority, has almost always an upper-hand in decision making.

Eastern ecclesiology has retained the fundamental concepts and spirit of the undivided Church of the early centuries. The most important among such concepts is the sacramental vision of the Church, highlighted by the imagery of Church as the Body of Christ. As St Paul says, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ... and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13). Synodality/conciliarity has its foundation in this vision of the Church. One who shares in the Eucharist has the right to share in the 'synodal life' of the Church.

Our discussions on synodality, I hope, will provide us further opportunity to re-discover the ecclesial structure in this direction and thus help us to go forward in our search for unity.

EXPERIENCES OF SYNODALITY WORKSHOPS

Laity in the Malankara Orthodox Church

Tijo Ivan John

The Malankara Orthodox Church (MOSC) is an Oriental Orthodox Church headquartered at Devalakom near Kottayam, Kerala, India. The Church was founded by St Thomas the Apostle. The Supreme Head of our Church is H.H. Moran Mar Baselios Marthoma Mathews III and he is known as the “Catholicos of the East” and Malakara Metropolitan.

The Canaan Law accepted and followed by the Malankara Orthodox church was collected and codified by Mar Gregorios Bar Hebraeus in the 13th century.

The principle of democracy is central to the governance of this Church which has Synodal systems in the broad theological sense of synod; i.e., “walking together” or “taking the same road,” in mutual love and understanding. Our church is both Episcopal and Congregational at the same time, but the election of bishops and the head of the church is done directly by the people or people’s representatives. The crucial reference to the Body of Christ, the people of God, should be maintained throughout the life of the elected and Ordained Clergy.

The Constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Church

The church had no written constitution until 1934 but was governed by consensus, traditions and precedence. It was the vision of Mor Dionysius Vattaseril to have a clearly defined uniform constitution to govern the Church administration and he initiated a committee to submit a draft constitution. In the year 1934 a Malankara Association meeting was held on December 26 and it was adopted and brought to force. The Constitution upholds the autonomy and autocephaly of the Church. The first article emphasizes the bond of relationship between the Church of

Syria and Malankara. The second article deals with the foundation of Malankara Church by St Thomas and the primacy of the Catholicos. The third article refers to the name of the Church and the fourth about the faith, traditions etc., and fifth, about the Canons governing the administration of the Church.

The Holy Episcopal Synod

The Episcopal Synod with the Catholicos as its president, is the apex body of all Bishops. The authority of the synod is final and binding. It has exclusive rights and privileges in the matter of upholding the faith of Church, its disciple, and by of Apostolic sucession. The bishops lead the diocese assigned to them by the Synod. Section 102-109 of the Constitution of Malankara Orthodox Church deals with the Episcopal Synod.

Section 103 deals with all prelates in Church who have been duly approved as per the Constitution shall be members of the Synod.

Section 104 says that the Catholicos shall be the President of Synod.

Section 105 says that the Catholicos shall convene the Synod and preside over the Synod.

Section 106 says that when there is accusation against Catholicos, the senior Metropolitan shall convene the Synod and preside over the Synod.

Section 107 conveys that the Episcopal Synod shall have the authority to decide over the faith, order and discipline.

Section 108 conveys that no one shall have the right to alter the faith of the Church.

Section 109 conveys that the Episcopal Synod may in consultation with the Association Managing Committee appoint Subcommittees for the purpose of theological education, mission work, Sunday school and similar matters.

Levels of Administration

There are three levels of Administration: 1. Parish General Body; 2. Parish Managing Committee; 3. Diocesan General Body.

1. Parish General Body: Every Parish is within the framework of Church Constitution. Each parish has a general body. The membership is confined to all male and female members above the age of 21 who have made their annual confession and Communion. All matters related to the Parish are discussed and decided by this body. The parish general body elects the “Church Managing Committee”, the “Secretary” and the “lay Trustee”. The parish Managing Committee, the trustee, and Secretary are elected every year.

2. Parish Managing Committee: Members of the Parish Managing Committee, excluding the priests, will be elected by the Parish assembly and their term of office will be 1 year. Each parish managing committee will have minimum of five and maximum of fifteen members including the priest. The Parish Assembly will decide the required number of members within these limits. Terms of Parish Managing Committee can be extended up to 3 years with the special permission of the diocesan Metropolitan.

3. Diocesan General Body: Every diocese will have a diocesan assembly and the diocesan bishop will preside over the meeting. Representation of the lay people is based on the number of parish members and term will be 5 years. All the matters related to the diocese is discussed and decided in the general body assembly including the budget and accounts.

Malankara Association

The Malankara Association manages and controls all the religious and social concerns of the Church. A priest and two laymen elected by parish general body, and members of the existing managing committee shall be members of the association. The Association is the body that elects the members of the Managing Committee, Bishops, and the Catholicos.

Managing Committee

The Managing Committee is a smaller body that looks into financial and other administrative matters. The members are elected by the Malankara association. Two Priests and four lay people representing each diocese are elected for a period of five years.

Working Committee

The Working Committee or the Advisory council prepares the agenda for the Managing Committee and helps the Malankara Metropolitan in his administrative functions. The body is constituted of ten members and executes matters as decided by the managing Committee.

Women in the Malankara Orthodox Church

Mercy John

The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (MOSC) is an autocephalous Indian Church. This Church belongs to the Oriental Orthodox Family. Apostle St Thomas founded this Church in AD 52. This Church is centered in Kottayam, Kerala; the southernmost region of India. H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III is the present Catholicos. MOSC consists of about 2 million members spread all over the world¹. The majority of the members of the Church are Keralites. Women comprise more than half of the community based on the population data from Kerala². They outnumber men in attendance at parish worship services, and many are engrossed in its activities. MOSC considers both men and women members of the body of Christ created in the likeness and image of God. The Church holds a constructive and positive approach towards womanhood while making feminine factors inclusive in the life of the Church. At the same time, several aspects of the Church are deprived of a well-defined status for women in the Church and it holds patriarchal notions and traits. Humankind is called to regain the original status of creation; therefore, a rethinking and a critical evaluation need to be corrected at every juncture of our journey. For this, the Trinitarian model of the relationship between the Ordained and the Laity, or the concept of *perichoresis*³ is ideal to follow. This paper is an attempt to explain

1. <https://www.oikoumene.org/member-churches/malankara-orthodox-syrian-church>.

2. As per the 2011 Indian census, 1084 females per 1000 males.

3. The word Perichoresis comes from the compound word in Greek, *peri* (around) and *chorein* (to go or come, to give way or to make room). Literally, this word can be translated as “rotation”. This word refers primarily to going around or encompassing. Perichoresis is a theological term which describes the relationship of the triune God.

women's experiences of synodality in the life and ministry of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church based on its theology and praxis.

Experiences of Synodality from Theological Perspectives

MOSC views females as fellow members⁴ with males, co-sharers in salvation, possessors of the same spiritual gifts, and common goals of communion with God. St Mary and other Gospel women have high regard in the Church. For MOSC, faith, spirituality, and theological affirmations are made visible in its Liturgy, and Liturgy is also an expression of its doctrines.⁵ Their role and participation in the salvific event and the public ministry of Christ contributed very much to formulating its theology and traditions. Reverence to St Mary is the highest expression of the Church towards the feminine part of humanity.⁶ She is the first honored female in the Church. She is never spoken of in isolation from the mystery of incarnation or the Church. She is appreciated in the Church exclusively in connection with Christology and Ecclesiology.⁷ Her presence in the Church is a continuing experience; it is not reduced to a role or a place in the Church.⁸

Theotokos and Christological Interpretations

The most common title used for St Mary is *Theotokos*, the God-bearer, and the most common usage is as the "Mother of God". The New

4. Constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (Malayalam) 1:4; Gregorios, "Purushanodoppam Sthrikkum Nethrithvam," pp. 13-30.

5. Baby Varghese, *West Syrian Liturgical Theology*, Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004, pp. 47-49.

6. Elizabeth Behr-Sigel, *Women in the Orthodox Church*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000, p. 2.

7. Yuhanon Mar Dimitrios, *St Mary the Mother of God*, https://mosc.in/the_church/theology/st-mary-the-mother-of-god.

8. K.M. George, "The Presence of the THEOTOKOS in the Economy of Salvation—An Orthodox Approach," <http://www.malankaraworld.com/library/shunoyo/StMary-theotokos-in-Orthodox-church-KMGeorge.htm>.

Testament and Fathers of the Church made it clear that the body of Jesus, or his humanity, was taken from the body of St Mary. Thus, Jesus' humanity is our humanity. But Jesus from the very first moment of his conception was the eternal God. Therefore, the mother of infant Jesus is the bearer of God. The practical implications of this understanding are expressed especially in our daily recurring prayer that begin with, "Peace be with you Mary full of grace..." The Church repeats the angelic salutation, "Greetings, favored one, the Lord is with you," (Lk 1:28) along with Elizabeth's words addressing her as 'the mother of my Lord' and calling her "blessed are you among women" (Lk 1:42, 43). The very opening liturgical expression of the Holy Eucharist in MOSC has references made to Mother Mary and John the Baptist.⁹ All these expressions show the acceptance of femininity and are founded on the biblical understanding of Christ and the incarnation. The Church seeks her prayers and her mediation is significantly present in the prayers. Therefore, the Church certainly embraces a higher view of womanhood in its theological understanding.

Theotokos in the Typological Interpretations

One of the characteristic features of the Liturgy of MOSC is its typological usage of Mother Mary. Many of these usages for *Theotokos* like the imagery of the burning bush, the fleece of wool of Gideon, the fiery chariot, etc.,¹⁰ are from the Old Testament and they are deep-rooted

9. The Service of the Holy Eucharist, 10.

10. Some of the typological interpretations in the Liturgy are Burning Bush (Ex 3:21): St Mary is depicted as the burning bush, she remained unhurt by the indwelling of God who is burning fire. The fleece of wool of Gideon (Judg 3:36ff): In the story of Gideon, the dew that appeared on the fleece of wool laid on dry ground as a sign of salvation for Israel as the incarnate Christ, and the fleece of wool as Mary. The Fiery Chariot of Ezekiel (Ezk 1:4-28): The fiery chariot that Ezekiel saw is the symbol of St Mary. The thicket (Gen 22:13): the thicket which Abraham found the ram while trying to sacrifice his son is the Symbol of Mary. The Ark of the Law and the Pot of Manna are also other symbolic representations.

in the liturgical tradition of the Church. The emphasis is always Christological. According to George Kondothra M., the method employed in the typological interpretation is to look at the whole Bible from the vantage point of the Apostolic experience of the mystery of the incarnation and not vice versa, that is to look at the incarnate Christ and the whole economy of salvation from the view of Biblical witness alone. That is why even the slightest allusions to Mary in the Bible bear great prophetic and Messianic significance in the eyes of the early theologians. He says again, when the poet theologian who composed the Liturgy, goes back even to the slightest allusion from the Old Testament and he relates it to the New Testament theme of incarnation and Mary's part in it.¹¹

These typological exegeses of the Bible found in the Orthodox Liturgy and their application in daily prayers underline the participation and role of women in Christ-event and the fundamental belief of the Church. While singing and participating in the liturgical services, we, and particularly women, experience inner joy and gratitude towards God for enabling our foremothers as part-takers and witnesses of his earthly ministry and salvific event. This gives us the energy to continue Christ's work on earth as faithful followers.

Female Images in the Ecclesiological Interpretations

The maternal image of the Church is deep-rooted in the tradition of the Church. This image comes up often in the ecclesiological interpretations of the Orthodox Church. The Church is personified as the mother of the faithful and bride of Christ. The third person 'she' is recurrently used instead of 'it' for the Church in Orthodox theological expositions, hymns, and prayers. The main focus of a Church building is the altar and its *Thronos* or Altar table for the celebration of the Eucharist.

At the time of the consecration of the Church, the altar of the Church will be dedicated in the name of one particular saint, along with

11. K.M. George, *The Presence of the THEOTOKOS in the Economy of Salvation—An Orthodox Approach*.

the mandatory dedication to St Mary. She stands as a symbol of the Church too (Rev 12:1). Therefore, she is both the personification of the Church and the role model for each Christian.¹² In the iconographic traditions, St Mary holding the infant Jesus symbolizes the Church holding Christ. The iconography of the Pentecost also represents St Mary at the center of the picture surrounded by the Apostles. This is also a symbolic representation of the Church. The newly baptized persons are said to be born from the womb of the mother Church. All these feminine representations compel us to think from the cultural perspective that this is a mother-centered Church, not a father-centered one. MOSC has many Churches in the name of St Mary and other women saints like *Marthasmoon*i and *Ulithi*. The Church respects women saints and martyrs and seeks their intercession. But the continuing patriarchal culture makes the Church patriarchal.

Gospel Women in the Liturgical Theology

In the 17th century the Church came into a relationship with the Syriac Orthodox Church and received West Syriac Liturgies and practices. This Liturgy is women-friendly and brings out the role and participation of women who are seen in the Gospels.

The depiction of women in the *Qyomtho*¹³ Prayers is very positive. These prayers are the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. Women during the time of the earthly ministry of Jesus are highly projected. Women who went to the tomb of Jesus are mentioned as “disciples” and this term comes up consistently in the prayers and hymns of *Qyomtho*.¹⁴ This usage is significant because women are not called “disciples” in the Gospels. The only reference to a woman disciple (*mathetria*) in the New Testament is Tabita (Acts 9:36). But our Church calls and accepts the

12. Baby Varghese, *West Syrian Liturgical Theology*, p. 97.

13. *Qyomtho* means resurrection. The Church uses these prayers from Easter to September 13.

14. Jnayarashcha Namaskaram & Qurbanakramam (Malayalam translation of the Liturgy of the Holy Eucharist), p. 100, p.138.

myrrh-bearing women at the tomb of Christ with the designation “disciples.” The Church sings and praises the presence and witness of women at the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus and wants to follow their path.¹⁵ The Church is very indebted to these women at the foot of the cross and the tomb of Christ for their witness and the information they conveyed to the Church.

The Canaanite woman is an example of faith and perseverance in our Liturgy. The woman with a hemorrhage is also an example of faith and the woman described as a “sinner” is the model of repentance. Mary Magdalene is described as the apostle to the apostles. She is the first one who is sent out to proclaim the good news, the resurrection of Jesus to his Disciples. A good number of readings, prayers, and hymns during the Easter services are descriptions of women’s roles concerning Christ.

From the above discussion, we can infer that the Church fully values and accepts women’s role and participation in the ministry and salvific act of Jesus Christ in its tradition. Not only the Apostles, but women who were considered inferior are also included in the Liturgy of the Church. The Church’s Christology and ecclesiology are formulated highly in consideration of women’s participation as well. St Mary as the symbolic representation of the Church, her participation in the Christ event, her ongoing intercessory role, and her iconographic portrayal makes the church a mother-centered church by its culture.

Experiences of Synodality from the Practical side of the Life and Ministry of the Church

The inherent feminine nature and women’s spirituality are inextricably linked to women’s ministry in the Church. It is undeniable that the love, dedication, and service of the women form a significant part of the existence of a parish. Paulose Mar Gregorios rightly said that the life of the Eastern Churches will be lost if the women’s teaching ministry stops. The teaching ministry of women is the foundation for the existence of the Eastern Churches.¹⁶ The first teacher is always a mother. Our Church has a deep theology, but in practice, it occasionally struggles to maintain

15. Jnayarashcha Namaskaram & Qurbanakramam, pp. 150-151.

16. Paulose Mar Gregorios, “Sthri Sabhacharithrathil” (Malayalam), p. 27.

reciprocity and mutuality between the ordained and laity, or between male and female members. Patriarchal cultural norms, refusal to accept reality, lack of respect for one another, resistance to change, and insufficient awareness of the issues, are some of the barriers that prevent the execution of a wise choice.

Many women are involved in the activities of the Parish with the catechism, prayer groups, social activities, spiritual organizations, and other spiritual events such as leadership training and conferences at the parish, diocesan, and inter-diocesan levels. Now women are allowed to take administrative positions in their parish. The presence of women representatives from the MOSC in the ecumenical consultations and meetings is remarkable. This shows the initiative of the Church in sending women to wider horizons. This helps them to meet various denominations, learn their experiences and search for answers to find out solutions within their traditions.

Participation in Worship and Sacraments

MOSC believes in the common calling of all the baptized without any distinction between male and female (cf. 1 Pet 2:9). Baptism demands a new life in Christ. We affirm that men and women are created equally in the image and likeness of the Trinitarian God and both are called to *theosis*.¹⁷ Women are more in number in the worship services and other activities of the Church than men. Though women would not have any particular leadership roles in any liturgical functions, they are allowed to read Old Testament just before the beginning of the Holy Eucharist. This practice started in 1988. The leadership of the Eucharist is still restricted to priests. Only male members who have received special blessings are allowed to enter the altar to assist the priest. Female members are only participants like other male members of the Church. Female members can join the choir group, however, choir is not a requirement in the Orthodox Church worship.

Women are allowed to preach in the Church with the permission of the priest. Some are excelling at it. Women are not encouraged, yet at

17. Oriental Orthodox Churches, World Council of Churches, <http://www.wcc-coe.org>.

the same time, some priests are highly receptive to it. The observance of the feasts of St Mary and other women saints, Women's Sunday, Parents' Sunday, etc., highlight women's role and demand their active participation in the Church.

A female member can receive all the sacraments except ordination. The Order of Deaconesses does not exist in the MOSC. At the same time, the rejuvenation of the Order of Deaconesses comes into discussion sometimes. There is no strict theological objection to the ordination of women, but traditional¹⁸ and cultural practices do not support it.

There exists a hierarchical order for the ordained persons for receiving Holy Communion. This helps to keep discipline while receiving the Holy Eucharist. Although there is no written law for the laity about this, the male members receive the holy body and blood first, and then the female members in the context of an ordinary parish.¹⁹ The contrast is that the status of a Sunday school Headmistress or a female teacher is inferior to her male students. This reinforces the superiority of maleness in children's minds and solidifies the patriarchal customs.

The Church uses an "inclusive andro-centric language" in its Liturgy. Most of the time the Priest addresses the worshippers as "brothers".²⁰ In the English translation of the Nicene Creed, it is said, "Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven...",

18. Tradition is not a static one, it is dynamic. It is not a block content to be carefully guarded by authorized hierarchies, but a dynamic action of God's love that is to be passed on to others of all sexes and races. Letty Russell, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective*, Philadelphia, Westminster, 1974, p. 79; Kallistos Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, California: Penguin Adult, 1993, p. 167.

19. There will be a separate row for female members if multiple priests are available for giving the Holy Eucharist. This practice of receiving the Holy Eucharist after male members is not applicable in those circumstances. But, most of the Parishes have only one Priest.

20. But in some English translations, inclusive language is seen. However, there is no strict rule for the use of inclusive language in translations.

which stands as a distraction to the women flocks. Conscious use of inclusive language is practiced in our schools and colleges and all are aware of that.²¹ It is high time to switch to inclusive language in the MOSC.

The Gospel portions for reading at the time of Baptism are striking. It consists of a text regarding the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan Woman on living water and eternal life. This higher-level talk with a woman on significantly notable issues²² of her context by Jesus, indirectly supports and elevates the status of feminineness at the time of the first sacrament. The MOSC follows a great practice for baptism. An infant or a child is allowed to enter the altar and kiss the *Thronos* after receiving baptism. Female children below five years are also getting this chance now. This started in 1988, during the time of Baslios Marthoma Mathews I by *Kalpana* 255/88.²³ The practice of baptizing only the male children just after the Epiphany is also changed by this *Kalpana*. This *Kalpana* wants to use separate water for each one. Now, the female infant also gets baptism just after the Epiphany, and therefore, this *Kalpana* is quite significant in the history of the MOSC as it lifted all the disparities that existed between male and female children during baptism. Therefore, it is clear that the Church takes initiative in changing certain customary practices and is ready to correct them in certain contexts.

The Gospel reading portion (Mt 19:1-12) during the sacrament of marriage is very positive to women, but the text from the Deutero-Pauline (Eph 5:23-6:3) is inclined to traditional hierarchical instruction. Though the text starts with mutual subjugation, it leads to the wife's subjugation to her husband. This is against Pauline teachings of the unity of male and female in Christ (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:11,12)²⁴. We expect our Church will rethink and stick to the teachings of Christ and Paul in the

21. However, Indian society does not fully embrace the usage of inclusive language.

22. Temple and Worship on Mount Gerizim or Jerusalem, the coming of the Messiah, Scripture, traditions, ethnic purity, etc.

23. *Kalpana* No. 225/88. *Kalpana* means Directive.

24. Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, Tenth Anniversary Edn., NY: Crossroad, 1994, p. 208.

context of domestic violence and abuses against women in India particularly. Husband and wife are one unit, therefore, mutual reciprocity and dependency are to be highlighted.

Women were expected to stand behind men in the Church before 1945, but this practice gradually changed and by 1960, the women's position in the worship services became right side while facing the *Thronos* or at the southern side of the Church. The right side shows a respectful position in the Eastern understanding. The Scriptural basis for this is seen in Ps 45:9, "at your right-hand stands queen in gold of Ophir" and the Church sings that at the time of *Kukilion*, the queen represents the Church.²⁵ At the marriage also bride stands on the right-hand side of the bridegroom. All of these elevates women's dignity and honor.

Women use a head veil during worship and prayer times. The exact reason is not specified whether it denotes the inferiority of women or cultural practice. This is generally considered as a cultural adaptation of the Middle East to keep modesty and decorum in the worshipping community. Likewise, Bishops have a head cover and Priests use a cap, all these are related to their holy orders.

Therefore, it is clear that all the liturgical functions are reserved for Priests only. Women have no specific role in the liturgical services of the Church. Men with special dedication can assist the Priest. At the same time, women are allowed to read Old Testament in the Church publically to prepare the worshippers for the Holy Eucharist and they can deliver a short sermon with the permission of the priest. Although these functions are permitted within the Church, implementation depends on the interest of the vicar. Therefore, we are looking toward the active participation and support of Priests to implement the rights that the Church recognizes for women.

Participation in the Priestly Formation and Edification of the Church

One of the significant changes on the part of the Church is the appointment of full-time female faculty members in the teaching and

25. *Kukilion* means a verse of Psalms. This is a series of prayers. "See the royal daughter stand, Halleluiah Vu halleluiah, Glorious queen at Thy right hand."

formation ministry of priests. Theologically trained women with adequate educational qualifications are allowed to teach in the seminary founded in Nagpur, in central India. Catholicos appoints them with the proposal of the interview board and the approval of the Holy Episcopal Synod. The first appointment was in 2011. This enabled women to participate in the full-time ministerial role of the Church. They share and participate in the functioning of the Seminary except in the liturgical functions. The registrar post at St Thomas Orthodox Theological Seminary is also open to female faculty members. We are trying to give an egalitarian outlook through our curriculum and personal talks. Women in the teaching and formation ministry of future priests is a new and challenging attempt on the part of the Church. Ladies can seek admission here. This started after a long-term discussion and then by the *Kalpana* of the Catholicos in 2005.²⁶ They can serve the Church as leaders and teachers after their studies with the appointment of their concerned Bishops or Catholicos. Theologically trained women are few in number in our Church and therefore, a special initiative is needed for the training and education of future women leaders and teachers of the Church. The Church would benefit more if women, especially nuns and the wives of priests, were supported and motivated to pursue theological education.

We have a well-developed system of theological training for the Laity. This is centered in our two Seminaries.²⁷ Proficiency, diploma, and degree courses are offered under this program. Online studies and contact classes under efficient leaders are also provided for the fulfillment of these courses. Women participate in these programs more enthusiastically than men. Graduated women through this program, are highly involved in conducting and training laypersons. They give leadership in spiritual organizations of the Church such as Sunday

26. John Thomas Karingattil, "Sthri Prathinidyavum Edavaka Pothuyogavum", in Sabhayum Sthreekalum, Jaisy and John Thomas Karingattil (eds.), Devalokam, Kottayam: MOSC Publications, 2009, p. 96.

27. Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam offers Divyabodhanam and St Thomas Orthodox Theological Seminary, Nagpur, offers a Sathya Jothi online program for the Laity.

School, women's groups, youth groups, etc. The church can utilize these women in the different realms of the ministry of the Church.

Sruthi School of Liturgical Music under the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Kottayam offers courses for both male and female members of the Church. Many women received training from there and support the choir in their parish. This has provided a platform for many young women to participate in worship actively.

Participation in the Spiritual Organizations

Spiritual organizations are the arms of the Church. They make the Church live and participatory. Many women are active members of these spiritual organizations and their participation in these organizations is in various ways.

Sunday School and Fellowship Groups for Children and Youth

Sunday School stands first among the spiritual organizations in a parish. Most of the teachers in the Sunday School are ladies. Different from past practices, now many of our Sunday Schools are under the leadership of headmistresses. They are the faith builders of the Church. Their voluntary service in the Sunday School is commendable.

*Balika-Bala Samajam*²⁸ for children between the age group, 5-15 is aimed at integrated personal development, social activities, and talent-oriented initiatives from the side of the Church. Girl children and lady teachers are very much involved in it. Youth Movement started in 1936, but Ladies were given access to the functioning of it as recently as 2005.²⁹

Student Christian Movement

Mar Gregorios Orthodox Christian Student Movement (MGOCSM) is the student wing of the MOSC. This is the oldest Christian student organization in India. This was founded in 1907 by the initiates of students in Madras. The main intention of this organization is to bring together MOSC students studying in various Colleges, and High Schools

28. The Fellowship group for boys and girls started in 1981.

29. Kalpana No. 161/2005.

to deepen their spiritual life and fellowship. MGOCSM units facilitate fellowship and both spiritual and economic support to students. They conduct various programs for students' educational and spiritual development including carrier guidance, hostel facilities, various training programs, and worship facilities, especially for women nursing students who do not have access to Church worship. It has brought forward and contributed many outstanding leaders including women to the Church.

Women's Groups

Marth Mariam Vanitha Samajam (MMVS) is the women's wing of the Church and it is named after the Blessed Virgin Mary. This started in 1928. They perform a wonderful role in the Church. Pray, act, and shine is their motto. MMVS stands for empowerment and spiritual enhancement of the female members of the Church. This group tries to improve spirituality by observing canonical prayers and Lent, encouraging women to take leadership in family prayers, and engage in social activities. Training women to have awareness of social problems, attempting to find out women's potential to promote leadership qualities, seeking solidarity with Christian women groups at local, national, and international levels, encouraging women in ecumenical gatherings, helping financial support for girls' education, etc., come under the aim of this group. They encourage women to take an active role in the administration of the parish and its committees. There is an annual leadership training camp, and annual examinations based on prescribed textbooks on the Bible, the faith of the Church, and liturgical hymns. They publish a tri-monthly magazine aimed at women's empowerment and spiritual growth with new insights and visions for the women's fold of MOSC.

MMVS at the Parish and Diocesan level runs certain projects and programs for helping the needy and for women's empowerment and upliftment. There are some projects for supporting women financially

like *Navajyoti MOMS*.³⁰ MMVS supports girl students through social awareness classes, carrier-oriented programs, soft skill training, etc. They are giving financial support for economically backward girl students to get coaching for Indian Administrative Service also. The initiative of the MMVS of Thiruvananthapuram Diocese for running a school for differently abled children is highly appreciated.

It is high time to intervene in the social issues related to women in the Church and society. Women need awareness against certain practices like the dowry which are harmful to women. Domestic violence against women and divorce cases are increasing day by day. Women stand firm to hold their social values and family system. Women's groups can intervene in this juncture effectively under the title of a parish, at least among its members.

Like other spiritual organizations, MMVS is under Diocesan Metropolitan as president and a priest as vice-president. Secretaries and other officials are from the women's group.

Women in the Monastic Life

Convents are spiritual sources for the people. We have more than 20 convents and they engage in teaching, healing, and other humanitarian activities. They are doing great service to the Church and society. The young generation shows less interest in joining a convent now.

30. Projects like Navajyoti MOMS Charitable Society & Chaitanya Samskaria Kootayma stand for women's financial and social upliftment. Snehasparsam Project under MMVS extends its hands toward women in need. They provide sick aid, education aid, marriage aid for financially backward girls, aid for the construction of houses for widows, etc.

Association of Priests' Wives

The association for priests' wives is called *Besquomo* Association, which began in 1977. The wife of a priest is the spiritual mother of a parish. Therefore, priests' wives have an important role in the ministry of a parish.³¹ Some wives of priests are actively participating and supporting their husbands in their ministry. Their role and participation in the ministry of a parish are not yet defined. Their role should be recognized, and they ought to be given participation in the pastoral activities of the parish. Gender disparity is very high in our society and therefore, a priest has many limitations to care for the female members of his parish. Here, priests' wives can render effective work and assist the priest by giving leadership to the female section of the parish. She can represent and take care of the women and their issues in that parish. At present many women and elderly people are living alone in their houses. They need special care and attention. The priest's wife can give proper guidance to the teenage girls and youths to solve their problems or can bring the attention of the priest to that or direct them to experts. Women groups can be held under her supervision. She can give special attention to girls and women. This surely attracts many women to the parish and its activities. Some wives of priests are highly dedicated and they are actively participating in the catechetical and philanthropic work of the parish. Many of them are passive and pursue their carrier and household chores. Their role in the ministry of the parish is to be acknowledged. Here they need official recognition from the part of the Church and proper training to make the service formal and more effective.

Participation in the Administrative and Decision-Making Bodies

Every parish is within the framework of the Church constitution. Each parish has a parish assembly and a managing committee. The membership is confined to all male and female members above the age

31. Kyriaki Karidoyanes Fitzgerald (ed.), *Orthodox Women Speaks: Discerning the Signs of Times*, Brookline, Massachusetts: WCC Publications, 1999, p. 31.

of 21 and who have made their annual confession and communion. Baselios Marthoma Didymos I sent a *Kalpana* to all the parishes to participate women in the assembly of a parish as observers in 2007.³² *Kalpana* No. 475/2011 by Baselios Marthoma Paulose II is very significant. By this *Kalpana*, women got voting right at the parish level. Therefore, the year 2011 marked a historic amendment to the Church constitution, women were granted voting rights at the parish level, membership in parish assembly, and the right to get elected to the parish managing committee. Following this, some women adorned the positions of trustee, secretary, auditor, and member of the parish managing committee.³³ Now under the leadership of MMVS, women are taking efforts for getting representation in the Diocesan Council and Malankara Association. Women need encouragement and support to participate in the general assembly meetings of the Church and responsible positions in the Church to exercise their duties and talents for the betterment of the Church.

The above-mentioned spiritual organizations are very active and women get chances to get involved in their ministry. The themes of the above organization's annual conferences are not aimed at holistic development. Partnership, justice, participatory decision-making, rights, etc., seldom come into discussions. Though we have many spiritual organizations for women to get involved in the ministry of the Church, only 15%-20% are actively participating in them. Therefore, we are trying to get others to participate in the ministry of the Church and to gain support and recognition from our authorities.

32. *Kalpana* No. 161/2007. They were also allowed to speak in the Parish Council (*Kalpana* No. 266/2008).

33. A trustee for the 2012-2013 fiscal year was Mrs. Santha T.C., St Ignatios, Kathakambal, Kunnukulam Diocese, Kerala. Her Parish consists of about 750 families. She was elected to the Trusteeship. Her parish saw great success under her leadership. We also have some female Church Secretaries. Mrs. Anju Susan Varghese is the current secretary of Ayroor St Mary's Orthodox Church in Kottayam Diocese, Kerala.

Conclusion

From the above analysis, we can conclude that MOSC holds an egalitarian outlook in its theology, liturgy, and ecclesiology as a worshipping community. We women are proud of its profound theology and liturgical traditions. Theoretically, our Church is women-friendly and keeps a balanced theological stand. At the same time, practically we are facing many challenges in the implementation of its theory. We have many spiritual organizations involved in the ministry of the church. The number of participants is less in number. The concept of egalitarianism on its practical side is a challenging one. Our Church traditions, culture, and the customs of the Indian society and its patriarchal structures sometimes resist decisions in favour of women. At the same time, changes are happening in our church and society from time to time. Keralites are the most educated community in India, and women are at the forefront. Many of the women in the Church hold positions of authority at various levels in Indian Society. But in the Church, they continue to be predominantly listeners. Now our Church opened doors for admitting women to its parish council and managing committee at the lower level. Discussions are going on about admitting to the higher level like Diocesan Council and Malankara Association. The Church does not utilize the intellectual capacities and practical wisdom of women properly and sometimes sidelines them. Even though we are full members of the Church, we are not allowed to participate in every aspect of its life and witness. At the same time, in the field, we receive access or acceptance that is concrete and firm. The Holy Trinity is a prime example of reciprocity, mutuality, and dynamic action. Each member of the Body of Christ is essential for the proper functioning of the church. We all are called out to continue the ministry and mission of Christ on Earth. Therefore, the concept of *perichoresis* can be a dynamic metaphor for our collective journey.

Youth in the Malankara Orthodox Church

Bipin Mathew

In Acts chapter 15, we see the Apostles and the elders of the Church, led by St James, coming together to make compromises on issues in order to maintain peace and unity in the Church. Synodality can be defined as working together to make decisions as one community. The experience of Synodality is one of togetherness and growth. It is a journey of learning, embracing ideas and compromising egos to work together to allow community growth and for the building up of the Church. Synodality is the fundamental backbone to the history and the future of the church, as we journey together as the people of God.

The journey of Synodality within the Malankara Orthodox Church is modeled after the Council in Jerusalem, as seen in Acts Chapter 15. This can be seen in the members of the Holy Episcopal Synod, gathering at least twice a year, according to the canons set forth at Nicea, to make decisions for the Church. This model can be seen in all aspects of the Church, from the administration down to its various ministries. Proverbs 22:16 says, “train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Synodality is introduced to the youth of the Church at a very young age through Sunday School ministry. A recent example of Synodality within the American Diocese was seen during the introduction of the new Sunday School Curriculum. Leaders of the Church recognized the needs of the youth of the church and came together to designate a Sunday School Curriculum Committee. The committee then went on to select members of the community (including active youth) to be part of the creation of the new curriculum. This experience of Synodality demonstrates the coming togetherness for the growth of the community.

Another example of a ministry within the Malankara Orthodox Church is an organization known as the Mar Gregorios Orthodox Christian Student Movement (MGOCSM) which prioritizes the development and prosperity of the youth in the Church. Under the leadership of the respective Diocesan Metropolitan, along with the

elected Vice President, MGOCSM General Secretary, and MGOCSM Council members are selected to minister to the spiritual needs of the youth of the Malankara Orthodox Church. Leadership roles such as secretary, treasurer, council members, etc., are widely occupied by the youth of the Church. Events held by MGOCSM include conferences, retreats, mission trips, etc., that promote worship, study, and service, which are the three pillars of MGOCSM.

Through MGOCSM conferences and retreats, the youth of the Church are provided a platform to come together to share ideas and resources, and to discuss concerns facing the youth of the Church on a consistent basis. MGOCSM stresses the importance of serving by being stewards of Christ. Mission trips have been a huge spiritual enlightenment for the youth of the Church. Since the creation of MGOCSM in 2005, we have had many domestic missions where the youth travel to various communities to help the community build new homes or fix damaged ones, as well as help communities clean-up their neighborhood, parks, etc. On international missions, the youth often visit orphanages where the team comes together to support the children and staff there. Here the youth work with the staff in their day-to-day tasks; i.e., participate in fun activities, teach the children English and about the Divine Liturgy. During the mission trips, the youth participate in all hours of prayers, and leads team devotionals for the missionary journey they are partaking in. Often the youths' journey in mission is to change the lives of people they encounter, but it is their own life that is transformed during the journey. The journey of Synodality demonstrated here is one of learning and growing together as a community, through service.

One of the big annual events conducted by the Malankara Orthodox Church are annual leadership camps in North America. The purpose of a leadership camp is to mold future leaders of the Malankara Orthodox Church. Through the various activities at camp, the participants are given opportunities to engage in discussions with Bishops, Priests, Seminarians, Teachers, and Leaders of the Church. Through the activities during camp, the youth acquire valuable tools and resources which they can apply in their everyday lives, as well as bring home with them to their respective parishes to help build up the Church.

The seeds of Synodality are sown in the youth during this conference, by providing the tools necessary to cultivate and pass down the faith to future generations.

The Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in the United States (FOCUS) is an American ministry for older youth and their families that is flourishing under the prayerful guidance of Diocesan Metropolitans along with support of Clergy and the faithful. This ministry encourages post-graduates, working professionals as well as young married couples to come together in fellowship to help one another become more Christ-like. The FOCUS community promotes networking and provides various resources to help members, especially young parents, with their struggles and questions. A form of Synodality is showcased here as the leaders of the Church equip FOCUS members with the tools necessary to create a strong Orthodox Christian home.

Why is Synodality good? Synodality is the structure that has been most effective for the Church since its genesis. This structure has been essential in the Church's expression of its nature as the people of God, the Church's journey, and the implementation of practices to fulfill its mission. Synodality ensures that one person does not dominate or impose their will on the Church. Rather, through a combined effort, the will of the Holy Spirit and Her people are brought to the forefront. The experience of Synodality is seen throughout the various missions and ministries of the Church. Using effective communication allows all parties to understand one another, and to come together to make a collaborative effect, and find discernment in God's teaching and calling. It is the realization that the Holy Spirit can speak through everyone to help us on our individual journeys toward God.

Monastic Life in the Malankara Orthodox Church

Bideesh Mathew

Introduction

The principal purpose of the monastic community is to travel the same spiritual path to achieve salvation. Unity is the real symbol of the Kingdom of God, as it is said in the biblical verse John 17:22, “they are one as we are one”. Monasteries are the best places for one to expect synodality within the Church. Almost all the monasteries work with the same motive to live as a community and to work towards the same aim. Even though the concept of synodality is recent, the idea of it is not a new one in the monastic community, and the case of Malankara Orthodox Monasteries are no exception.

In the Malankara Orthodox Church, there are forty-one monastic communities including both the community of monks and nuns. Both Catholic (Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites, Society of Jesus, etc.) and Anglican (Cowley Fathers) Monastic Communities have influenced the Indian Church. In the long history of Malankara Orthodox Monasticism, two chief aspects of Synodality are to be considered: (i) synodality within the community and (ii) synodality towards the outside community. There are different disciplines and rules for each community, but community life, prayer, timetables of day-to-day life, common vows like chastity, poverty, and discipline are common to all the communities.

1. Synodality within the community

Within each monastery, the community as a whole bind together with the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood. The community of the monastic life always exists with a proper framework of rules and the brotherhood in Christ. There are five things that stand out when we discuss the synodality within the monastic community:

Worshiping community

As the abridged version of old slogan related to family and prayer, we can understand the importance of community life and prayer; where people pray together, they will live together. Eucharist and prayer are the centre of all the monastic communities. The chapel is the centre of their gathering. All the monasteries are very strict about observing the prayers. In monasteries, a day starts with prayer and ends with prayer, and there are prayers conducted during particular time periods. All the monasteries are vigilant about completing their daily prayer cycles. As per the Syrian liturgical tradition, Malankara Orthodox Churches have seven prayers in a day. Some of the monasteries celebrate Holy Eucharist followed by morning prayer, and others do it once in a week and on special days. In some communities, small punishments such as fasting up to midday or completing some prayers or Holy Scripture portions are given to people who skip prayers. Prayer is truly the strength of the community to exist in harmony.

Brotherhood and Sisterhood

Though hierarchically different on the basis of ordination, all members of the community are basically brothers and sisters in the monastery. Those who wish to become a member have to stay in the monastery for a period of time and since then they are called as 'brothers' and 'sisters.' They help each other and they communicate with each other with the affection of siblings. The monasteries are like families; the members respect each other. The wealth and the property of the community is always considered as common. There is no discrimination on the basis of anything. If somebody in the community works and earns money that will go to the common pool. The monastery will use this according to the needs of the community and the individual.

Bethany Monastery Community is one of the oldest monasteries in the Malankara Church. They have both monasteries and convents. Their original names are "Brotherhood of Imitation of Christ" and "Sisterhood of Imitation of Christ" respectively, for the monastery and the convent. This is also similar in other communities even though each community has separate rules and motto of life.

Common rule as a binding force

The disciplines of the community always bind the members of the monastery together. Unified prayer time and the participation of members of the community in it are always followed in its perfect manner. Rules bind together the community like a family. In almost all the communities, the members themselves serve their food at the table and in some communities, food preparation and other activities are carried out together like a family. The very aim of the monk is the absolute self-sacrifice for the sake of God. All the communities have rules for their day-to-day activities: distribution of positions to all the members, their duties within the community and towards the outside society, handling of money, etc. So, the disciplines and the rules of the community restrict the members like the walls of a house. While the vows of poverty, chastity and discipline are common to all of the monasteries, each community has rules for their disciplines.

Head of the community

Each community has a superior, and all the members of the community are obliged to view the superior as the father in the family. The superior is the gatekeeper of the rules in the community. If somebody wants to do something or go out for a while, they should first get the permission from the superior. The power of the superior is to always act in relation with the community as a whole. The superior's authority ceases if he violates the law or goes out from the community. So, the superior's power is given by the community. He or she has no special privileges on the basis of the position. In most of the communities, one superior holds the position for four or five years, and is selected by the members of the community.

Conciliar nature of the distribution of authority

Almost all the communities follow a norm and that community is ruled by a head and a general body. The superiors are selected by the community through election or the voice vote. Each superior, and a subgroup if applicable, has a specified period to hold authority and after will join the community body to select new superior and subgroup. So,

holding the authority is not permanent for anyone. All the members of the community are equal even though some have special duties that are exercised in a conciliar way.

2. Synodality towards the outside community

The face of the Holy Church

Malankara Orthodox Monasteries are the face of the Malankara Orthodox Church in each place where they exist. Each community has special rules and administrative structures, but all are joined in a single body of the Church. Actually, they are the defenders of the faith. The purpose of each community is to help and serve the Holy Church in its traditional doctrinal aspects through monastic life. Each monastery, in one way or another, is engaged in the great mission of visiting Christian centres in order to ensure people's conformity with Christian faith and life. In the early periods, some of the monastic priests worked nearby places where they lived. They served voluntarily, without financial motives for their services. Monasteries have a major role in the extension of the missions of the Church in certain places. Even though they are part of the Church, each monastery has the autonomy to implement their authority within their community and their properties.

A case in point is Bethany monastery; the vision of the founding father was to organize a strong indigenous missionary society towards the evangelization of India and the outside.¹ The monasteries observe all the Church disciplines in their communities perfectly. Their witness is a mission of the Church in that place.

Extend a philanthropic hand to the society

Working for social welfare is an unavoidable part of a monastery in a particular place. There are ample examples of monastic roles in philanthropic activity. They extend their helping hands to the society where they live. Almost all the monasteries run at least one of the following social well-fair activities: educational institutions, medical

1. The Rule of life of the Brotherhood of the Imitation of Christ, p. 1.

establishments, medical aids, hostels, orphanages, and mission centres. Mission work and pastoral work are also part of the monasteries.

One of the examples is Mount Tabor Monastery, Pathenapuram, Kerala; one of the oldest monasteries in the Malankara Orthodox Church. During the nascent stages of the monastery, the place was in backwardness, later it became a town with all facilities. In the beginning, in 1933, the founder started schools and hostels for students. Education has brought a lot of changes in that society. The words of the superior, as recorded in a book published in 1963 are: "It has engaged itself in missionary activities, in running orphanages, home for the aged and destitute and is doing educational work and social uplift, work among Harijans in and outside Malabar."²

The monastic community, *Servant of the Cross*, founded by His Grace Pathros Mar Osthathios, has helped to improve the religious and social welfare of thousands of poor depressed classes in Kerala, India. It can very well be called the pioneer organization in the field of mission activities in the Malankara Orthodox Church. Among the monastic communities, *Servant of the Cross* has worked among the lower-class society and a lot of people have been converted to the Malankara Orthodox Church.

Conclusion

The attitude and the behaviour of people to their fellow beings are of immense importance in the present scenario. The church takes an initiative to put everyone together on the journey towards the same entity. Here the role of each institution of the Church is very important. As part of the Church, Malankara Orthodox Monasteries are performing an exemplary role in Synodal activities both inside and outside of their communities. Monasteries are playing a major role in catering to all the needs of the Church in their given environments and within the community.

2. George Munduvel, *The New Life in an Old Church*, The Orthodox Syrian Church, Calcutta, 1963, p. 22.

2.7. SYNODALITY IN REGIONAL ECUMENICAL NETWORKS

Synodality in the Middle East

Souraya Bechealany

The aim of this public ecumenical conference is to listen to and to learn from the Oriental Orthodox traditions about their understanding and experience of synodality. But, in the Middle East, most of the historical Churches, from all the denominations, are either patriarchal or synodal. So, also keep our attention on Catholic and Evangelical Churches which have their own experience of synodality.

For the Eastern Churches, the synodality among the Churches, in other words the togetherness, is a matter of “being or not being”, a matter of life or death, as mentioned by the Catholic Patriarchs of the Orient, in their first pastoral letter in August 1991: “In the East, we shall be Christians together or not be”. Hence, Synodality is a must, and must first be lived within each Church, then among the Churches, and finally towards, for and in communion with other religious communities and with the world.

For the Eastern Churches, Synodality is related to the gift of original Diversity: Diversity is not the consequence of historical divisions. Diversity is the sign and the fruit of the richness of plural traditions: Syriac, Byzantine, Armenian, Coptic, etc. Hence, embracing Diversity of traditions leads the Eastern Churches to the exercise of Synodality, as the way of and to Communion and Unity.

1. The Middle East Council of Churches: The lived experience of Togetherness and Synodality

On March 2, 2018, the Catholic “International Theological Commission” issued a document on “Synodality in the Life and mission of the Church”. In paragraph 6, the Synodality is defined as “the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission”. This definition conjures up three significant

expressions: journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in the evangelization.

In the Middle East, this understanding of synodality is manifested and exercised in an ecumenical network that brings together almost all the Churches. This network was founded in 1974 by three ecclesial families (the Orthodox, the Oriental Orthodox, the Evangelical Churches), under the name of “The Middle East Council of Churches” (MECC)¹. The Catholic family joined the Council in 1990. Now the MECC includes 4 families of 27 churches, and covers 8 countries: Egypt, Palestine/Holy Land, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Cyprus. Some evangelical communities based in Algeria, Tunisia, Sudan and Kuwait, are also related to the MECC.

As former secretary general, I invite you now to discover this ecumenical institution: its *raison d’être*, mission and purpose, nature, its structure and membership, and finally, its programs.

1. *Raison d’être*

According to the MECC’s Constitution (article 3):

the Council includes within it the four ecclesiastical families of the Middle East which believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior in accordance with the Holy Scripture and as articulated in the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. These Churches endeavor to realize together their common calling to praise God, the holy one in three persons, Father Son and Holy Spirit.

2. *Mission*

In its article 5, the Constitution develops the mission and the purpose of the Council which

is to deepen the spiritual fellowship among the churches of the Middle East, and to unite them in word and deed as they strive

1. <https://www.mecc.org>

to achieve the unity of the churches and bear a living evangelical witness to spread the gospel of salvation and reconciliation through the Lord Jesus Christ, love, peace and justice throughout the region and among the people inhabiting it.

In a recent reference document entitled *We Choose Abundant Life*² (§ 36), the MECC is presented

as a forum and a platform of encounter, acquaintance, dialogue, and cooperation (among the churches) towards fulfilling their united witness to the resurrected Christ, in the hope of restoring full communion. [...] Its creation opened a new chapter in relations among the Churches. It encouraged them to a deeper rapprochement, to face common challenges together, and to interact more profoundly with their communities. It also enabled them to strive to reject the kind of conflict, competition, and reluctance that they had known throughout their history. Indeed, this history has known periods of closedness and isolation, mainly because of psychological factors in which tribal mentality theories of superiority and complexes about persecution prevailed over the love of God that casts out fear (1 John 4:18).

In other words, the MECC works towards the unification of visions, perspectives, and attitudes among Eastern churches, especially on issues related to Christian presence and witness in the Middle East.

3. *Nature*

The Council presents itself as “a Christian association which has a legal personality” and “derives its competence from the Christian Churches assembled together. It is not an institution set in authority over the member churches” (Constitution, article 3, I-II).

2. <https://www.wechooseabundantlife.com>: *We Choose Abundant Life. Christians in the Middle East: Towards Renewed Theological, Social and Political Choices*, Beirut. September 2021.

4. *Membership*

In respect to the MECC's Constitution, "the Council includes within it the four ecclesiastical families of the Middle East – the Orthodox, the Oriental Orthodox, the Evangelical, and the Catholic" (article 3).

The four ecclesiastical families noted in article 3 hold membership in the Council. They are equally represented throughout the structure of the Council. In the understanding of this article, an ecclesiastical family includes churches that are autonomous administratively and ritually, sharing a common faith tradition and are in full communion with each other. In the event that two or more of the member families achieve full communion with each other, each family will retain its previous representation with the structure of the Council (article 6).

As we can see, the membership is not held by each single church, but by family. By family, the Constitution means the churches that share "common faith tradition, with full communion". The full communion is described in the By-Laws article 1 B as the "sacramental unity".

The four families are equally represented in the Council, in spite of the number of the churches per each of them. In other words, it's a consensual constitution, founded in a synodal understanding of ecclesiology.

List of Families:

The Oriental Orthodox Family:

- Coptic Orthodox Church
- Syriac Orthodox Church
- Armenian Apostolic Church Catholicosate of Cilicia

The Orthodox Family:

- Church of Alexandria and All Africa
- Church of Antioch and all the East
- Church of Jerusalem
- Church of Cyprus

The Evangelical Family: The evangelical family includes 15 communities, among them:

- Coptic Evangelical Church: Synod of the Nile
- Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land
- Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East
- Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East
- National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSEL)

The Catholic Family:

- Maronite Syriac Church of Antioch
- Greek Catholic Melkite Church
- Chaldean Catholic Church
- Syrian Catholic Church of Antioch
- Coptic Catholic Church
- Armenian Catholic Church
- Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem

Today, the MECC includes all the historical churches except the *Assyrian Church of the East* and the *Ancient Church of the East*. For the MECC, it is the hardest wound to bear today in the Middle East that should be transformed on a pressing challenge to overcome. Again and again, the Churches will be together, or they will not. It is a matter of life and death for their mission in the Middle East!

5. *Structure*

The synodal scheme is reflected in the structure and the procedures adopted in the Council.

Article 7 of the Constitution defines the structure as followed: “The MECC executes its responsibilities through the General Assembly, the Executive Committee and the General Secretariat...”

First - The General Assembly

“The General Assembly is the legislative body in the MECC” (*Constitution, article 7, First A*). It is the “supreme authority” (*By-Laws, article 3, A*). It regularly meets once every four years, and

shall be composed on the delegates of the four members ecclesiastical families who have the privilege of the floor, and the right to vote, propose or amend actions, and second them (*By-Laws, article 3, B-I*).

The Constitution (*article 7, First-C*) defines the GA' duties:

The GA evaluates the overall work of the Council, elects the 4 presidents and the members of the next Executive Committee, elects the General Secretary and the three Associate General Secretaries, submits the recommendations concerning the general objectives of the Council and its future program and structures, entrusts to the Executive Committee execution of specific tasks.

Second - The Executive Committee

"The EC is the executive body of the Council. It's composed of the 4 presidents of the Council (representing the 4 families) and of an equal number of members from each of the ecclesiastical families. It implements the general directives and future programs laid down by the General Assembly". "The EC is concerned with following the spiritual, administrative and financial issues of the Council. The EC meets at least twice a year" (Constitution 7, Second).

Third - The General Secretariat

The Council affairs are run normally by the General Secretary who is elected by the General Assembly. The *By-Laws* (7- B) define the role of the GS who "is the general executive officer of the Council, and the head of the structure of those who work in it". Clause F continues: the GS "follows the various programs and projects of the Council on a daily basis and constantly". He/She is responsible for the proper functioning of the programs and activities, in accordance with the decisions of the General Assembly and the Executive Committee. He/She is also assisted by three associate general secretaries.

6. *Programs*

The Council envisions a Middle East which is diverse and vibrant in its spiritual and social dimensions; where Churches are united in their commitment to ecumenical Christian witness and *Diakonia*; where

compassion, justice and peace are the founding elements of nations, communities and institutions; and where all can fully exercise their human rights and live in dignity.

There are three main departments:

- Theological and Ecumenical Department
- Diakonia Department
- Communication and Public Relations Department

7. Headquarter and regional offices

- Headquarter: Beirut
- Regional Offices: Amman, Damascus, Cairo
- In the offing: re-opening in Larnaca and Baghdad

2. Three Initiatives as lived experiences of Synodality in the Middle East

Synodality is the very nature of the Church. Therefore, it inhabits all the aspects of the life of the Church. I will present three concrete initiatives which reflect this synodality.

Catholic-Orthodox Agreement on three pastoral matters (Lebanon, 1996)

Ten Catholic, Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Patriarchs held a meeting on October 14, 1996, at the Syriac-Catholic Patriarchal Headquarter (Monastery of Our Lady of Deliverance, Sharfe, Lebanon). The Patriarchs discussed three common pastoral topics: the mixed marriages, the common catechism and the first communion in the catholic Church.

I will focus my presentation on the common catechism, as a specific pastoral achievement among the Churches:

The purpose of this agreement is to respond to a reality experienced in public and private schools, where students participate in the same catechism classes. This reality requires that the Churches establish a unified catechism program to be adopted by all schools in Lebanon and eventually in the entire Middle East region.

The beginning of this project dates to 1969.

The common fundamental principles of this catechism are found in the Antiochian heritage, which is identical in the Churches: the Christian reading of the economy of salvation as proclaimed in Sacred Scripture, the liturgy where the mystery of Christ is lived, the Fathers, including the ascetics, who are witnesses of the Holy Spirit, the iconography and finally the experience of the divinized life in the Holy Spirit, which is a struggle in this world.

A single catechism program aims to offer a book that is a point of reference for teachers and students at all ages, from year to year, based primarily on the data of Sacred Scripture, liturgy, patristics and iconography, so that the basic text is the same, and the quotations from Sacred Scripture, liturgy, etc., are in accord with each other's heritage. This does not prevent us from pointing out the differences in teaching and practice that still exist between our Churches and that continue to be an obstacle to full communion between them.³

The Patriarchs entrust the preparation of this project to special commissions with the participation of all the churches.

This project was accomplished in 2012, in 2 languages (Arabic and French). But unfortunately, its reception remains very weak. There are many reasons for that, both internal and external. It needs a continuous synodal process of rectification and reorientation of the journey together.

Special Synod in the Maronite Church, dedicated to the role of the Woman in the Church and the Society (2020-2023)

On June 19, 2021, the Synod of Maronite Bishops approved the project of a special Synod dedicated to the role of women in the Church and the Society and entrusted its preparation to the Women's Pastoral department in the Maronite Curia. The synodal process is now held in parishes, dioceses, religious communities, and civil and academic institutions, both in Lebanon and in countries where the Maronite diaspora is present. This initiative renews the synodal tradition in the

3. Extract from the document "Catholic-Orthodox Agreement on three pastoral matters", Sherfe, Lebanon, 1996.

Maronite Church with the intent to support, in an innovative way, the vocation of woman and her role within the ecclesial community and civil society. An Ecumenical strategical committee accompanied this process and wrote the document which was approved by the Synod of Bishops in June 2023. The document was made public at an official celebration at the Maronite Patriarchate in Bkerke-Lebanon on September 9, 2023.

“We Choose Abundant Life. Christians in the Middle East: Towards Renewed Theological, Social and Political Choices” (Beirut, September 2021)⁴

This document was issued on 28 September 2021 in Lebanon, by an ecumenical group of eleven specialists in theology and human geopolitical sciences: “Women and men, ordained ministers and lay people, belonging to different Churches, with different cultural horizons, national geographies, and complementary areas of expertise” (n. 2).

Following two years of consultations with 100 Christian experts from diverse churches, countries, and specialities in the ME, and including 20 youth and 2 small groups of Jewish and Muslims, the group spent a full year writing the document.

The document is a model of contextual theology based on a collaborative and inclusive approach. It offers an in-depth examination of the situation in the Middle East “as its starting point, examining theological discourse and religious practices in the light of rigorous scientific and critical criteria” (n.4/n. 74-76).

4. We Choose Abundant Life. Christians in the Middle East: Towards Renewed Theological, Social and Political Choices, Beirut, September 2021: § 34-39 (36); 65-69; 82, 85, 86, 87. www.wechooseabundantlife.com.

3. Current Challenges

In their first letter in August 1991, the Catholic Patriarchs of the Orient declare that

In the East, inter-Church relations have certainly not always been set on fair in our region. But the time has come to cleanse our memory of the negative after-effects of the past, however painful they may be, and to look together to the future, in the spirit of Christ and in the light of his Gospel and of the Apostles' teaching". Therefore, the Churches need to reinforce their visible unity, through the MECC, and to deal "with one another based on creative ideas and clear and structured programs to enable them to highlight their common spiritual identity and engage together with greater strength in achieving visible unity (1st Pastoral letter, p. 4).

Yes, the time has come to walk together, to pray and work together and to carry the challenges of the Middle East together. The time has come to consolidate the exercise of synodality and to face urgent challenges, such as:

- the MECC's membership of the Assyrian Church of the East and the the Ancient Church of the East
- the renewing of the MECC' structures, governance and strategies
- The role of women in the Church
- the role of youth in the Church
- The renewed theological and ecclesiastical discourse in line with modern-day circumstances.

Meeting these challenges internally strengthens the Churches' communion to serve the "society in which the kingdom of God may be fulfilled, so that human beings may receive life as God has desired it for them, according to the words of Christ in the Gospel of John: 'I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (John 10:10)" (WCAL, § 100).

Synodality in Action: The Christian Conference of Asia

Ruth Mathen

*“We take Asia to our hearts,
See her and feel her within her within us,
Embrace her,
In her wholeness and brokenness.”¹*

At the outset, I need to say that exploring the themes of ‘communion, participation, and mission’ through the lens of synodality in the Christian Conference of Asia’s -CCA- work had led me to grapple with something that has become bigger and more complex than I intended. This paper will understandably have limitations in scope as it is impossible to sum up the entirety of these three themes within the CCA’s work and history in a short duration of twenty minutes or in one paper. There are other avenues surely in the history and functioning of the CCA that can be viewed through the lens of synodality, and I did not intend for this paper to be the end of such an exploration. However, it represents the best of my current ability, experiences, thinking, and understanding.

As I understand, the synodal process heavily emphasises “listening” from a variety of voices. Thus today, my address will include not just my voice but Asian voices from the CCA, past and present. The voices from the past of course, feature as quotes from different reports and books. The voices from the present include short videos. I have also included in my presentation Asian Christian artwork² from Asian artists and Asian Christian songs³.

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1. Fabella, Li, and So, *Asian Christian Spirituality: Reclaiming Traditions*, 1992.
 2. Tanaka and O’Grady, *The Bible Through Asian Eyes*, 1991.
 3. *Sound the Bamboo*, CCA Hymnal, 2000.

What does synodality mean, for the CCA?

Before I speak of the CCA, I would like to set the presentation in the light of what synodality means, for the CCA. Those of us here will know about the meaning and origin of ‘synodal’ or synodality’, but for me, it is the spirit of this word that is important. While the CCA may not have explicitly used this particular word to describe its working, certainly we have imbued its spirit. A coming together, a being together, a witnessing together, and a walking together is what the CCA has focused on always. Synodality is not about merely *doing*, it is about *being* for us. It does not represent for us any hierarchy, primacy, or one-sided governance, but is mutually discerning and directing. Thus, if I may be allowed to go so far as to say, using the term ‘synodal’ to describe the CCA would simply be old wine in a new bottle; another reference for ecumenical thought, another word to be added to the ecumenical lexicon of dialogue, relationality, shared vision, discernment, encounter, cooperation, common pilgrimage, and so on.

Synodality, however, offers a good lens for viewing the CCA’s different loci of work. The present CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara often refers to the CCA as a “bridge” or a “platform”. I call it an “elasticised ecumenism”, a state of constantly being and relating – with our Creator, with our member churches and councils, with the global ecumenical movement, with people of other faiths, with other civil society organisations and international organisations, and with governments. At the CCA, we are always relating within and outside; our work is moving, it is fluid, and it is in flux. It constantly reshapes and renews itself in light of new situations and new demands. Its primary concern is the people and not its own institutional preservation⁴. It moulds and shapes itself over and over through

4. This is evidenced in the many changes in the structure of the CCA – with its name change from the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC) to the present-day Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in 1973; its expansion and contraction of different Committees over the years; its changing programme structures, and so on.

continual discernment, understanding, dialogue, and encounter, riding the ebb and flow of individual, congregational, and communal life.

Coming Together: The Roots of the CCA

The CCA is the first and oldest regional ecumenical organisation in the world.⁵ It was constituted by the decisions of Christian churches and national councils of churches or national Christian councils, whose representatives first met at Prapat, Indonesia, in March 1957. 'Prapat' itself means "coming together". The Prapat Assembly met in the aftermath of the 1955 Bandung Conference where newly independent Asian and African countries together reflected on their place and role in the world, their responsibility and fellowship to each other.

In those days, Indonesian President Sukarno was rallying under the slogan '*gotong royong*', the need for a 'common task' in which all political parties, in fact, the whole nation, would join together to help construct the country as in the customary Indonesian way in communities, to help build a home or dwelling place of the neighbour. Incidentally, the theme of the Prapat Conference was 'The *Common Evangelistic Task* of the Churches in Asia'.

Being Together: From Missionaries Past to Mission Present; from Disunity to Unity

In the early days of the CCA, there was a vehement disavowal of replicating the mission strategies of the colonial churches. Although the

5. The first Assembly of the CCA was in 1957, in Prapat, Indonesia. Other regional ecumenical organisations first officially met as follows: Conference of European Churches (CEC): 1959, in Nyborg, Denmark; All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC): 1963, in Kampala, Uganda; Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC): 1966, in Lifou, New Caledonia; Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC): 1973, in Kingston, Jamaica; Middle East Council of Churches (MECC): 1974, in Nicosia, Cyprus; Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI): 1982, in Huampani, Peru.

modern Asian ecumenical movement can partly attribute its origin to such colonial missionary movements, being called even the “midwives” of the Asian ecumenical movement, their failings had been made vocal by Asians⁶ since as early as the 19 World Mission Conference in Edinburgh⁷.

I like to call the period of the expansion of colonialism and the proliferation of Western missionary movements in Asia as the pre-Genesis ‘primordial chaos’ of the Asian ecumenical movement, from which it emerged – it was painful but it ultimately worked for good. As T.V. Philip says, “The real push or impetus for Christian unity came from the Christians in Asia itself, rather from the protest against Western denominations and missionary paternalism⁸” and not necessarily from the divided⁹ Western missionaries.

This being together was not organised but was organic. The seeds of this common task, of this coming together, had been sown in the two-

6. At the 1910 Edinburgh Conference, V.S. Azariah from India spoke critically of the problem of cooperation between foreign and native workers. In a fervent plea, he said “Give us friends. The favourite phrases ‘our money’, ‘our control’, must go...We shall learn to walk only by walking – perchance only by falling and learning from our mistakes, but never by being kept in leading strings until we arrive at maturity” - as cited in Koshy, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia - Volume I* (2004), pp. 50-51.

7. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance*, 1953, pp. 454-457.

8. Philip, *Ecumenism in Asia*, 1994, p. 144.

9. “The division which had arisen in the Christian Church in Western lands had grown so large and wide, and in many instances had become so bitter and incompatible as to make almost impossible the recognition of the unified character of the Gospel and as coming from the very life of the one Lord and Saviour. The increasing momentum of division had reached its greatest intensity among the many missionary societies that came to establish beach-heads in Asia for their parent organisations in Europe and America.” – Speech by Bishop Enrique Sobrepena, “Life Together Among the Churches of East Asia”, in: *Witnesses Together: Official Report of the Inaugural Assembly of the East Asia Christian Conference*, 1959.

three decades preceding this first meeting. The Prapat Assembly, and indeed preceding meetings such as the 1949 Bangkok Conference or the 1938 Tambaram Conference, prompted the Asian churches to look at their own role and vocation in the prevailing colonial missionary situation. Despite apprehensions from the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the International Missionary Council (IMC) who helped organise these initial meetings but “did not want regionalism or national interest”¹⁰ to supersede the wider ecumenical movement, the intention of those who gathered was not to isolate or confine themselves and their interests to the Asia region, but to unify efforts and responsibilities within the “whole task of the whole church for the whole world”¹¹.

The questionable and ambiguous nature of the mission of the West that married the throne and sword, that was permissive of enslavement and death in the light and love of the Gospel made the Asian churches question Christian community and discipleship. Thus, Asian ecumenical

10. R. B. Manickam, “Introduction: The Task of the Bangkok Conference,” in *The Christian Prospect in Eastern Asia: Papers and Minutes of the Eastern Asia Christian Conference of 1949* (1950), p. 6.

11. Popularised by the WCC’s 1951 Rolle Formulation, this term was first used by an Asian, G.T.K. Wu from China, in 1939 at the First World Conference of Christian Youth in Amsterdam: “No mere humanism, not just Christ as teacher. What we need is the whole Christ and the whole Gospel for the total need of the total world.” The Rolle Formulation (from the Minutes of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in Rolle, Switzerland, 1951): “It is important to insist that this word (namely ecumenical) which comes from the Greek word for the whole inhabited earth, is properly used to describe everything that relates to the whole task of the whole Church to bring the Gospel to the whole world. It therefore covers equally the missionary movement and the movement towards unity, and must not be used to describe the latter in contradistinction to the former. We believe that a real service will be rendered to true thinking on these subjects in the churches if we so use this word that covers both unity and mission in the context of the whole world.” As cited in Koshy, cit., Chapter 2, ‘The Ecumenical Movement in Asia’, in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia* – Vol. 1, pp. 29-31.

efforts were not necessarily the objectives of the missionary movements, rather the Asian movements were forced to look at questions of cooperation and unity by the churches, which were soon developing independent and national identities. The CCA's fifth Assembly (Kuala Lumpur, 1973) grappled with the language of John Gatu's 1971 call for the 'moratorium on foreign missionaries and funds'¹², acknowledging and, encouraging, even, such a temporary moratorium "in order to allow time for developing of self-identity, self-reliance, and self-hood ... to develop new patterns of mature relationships"¹³.

Witnessing Together: Social Questions and the Pedagogy of Encounter

One would presuppose that such a coming-together of churches would be marked first by dialogue on issues of faith and order, on finding common theological or doctrinal ground, before everything else. That was not the case with the CCA. The CCA's social-mindedness and concern for the other has been its hallmark since its origin. The word 'diakonia' appears as early as the 1959 CCA Kuala Lumpur Assembly. Prof. M. Takenaka from Japan, in his address on 'A New Understanding of the World and the Need of Theological Renewal'¹⁴, calls out the secularistic outlook of the modern world and calls upon those present to not disregard the function of 'social diakonia', which he calls "a part of the witness to the redemptive love of God in the world". He makes a distinction between 'charitable diakonia', which is individualistic, and

12. In 1971, John Gatu, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, issued a famous moratorium on foreign missionaries and funds.

13. Message and Communication Thrust Paper, in Fifth Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia (Christian Action in the Asian Struggle) (Singapore, 6-12 June 1973) (1973), p. 28.

14. Chapter Four: A New Understanding of the World and the Need of Theological Renewal by Prof. M. Takenaka, in Witness Together: Official Report of the Inaugural Assembly of the East Asia Christian Conference (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 14-24 May 1959), pp. 39-40.

‘social diakonia’, which as the name suggests is social and is concerned with justice and rights. Thus, questions on social and political issues ran in parallel, dealing with the Christian understanding of a responsible society, democratic polity, and relation between state and religion, with social goals and economic development, with the churches’ role in Asian societies¹⁵.

Such impulses have formed the ongoing action and understanding of communion and mission in the CCA. It is not a reconciled diversity, rather an organic union and conciliar fellowship, for the good of all. Such communion is not merely for uniformity or institutional unity, but for continually walking together and learning together in the Asian context. It is an expression of the unity of the churches through mutual fellowship, mutual understanding, mutual acceptance, and cooperation in common Asian concerns. Dr D.T. Niles from Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon), the first General Secretary of the CCA, spoke of churches and missions as instruments of evangelism¹⁶. The unity of the Church was determinative of its mission. Thus, mission and unity become inseparable and interdependent, and are vital to the life and service of the Asian Church in the world.

The 1973 Kuala Lumpur Assembly acknowledged the variety of traditions and missions within the CCA’s¹⁷ member churches. The Message and Communication Thrust Paper noted that some emphasised

15. Evidenced by The Churches’ Consultation on Social Questions, organised by the Study Division of the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches in Indonesia at Pimatang Siantar, Indonesia; preceding the 1957 Prapat Assembly; also, The EACC Report on the Witness of the Churches Amidst Social Change in Asia (1959).

16. The Common Evangelistic Task of the Churches in East Asia: Papers and Minutes of the East Asia Christian Conference Prapat, Indonesia, 17-26 March 1957, p. 13.

17. It was at this Fifth Assembly in Kuala Lumpur in 1973 that the name of the organisation was changed from East Asia Christian Conference (EACC) to the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA).

mission as preaching the Gospel for conversion and more dynamic church growth, some emphasised Christ's lifestyle stressing repentance and reconciliation with God, some based their understanding of mission on the incarnation of Jesus, stressing Christian presence and identification with the needy, and some demanded the mission of the church to identify with the poor and oppressed and overcome radically the powers which create such poverty and oppression. It acknowledges that each group "draws heavily on Biblical revelation for their faith and lifestyle"¹⁸.

This is not to undermine the serious dogmatic or theological differences that exist among the member churches of the CCA. The CCA has promoted an ecumenical paradigm where God is perceived as a fellow sufferer and sojourner, a great comforter, and a divinity that is not dominating or controlling but is liberating and transforming, that works through and for compassionate love, care, and service. At the heart of the CCA, there has always been a "pedagogy of encounter" – of actual human interrelatedness, not abstract ideas or dogmas; a commitment to continued struggles to overcome forces that threaten the fullness of life; of cultivating a culture of dialogue – to be lived at the local level where people of various religious convictions in Asia encounter in their day-to-day life and negotiate with existential realities. Such a pedagogy of encounter can be related to four shifts: (a) from competition to cooperation of churches; (b) from condemnation to dialogue with other religions; (c) from isolation to collaboration with civil society and people's movements; (d) from disintegration to integrity of all God's creation¹⁹. Our mission needs to be understood as 'servanthood' in God's liberating act.

18. Message and Communication Thrust Paper, in: Fifth Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia (Christian Action in the Asian Struggle, 1973), p. 27.

19. Synthesis Report from the CCA Southeast Asian Consultation on 'Appraising Our Ecumenical Vision for Today's World', 25-29 November, 2008 in the Philippines. CTC Bulletin, XXV (1-2), 2009.

Working Together: CCA–FABC Relations

Given the setting of this conference, I thought it would be appropriate to speak about the involvement of the Roman Catholic church in the Asian ecumenical movement through the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)²⁰. The Protestant and Orthodox traditions within the CCA have consistently sought to establish the humanisation of *all* people and not just Christians as the common ground where churches could enter into dialogical partnerships with other religions as well as secular ideologies. In fact, a similar vein is seen in the FABC with whom the CCA is proud to partner. Although the FABC is not the only way²¹ in which the CCA relates with the Roman Catholic Church, it is certainly the widest and more direct way.

The FABC's theology has been described as the “theology of dialogue”²². At their very first meeting in 1970, the Asian bishops had already pledged themselves “to an open, sincere, and continuing dialogue with our brothers of other great religions in Asia, that we may learn from one another how to enrich ourselves spiritually and how to work more effectively together on our common task of total human development”²³. Dialogue was necessary for the FABC to relate and

20. The FABC was formed in 1970 as a response to the Second Vatican Council's call. It is a voluntary association of episcopal conferences in South, Southeast, East, and Central Asia. The principal agencies through which FABC functions are the many assemblies and seminars organised for bishops and other church leaders in Asia, which usually culminate in Statements that offer new visions and directions for the churches in Asia.

21. The Roman Catholic Church is a full member of the national councils of churches in Taiwan, New Zealand, and Australia.

22. Chia, *Theology of Dialogue: Vision of the Catholic Church in Asia*. Edmund Chia was the then-Executive Secretary for the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the FABC, 2004.

23. “A Message and Resolutions of the Asian Bishops' Meeting (ABM), 1970” in Rosales and Arevalo (eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Documents from 1970 to 1971*, (1997).

contextualise itself to Asian realities, and to be an authentically Asian Church. This “dialogue” of the FABC is three-fold or triple: with other faiths, with culture, and with the poor.

There were mutual participations of the CCA and FABC in each other’s programmes. The FABC’s Office of Human Development and the CCA’s Urban Rural Mission department co-sponsored programmes such as the Asian Committee for People’s Organisation (ACPO), the Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism (ECTWT), and numerous advocacy programmes on women workers and labourers. Another jointly organised meeting of the FABC and the CCA was the 1987 Singapore Consultation on “Living and Working Together with Sisters and Brothers of Other Faiths”. Such early programmes saw cooperation between the CCA and FABC as “safe, useful, and practical”²⁴ given that such extra-church social concerns were of mutual benefit and served the wider Asian communities and did not need the two bodies to confront ecclesiological or theologically sensitive issues.

The 1989 Asia Mission Conference which was organised by the CCA saw Roman Catholic participation. This Asia Mission Conference recommended²⁵ to the CCA’s 1990 Manila General Assembly that a

24. Chia, 2006.

25. Christ Our Peace, Building a Just Society: Report of the 9th General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia, p. 84, Recommendation from the CCA General Committee to the General Assembly regarding FABC-CCA Task Force. The following recommendation was adopted by the Asia Mission Conference, held in Cipanas, Indonesia, in September 1989. Subsequently, the General Committee received and adopted the recommendation and now report the following to the Assembly for its information. The recommendation reads as follows: to give thanks to God that many Asian Christians today are yearning to give common witness to Christ and are earnestly seeking the Church’s unity and renewal; to recognise that our ecumenical structures are provisional expressions of the ecumenical vision, to be open always to new leadings of God’s spirit; to affirm its willingness to rethink CCA’s ethos, constitution, programmes, and ways of work, in the quest for a more adequate expression of Asian ecumenism; to invite the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences to join with CCA in

“task force” be set up, which the General Assembly unanimously accepted. This joint task force met at Hua Hin in 1993 and decided to set up the Asian Ecumenical Committee (AEC) to share information on matters pertaining to church life, unity, and ecumenical relations, conduct joint programmes, and foster ecumenical relations at the national and local levels. This was for “full and visible unity of the Church” which was “God’s will for all”²⁶.

One of the first fruits of this joint endeavour on mission and unity was the Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU), which met even before the first AEC convened in 1997. AMCU-I met under the theme ‘Making Visible Our Unity in Christ’ in Hong Kong in 1996 and analysed the “theology of ecumenism, the vision of Christian unity, and ways to build on what unites Christians and to overcome what divides”²⁷. AMCU-II met under the theme ‘Ecumenical Formation as Churches of Asia Move Towards the New Millennium’ in Bali in 1998. What is notable is the acknowledgement of AMCU-II of the inclusion of women in theology and ecumenism.²⁸ After AMCU-III (2001), AMCU-IV (2007) was the first time when the Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA, then known as the Evangelical Fellowship of Asia) participated. AMCU-V (2010) saw the participation of the Asia Pentecostal Society (APS) for the first time, on encouragement of the Global Christian Forum (GCF)²⁹. AMCU-V (2010) saw again participation from CCA, FABC, AEA, and APS.

appointing a task force comprising of five persons named by each body, to explore the possibility of Catholic membership of CCA or of a successor Asian ecumenical structure, and to report back with recommendations to the two appointing bodies.

26. Hope in God in a Changing Asia: Reports of the Extraordinary General Assembly and the 10th General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia, p. 123.

27. Michel, 2000.

28. Virginia Fabella, *The Roman Catholic Church in the Asian Ecumenical Movement in A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia*, Vol. II, Koshy, 2004.

29. H.H. Lebang (ed.), *CCA News*, 46(1), 2011, pp. 14-15.

AMCU-VI (2013) and AMCU-VII (2016) even included the Asian Evangelical Alliance as an organising partner³⁰.

The FABC has also been involved as a co-organiser in the CCA's Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS) since the programme's inception in 1996. The CATS is an outstanding example of the CCA strengthening the *koinonia* of Asian theologians. It serves to consolidate theological work already done in Asia, share ongoing work on Asian theological issues, develop an Asian theological agenda, and set up a structure of continuing Asian theological reflection and formation³¹. The FABC also sends resource persons for the CCA's month-long Asian Ecumenical Institute (AEI). The CCA encourages the presence of the FABC in its programmes not just as participants, but as speakers, resource persons, panellists, worship leaders, and so on.

It is not enough, however, to limit the coordination and cooperation of the CCA and FABC to a few meetings annually, or a few sporadic participations, a "ritual"³², as is seen today. The 1989 Asia Mission Conference asked the two bodies to consider the Roman Catholic Church becoming a full member of the CCA, or to develop a new ecumenical structure where the Roman Catholic Church could be a full and equal partner with the CCA. This vision has not yet been fulfilled. It is more important than ever before to present a united Christian witness in Asia.

Walking Together: Participation and Moving from the Margins to the Mainstream

The Principle on Participation is enshrined within the CCA's participation. Such participation is not only within the programmes the

30. Common Statement... (2013) and Asian Movement... (2016). AMCU-VI theme: "Christian Witness in a Multireligious World"; AMCU-VII theme: "Crisis of Climate Change in Our Common Home".

31. Antone, 2008.

32. Chunakara, 2014, p. 61.

CCA organises, but also within the General Assembly, the highest decision-making body of the CCA: “§ 1.2 Principle on Participation: CCA is committed to the full participation of women, men, youth, clergy, and laity at all levels of the CCA structures and programmes.”³³

The participation of the faithful in God’s mission through the Church is not simply the prerogative of the clergy or the mission workers. The EACC/CCA has always strived for participation and representation of not just clergy but lay persons from different walks of life, men and women, and young and old. There were strong attempts by the CCA to strengthen the role of the laity through programmes on medical ministry, urban-rural missions and labour concerns, land and agriculture, and family life in its initial decades. Even current programmes reflect this inclusion – as a small example, earlier this year, a CCA Consultation on Health and Healing in Chiang Mai saw pastors and medical ministry church workers in discussions alongside medical doctors and health workers. At a CCA Consultation on Artificial Intelligence and Post-Humanism next year in South Korea, we are planning to involve not only theologians but also scientists and ethicists. When we conduct our peacebuilding or human rights training programmes, we involve not only young pastors and church workers but young people in the fields of law, social work, academia, environment protection, and so on.

Youth Participation

Youth were present at the Bangkok meeting of 1949, and while there was no youth delegates at the 1957 Prapat meeting, it was the EACC who was one of the sponsors of the Asian Youth Work Consultation held in Japan, and then invited youth representatives from that body to participate at the CCA 1959 Assembly. While there was no clear mention of balanced representation among delegates in the CCA Constitution, the young people at that time demanded that the EACC include, as a constitutional provision, a special number of youth delegates as voting

33. CCA Constitution.

members of the EACC Assembly³⁴. The 1973 amendments to the Constitution included for the first time representative phrasing:

Delegates appointed officially by each constituent member according to the numbers and categories decided by the General Committee so that the body of voting delegates represents clergy, laity, men, women, and age groups from both established bodies and renewal movements of various confessions...³⁵

The 1973 Assembly's Life and Action Programme, concerned with ecumenical formation, also recommended that each Programme Committee of the CCA to "consist of at least 25 percent youth representation with a balanced number of men and women in its youth membership"³⁶. The 1977 Assembly resolved that the nominations by delegates for different positions should be submitted "in the categories of layman, woman, youth, and clergy—and the Steering Committee must arrive at a balanced list"; after the issue was raised from the floor that persons qualifying as both 'youth and woman' was leading to an imbalance in representation.³⁷

The current CCA Rules and Regulations³⁸ regarding the General Assembly clearly spell out what balanced representation in the delegations sent by member churches and councils must look like:

§ 1. General Assembly

The voting membership at the General Assembly shall be determined in the following manner:

- All member churches are entitled to appoint one voting delegate.
- Churches with a membership of over 100,000 members may appoint a second voting delegate who shall be under the age of

34. Cf. *Witnesses Together: The Report of the 1959 CCA General Assembly in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*, pp. 127-136.

35. *Report of the Fifth Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia, 1973*, p. 11.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

37. *Report of the Sixth Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia, 1977*, pp. 9-10.

38. CCA Constitution (2015).

- 30 years provided that should the first delegate be a male, the second shall be a female to ensure gender balance.
- Churches with membership of over 1,000,000 may appoint a fourth delegate.
 - Each member council may appoint up to four voting delegates provided that one voting delegate shall be under the age of 30, one a lay man and one a lay woman. Where possible, the General Secretary of the national council should be the voting delegate.
 - NCCs are encouraged to appoint its delegates from the churches which are not direct members of the CCA.

The former CCA Programme Structure, as approved of by the CCA's 11th General Assembly in 2000, brought together all of the different programmes and activities of the CCA under three main clusters; namely, Faith, Mission, and Unity (FMU), Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service (JID), and Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice, and Youth Empowerment (EGY)³⁹. In this structure, the concerns of youth and women were clustered together.

However, the most recent revision of the CCA Programme Structure, as approved by the CCA's Executive Committee Meeting in 2015, did not have a separate Gender Desk or Youth Desk. This could be a point of criticism; however, I would argue that having youth concerns or gender concerns confined to a specific desk leads to a "project-ivising" of that particular concern without integration into other issues. There is a sort of lethargy that sets in within other

39. Feliciano V. Carino, Towards New Thrusts and a New Structure for the CCA, in: *Time for Fullness of Life For All: Report of the 11th General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia, 2000*. Issues under each programme head: Faith, Mission, and Unity (FMU): Mission and Evangelism, Theology, Spirituality, Religions, Christian Unity, Dialogue, URM Concerns; Justice, International Affairs, Development and Service (JID): International Relations, Human Rights, Development and Service, Indochina Concerns, Migration, Refugees; Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice, and Youth Empowerment (EGY): Education in Society, Ecumenical Formation, Youth, Women, p. 29.

programme areas that do not feel the need to include women or youth, since that would be taken care of by the youth or gender desks. However, ‘Youth’ and ‘Gender’ are transversals now in all of the CCA’s programmes since 2015⁴⁰. Our General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara firmly and enthusiastically believes in the integration of youth and gender concerns in all programmes of the CCA in relevant and meaningful matters, without relegating the task of youth or gender empowerment to merely one specific desk. As a result, I would say that the CCA has had far more involvement of young people and women in its programmes than before! In the last six years, without a Youth or Gender desk, the CCA has held 29 programmes with 1,289 youth participants and 26 gender-specific programmes with 1,431 participants – and this not counting the general programmes that too would have had wider participation from youth and women. The CCA also supports youth interns every year. Currently, we have five youth interns in the office. I myself joined the CCA first as an intern and am now a programme staff. Our office is currently quite young: of the 16 staff in the office, 7 are youth below the age of 30. The average age of the office right now is 38 years. This way of mainstreaming inclusion is forward-thinking and integral to the well-rounded development of new lines of ecumenical leadership in Asia.

Life Together: Survival and Presence

In this section, I shall highlight some concerns and drawbacks on life together and discern what the future of the CCA, and indeed even the Asian ecumenical movement, may look like.

Voices Too Soft

In the earlier section on participation, it was highlighted that the CCA stressed the inclusion of laity, youth, women, and other marginalised groups through its Principle on Participation. Although they are in attendance at the CCA programmes, do their experiences, lessons, and

40. See Appendix: New Programme Structure of CCA approved by the 2015 Executive Committee Meeting.

messages percolate through the rest of their churches once they return home? The CCA has no mandate to “govern” or directly influence the member churches’ functioning, nor will the CCA even attempt to do it. The CCA Presidium Reports at both the 12th and the 13th General Assemblies of the CCA lamented the lack of the so-called “second line” of youth leadership. The member churches themselves must take ownership of the human resources they send for such ecumenical events and nurture new generations and lines of leadership for the ecumenical movement, such a search and encouragement of new blood cannot lie in the hands of the CCA alone. The sending of laity, youth, women, etc. should not be tokenish but serve as a springboard for wider inclusion within the churches themselves. For example, a typical CCA programme would see a healthy balance between clergy and laity in attendance. A young person may find more reception and welcome at such a platform of the CCA, rather than in their own church. Having already gained an ecumenical exposure, it is an imperative of the sending church to be an ‘ecumenical horticulturalist’ and nurture the seed of ecumenism in this young person’s heart; preparing the soil, tending the new shoot, regularly watering it.

The shrinking of civil spaces for churches in Asia is of great concern. Being in the margins, Asian churches can only occupy those spaces that they are *allowed* to occupy by the state. For example, bishops, pastors and priests, nuns, and church workers are regularly branded “communist insurgents”, are “red-tagged”⁴¹, and are killed by the Philippines National Police or the Armed Forces of the Philippines. These extra-judicial killings are brutal and are arbitrary assaults on fundamental human dignity and human rights. Minority Christian communities are routinely suppressed in different Asian countries in many ways; such reports are publicly available in plenty and I will not go into further detail on this matter.

41. CCA General Secretary denounces spate of extrajudicial killings in the Philippines (2021).

Voices Scattered

A 2017 CCA International Consultation on 'Towards Revitalising the Ecumenical Movement in Asia' held in Chiang Mai was a period of honest introspection and self-reflection for the member churches and councils of the CCA. The CCA General Secretary Dr Mathews George Chunakara, in his Address entitled 'CCA@60 and Beyond: Ecumenical Movement in Asia and Emerging Challenges' said:

What we experience today in Asia is a lack of coherence and coordination within the ecumenical movement... In a continent where the number of Christians is profoundly small, division makes Christian witness still more difficult, less effective, and more fragmented. In such a situation, concerted efforts for dialogue and communication with mutual accountability should be a priority, to address the emerging challenges more efficiently. The need for regaining lost vision in our ecumenical journey should be a priority of all those who are concerned with mission and witness.⁴²

Similar concerns have been raised by the CCA since the late 1990s.⁴³ Fragmentation and division in the Asian churches now is a reality. In his

42. Mathews George Chunakara, CCA@60 and Beyond: Ecumenical Movement in Asia and Emerging Challenges, in *Towards Revitalising the Ecumenical Movement in Asia: Report of the International Consultation* (Chiang Mai, Thailand, 11-12 July 2017), 2020, pp. 11-26.

43. At 1995 Colombo Assembly, John V. Samuel, General Secretary of the CCA in his report said: "While we praise God for the church's ministry of reconciliation, we have to recognise with pain the inner strifes within the church community. There are indeed rifts and divisions within the church. Each group/action justifies their position. The fact remains that such conflicts have not only weakened us, but have made us ignore and fall short of the purpose of our calling. The movement of church unity, it seems, is no longer exciting. Sadly, the united churches have not been able to inspire other churches to take unity as an important model for effective witness in a multi-religious Asia. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of confessional families promoting denominational

book 'Ecumenism in Asia: Prospects and Challenges' (2014) Dr Mathews George Chunakara highlights the dismal situation in Cambodia, Nepal, Bhutan, and Mongolia, which he calls "missionary battlefields" given the aggressive missionary evangelism and the fragmentation of existing churches. Giving the example of churches in Bangladesh, he writes: "Christians in Bangladesh are only a microscopic minority, and their total number may be only 400,000. Despite that, there are 46 denominations competing with each other in the country, some 150,000 Protestants divided into 45 Protestant denominations."⁴⁴

The proliferation also of other international "ecumenical" bodies in the region that replicate or duplicate efforts detracts from our work. A lack of coherence or communication between existing bodies in the region like the CCA and other ecumenical diaconal organisations in the region divides the attention and resources of the member churches and takes away from the ecumenical movement rather than add to it.

Voices Dying Out

Fragmentation is also leading to the immobilisation of national councils of churches. A situation of fragmentation, politics, and division marks the churches in Pakistan, and has severely curtailed the functioning of the National Council of Churches in Pakistan (NCCP). Differences among member churches led the Conference of Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand (CCANZ) to be shut down in 2005.

Other reasons are also contributing to the ecumenical fatigue of such national councils and member churches. In countries like Bhutan, Cambodia, and Bangladesh, the NCCs are not in a position to collectively raise their voices. In a politically controlled situation like Myanmar, the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC) is constrained to speak out. Leadership issues affect the participation of the churches in the wider ecumenical movement, for example, the Council of Churches

unity, rather than unity of churches... This is visible in most countries. The internal threat is becoming disastrous for the life of the church. How could the church's inner life be strengthened? How should the process of reconciliation be initiated?" in Report of the 1995 General Assembly of the CCA, p. 101.

44. Chunakara, *Ecumenism in Asia: Prospects and Challenges*, 2014, pp. 37-38.

in Malaysia (CCM) was absent from the CCA for almost a decade but now is beginning to engage with the CCA again. Leaders may not create new lines of leadership or may not mentor new generations leading to a lack of ownership of the ecumenical movement in Asian countries.

However, this is not to generalise the situation of all Asian national councils. The NCCs in India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines have been prophetic and vocal in promoting peace and reconciliation, justice, and interreligious harmony in their respective countries. However, this task should not be the task of the NCCs alone – I would say that these prophetic voices are shouting themselves hoarse! Without the member churches' active and dynamic action and cooperation, the NCCs or even the CCA remain tokenish, a hollow shell of unity. In many countries, there is a lack of ownership and of long-term ecumenical thinking as each church is more self-oriented. We are trying to mobilise the member churches in a variety of ways to be more involved, but we face indifference - which I would say is more dangerous than resistance.

Voices Missing

Can we say that the CCA is a truly representative body of Asian churches? There are some churches in Asia that are fully missing the conversations of the Asian ecumenical movement. After the tragic expulsion of the CCA from Singapore in 1987⁴⁵, the churches and the national council have yet not been reconciled with the CCA. The exit of the Chinese churches from the ecumenical movement, due to Asia's geopolitical climate, is also unfortunate.

There are no strong or salient relations of the CCA with the Evangelical and Pentecostal church bodies in Asia. This needs to be high on the ecumenical agenda. The experience of carefully nurturing the building blocks of relationships that we have had with the FABC should

45. Ron O'Grady, *Banished: The Expulsion of the Christian Conference of Asia from Singapore and Its Implications*. Published by the Christian Conference of Asia, 1990.

teach us the lesson that overcoming the divisions within the Christian family is not easy and requires of us “commitment, care, sensitivity, and the fullest expression of charity and openness”⁴⁶.

Hoping Together: The CCA’s 15th General Assembly in Kottayam, 2023

The planning for the 15th CCA General Assembly, originally to be held in 2020, ground to a screeching halt because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the CCA quickly adapted to online programmes and digital functioning, we are looking forward to being together and working together in person, in the cradle of Asian Christianity in Kottayam, India. God willing, the CCA hopes to organise its 15th General Assembly in Kottayam, Kerala, India, from 27 September to 4 October 2023.

The theme of this upcoming Assembly, as approved of by the 2019 Executive Committee is ‘God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation’ (Psalm 104:30, Lamentation 5:21). This theme, which is articulated as a prayer, mentions the word ‘Creation’ for the first time. It has a theocentric and a missiological emphasis. The sub-themes of the Assembly are: ‘Towards Dwelling in Harmony with Creation’ (Isaiah 65:25), ‘Towards Attaining Life in its Fullness’ (John 10:10), and ‘Towards Affirming the Will of God’ (Romans 15:5-6, Psalm 143:10).

The 2023 Assembly theme is setting up and centralising the work of the CCA in the future years to respond to the “Voices Groaning” – the hurting and suffering creation; we hope also that our member churches and councils will take this call more seriously and practice eco-theology, eco-nomy, eco-ciety, and e-konia.

Conclusion

By now you may have noticed that except in the Introduction, I did not use the word ‘synodal’ anywhere else in the paper up until now. This has

46. Feliciano V. Carino “General Secretary’s Report” in *Time for Fullness of Life for All: Report of the 11th Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia in Tomohon, Indonesia*, 1-6 June 2000, p. 94.

been intentionally done to reiterate that the CCA has always been synodal and has made synodality happen without ever using the word 'synodal'. I hope that the aspects and essence of synodality, namely, communion, participation, and mission, have been made clear, obvious, and visible in the life and work of the CCA through this paper. Given the wide scope of the topic, I have not viewed certain sub-themes such as gender inclusion and interreligious dialogue through the lens of synodality in the CCA's work, but surely, they too merit further study.

I thank God Almighty for this opportunity, and I thank the organisers, Pro Oriente and the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas, for inviting the CCA to share its experiences of synodality. I hope this paper has done justice to the topic assigned to me and that you find in it some useful nuggets of information and application. Thank you.

SYNTHESIS PAPER BY CATHOLIC LISTENERS

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Some Major Points to be Highlighted

Two international ecumenical conferences entitled “Listening to the East”, organized by PRO ORIENTE and the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum), were held in Rome, November 23-24 and 25-26, 2022, under the auspices of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and the Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops. Their primary aim was to explore how the synodal process of the Roman Catholic Church could benefit from the traditions of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Church of the East. The participants from all these Church traditions took part and shared their theological insights and practical experiences of synodality in their respective Churches during both conferences.

In the eyes of many participants, one of the main achievements was the genuinely synodal spirit that animated both conferences, thanks to the fraternal sharing of the theological thinking and living experiences of synodality in the different traditions complementing each other. The dynamics of the intended learning process actively co-participated all present traditions. Not only did the Catholics feel enriched by the thinking and experiences of the Orthodox, but also among the various Orthodox Churches, a mutual enrichment was experienced. Many Orthodox participants expressed their gratitude to the organizing bodies for this unique opportunity for meeting and sharing. Some even shared the feeling that they considered themselves as becoming part of the synodal process of the Catholic Church in itself.

The predominant overall insight resulting from these conferences is that all the Churches of the Syriac and Oriental Orthodox traditions are synodal in their being and their mission. For them, synodality is a living experience, prior to being an institution or a canonical framework – an experience that has its source and is manifested most profoundly in the Liturgy; above all, in the Eucharist celebration.

The *theological understanding of synodality* in the Syriac and Oriental Orthodox traditions comprises several dimensions:

- *Ecclesiological dimension*: Ecclesiology in the understanding of Western systematic theology is something foreign to the East. The Church, rather, is seen as a living mystery that is nourished and manifested in community life – particularly in liturgical life – and centered on the Eucharistic celebration. It transcends time and space, including all those who are joined in prayer.
- *Christological and pneumatological dimension*: Synodality manifests the mysterious presence of Christ in the world, based on the understanding of the Church as a symbol of the Body of Christ to whom the Holy Spirit is promised, with Christ as its Head.
- *Sacramental dimension*: Emanating from the aforementioned symbol, synodality reveals itself in the Eucharist, in which the whole ecclesial community takes part, with the baptized faithful united around their bishops and priests. Thus, synodality also requires the participation of the whole People of God.
- *Eschatological dimension*: As a gathering together, the synod mirrors the communion between the earthly Church and the everlasting heavenly Church, and offers a glimpse of the coming of the Kingdom of God.
- *Pastoral dimension*: Synodality is experienced in the everyday life of the Church, and therefore, encourages trust among the faithful and active participation in the community life of the Church.

The main insights on *the practice of synodality* in the Syriac and Oriental Orthodox Churches can be subsumed in the following points:

1. *Contextuality*: Due to the processes of migration since the 20th century, the Churches of the Christian Orient are no longer located in the Middle East and India alone. Rather, in these days they comprise large communities spread over different continents (America, Europe, and Australia). Thus, they have also become global Churches facing all the challenges connected with the different geographical, cultural, social, and economic contexts and differences. Hence, the contexts in which the faithful live, have a strong impact on the life of these Churches on various levels. Expectations arising from a specific part of the world do not have to be transferred to all other parts of the world. The faithful of the Churches of the Syriac and Oriental Orthodox traditions feel the need to find solutions for the different challenges on the respective local or regional levels. Similarly, a reflection on terminology is useful since the meanings may differ according to the cultural contexts. This requires an appropriate definition of canonical and theological terminology, ideas, concepts, etc., as has been noted in the inter-Oriental discussion about the diaconate and clergy.
2. *Diversity in unity and mutual exchange*: The Churches of the Syriac and Oriental Orthodox traditions note that the context influences the exercise of synodality even within the same Church. They also acknowledge that the historical circumstances played an important role in the development of their respective canon laws. At the same time, one can never speak about a purely Oriental understanding of synodality, because there have always been mutual influences and enrichments going on both between the various Oriental traditions and between the Oriental and Western traditions. This dynamic of communion is felt on all levels (bylaws, education, etc.), even if there is no full communion between the Churches. For instance, some priests and theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches are educated at Catholic

institutions and recognize that this has enabled them to formulate more clearly their own traditions. On the contrary, very few, if any, Catholic priests and theologians have frequented the institutions of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and as a consequence, the majority of them are less aware of the theological, spiritual, and cultural richness of the Oriental Orthodox Churches. This is where Oriental Catholics, who share the same heritage and know these traditions well, can play an important role in bringing the Oriental and Catholic/Latin traditions closer together.

3. *Challenge of pluralistic societies:* In their ancient and long-lasting traditions, the Syriac and Oriental Orthodox Churches developed models on how to deal with certain pluralities and challenges of contextuality, and are well aware of the necessity to adapt their tradition to the circumstances in which their faithful are living today. In this concern, the pastoral care for the need of the faithful should prevail on a rigid attachment to tradition. Since salvation is the goal, the Churches have to focus on caring and healing instead of judging. The law should be for the people and not the people for the law. This requires taking heed of the different contexts in a globalizing world in which the faithful are living. For example, the demands for a greater participation of women and youth in Church life are often coming with stronger emphasis from the communities living in Western countries.
4. *Lay participation:* The topic of lay participation was among the most frequently discussed issues during the two conferences – especially the question concerning the possibilities for women to take part in Church life arose repeatedly. Likewise, the topic of youth participation, as the youth should be empowered to offer their specific contribution to and make their own choices in Church life. As a positive example of lay participation in Church life, the Sunday School Movements were mentioned, which often are led by lay people, women and men alike. The fact that women may teach in Sunday schools, at the heart of the

Church, has been repeatedly highlighted in discussions about women's participation.

5. *Participation in the decision-making process:* Participation in the various Oriental Churches can happen in different ways and at different levels, and is not only consultative in nature, but is also involved in decision-making. Some examples:
 - a. Participation of the whole community of the faithful was highlighted in a liturgical context. For instance, the acclamations of the whole attending assembly during *ordinations* of bishops and priests is an expression of their consent.
 - b. *Coptic Orthodox:* Although the Holy Synod is the highest authority in the Coptic Orthodox Church, the laity is involved in the election of the Coptic Pope. Moreover, decisions are postponed in the Coptic Orthodox Church, if there is no unanimity on a certain subject. Further, lay people in the Coptic Orthodox Church are leading counselling programs for priests, and local Church councils consist of 70% elected laypersons from diverse backgrounds.
 - c. *Malankara Orthodox:* In the Malankara Association in the Malankara Orthodox Church of India, besides the bishops' synod, also the parishes are represented, each one with a priest and two lay persons. Thus, lay people constitute the majority of this high decision-making body of the Church.
 - d. *Syrian Orthodox:* A particular bishop is appointed for the youth and he represents especially the needs and concerns of the younger generation, which are collected during the annual youth gatherings, in decision-making processes concerning the Church.
6. *Synodal self-image:* Although the participation of all faithful is a major concern of the respective Oriental Churches, it is obvious that this does not usually extend to theological issues. The structures that enable the faithful to participate in the life of the

Church are also an encouragement and a call, addressed to each individual believer, to participate actively according to his or her specific role. And although there is a difference in some aspects between the synodal self-understanding and living experience in the various Syriac and Oriental Orthodox Churches, the synodal thinking is to a certain extent part of the life of all these Churches.

7. *Synodality and Primacy*: In the practice of the Syriac and Oriental Orthodox Churches, synodality is linked to primacy, and the Patriarch is the visible expression of primacy in the synod and in the life of each Church. The collegial nature of the ministry presents itself as a significant aspect of synodality, since ministry implies community. However, it is noteworthy that the participation of the laity in the Church often depends on the respective country, the responsible bishop, and the priests in the parishes. Synodality is to be considered an effective way for allowing every member of the Body of Christ to be seen and heard. In other words, synodality serves as empowerment of subaltern voices; it allows them to become active participants within their respective Church.

The few major issues related in this report can convey only a partial image of the enriching experience of these two conferences. The main fruits of these days remain the encounter and sharing themselves, between Catholics and Orthodox of the various Oriental traditions, as well as between these traditions themselves. Hopefully, this same experience can also be actualized in some way during the general assembly of the synod in Rome – and perhaps even more important – during the process of the reception of the synod on synodality in the various local Churches. How to favor such ecumenical participation throughout the whole process should be an ongoing concern for all and everywhere, in particular on the local level.

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Dr Martina Aras studied Catholic Theology, German Linguistics/Literature, and Educational Science. Her final thesis was on “The Christology of Philoxenus of Mabbug and Jakob of Sarug”. In 2021, she obtained a PhD in Systematic Theology from the University of Paderborn (Germany), with a thesis on “Faith and Healing in the Perspective of the Syriac Church Fathers: A Case Study on the Canaanite Woman”. She has been working as a research Assistant at the Institute of Catholic Theology, specifically in Systematic Theology, at the University of Paderborn. Since April 2022, she holds a Post-Doc position as Research Assistant at the Johann-Adam-Moehler Institute for Ecumenism in Paderborn.

PABLO ARGÁRATE

Pablo Argárate holds the UNESCO Chair in Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue for South-East Europe, he is the dean of the Faculty of Catholic Theology University of Graz, and the director of the Institute for Ecumenical Theology, Eastern Orthodoxy and Patristics. With a PhD in Philosophy and a Dr theol. (Tübingen), he has been before Assistant professor at the University of Paderborn, and in Tübingen. He was Professor of Patristics & Historical theology at the University of Toronto, where he was also director of the Eastern Christian Studies Program until 2011. At PRO ORIENTE, Prof. Argárate is a member of the Board and of the “Forum Syriacum” Commission, and also the Academic Chairman of the “Commission for Ecumenical Encounter between the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church”.

MAR AWA III

Mar Awa III (born David Royel) is the 122nd Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East. He previously served as the Secretary of the Holy Synod and as Bishop of California. He was born in Chicago, Illinois, and is a first-generation

Assyrian-American. The later Catholicos-Patriarch obtained his bachelor's degree from Loyola University Chicago in 1997 and went on to achieve his second bachelor's degree of Sacred Theology from University of St Mary of the Lake in 1999. He received his Licentiate and Doctorate of Sacred Theology from the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome. David Royel was ordained as Cor-Bishop on 15 July 2006 by Mar Dinkha IV at Mar Gewargis Cathedral in Chicago, Illinois, and as Archdeacon by Mar Dinkha IV on 23 November 2008 in Mar Yosip Khnanisho Church in San Jose, California. On 30 November 2008, he was elevated to the rank of Bishop, taking the name Mar Awa Royel – in Assyrian, *Awa* means *father*. He is the first American-born Bishop of the Assyrian Church of the East. Mar Awa was again consecrated by the Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV. Under his tenure, Mar Awa established the St Issac of Nineveh Monastery in California in addition to the tonsuring and clothing of two monks. This is the only active monastery in the Assyrian Church worldwide. As Bishop, Mar Awa has made many attempts to raise awareness for the plight of the persecuted Christians of the Middle East. After, on 6 September 2021, Mar Gewargis III had formally stepped down as Catholicos-Patriarch during an Extraordinary Session of the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East, leaving the Patriarchal See vacant, on 8 September 2021, the Holy Synod elected Mar Awa Royel, to succeed Mar Gewargis III as the 122nd Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East. This was a historic decision as Mar Awa would become the first western born Catholicos-Patriarch. He was consecrated and enthroned as Catholicos-Patriarch on 13 September 2021, on the Feast of the Holy Cross, in the Cathedral Church of St John the Baptist in Erbil, Iraq, and assumed the ecclesiastical name Mar Awa III.

MOR POLYCARPUS AYDIN

Mor Polycarpus Aydin got his Bachelor of Divinity from Heythrop College in London, in 1995. In 1997, he obtained a Master of Syriac Studies from the University of Oxford, Campion Hall. He was visiting student at the Oriental Institute under the supervision of Dr Sebastian Brock. In 2000 Mor Polycarpus got his Master of Divinity from St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary (Crestwood, NY, USA). In 2011 he obtained his PhD at Princeton Theological Seminary. After a position as priest in charge of the Parishes of St John, Princeton, NJ, and St James, Corpus Christi, TX, serving from 2003 to 2006, he became the Metropolitan and Patriarchal Vicar of The Netherlands of the Syriac Orthodox Church in 2007. Among his research interests are the Syriac language and Culture, the cultural history of minorities in the Middle East, Monasticism, Ecumenism, Poetry, and Calligraphy. He has numerous publications as author and editor in the fields of Syriac Studies and Eastern Christianity. At PRO

ORIENTE, Mor Polycarpus is a member of the “Forum Syriacum” and the Oriental Orthodox-Catholic dialogue commission “CEE”.

OUGHIN AZIZIANALIKOMI

Oughin Azizianalikomi is soon to be a Bachelor of Theology, as a graduate from the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas in Rome. He is a deacon from the Assyrian Church of the East from the diocese of Iran, in the city of Urmia. He was elected as a member of the National Executive Committee of the Assyrian Church's Youth Association in Iran and served there for two years before he left for Rome for his studies. In the year 2018 he was incardinated in the diocese of Chicago of the Assyrian Church, with the plan to be ordained a priest for the same diocese.

PETER AZZO

Peter Azzo obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Theology from Loyola University in Chicago in 2022. He has been working as independent scholar in different research projects at Loyola University, in the departments of sociology, theology, and history, on subjects like the sociology of religion, with emphasis on current pastoral challenges in the USA, the history of Christianity in China, Ecclesiology, and the Theology of Sacraments (Eastern and Western). He is a deacon of the Assyrian Church of the East, serving at St George Cathedral in Chicago, Illinois. Deacon Azzo is also a diocesan representative in the National Executive Committee for Youth Ministry, and the Youth Ministry President at St George Cathedral.

ARCHBISHOP KHAJAG BARSAMIAN

Archbishop Khajag Barsamian is the Pontifical Legate of Western Europe and Representative of the Armenian Apostolic Church (See of Etchmiadzin) to the Holy See in Rome. Barsamian was born in Arapkir, Turkey, on July 4, 1951. He began his religious studies at the Holy Cross Armenian Seminary in Istanbul. Encouraged by Archbishop (later Patriarch) Shnork Kaloustian, he went to study at the Seminary of the St James Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem (1967-1971). He was ordained a celibate priest in 1971 and became a “vartabed” two years later. He studied at New York's General Theological Seminary, at St John's University in Minneapolis, at the Gregorian University in Rome, and at Oxford's Oriental Institute. He has lectured in the United States, Italy, England, Germany, Jerusalem, and Armenia. His publications have appeared in various educational and scholarly journals. He took on pastoral duties in Istanbul, in the Armenian communities in Jaffa, Haifa and Ramleh, and throughout the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America. Barsamian was elected Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern) in 1990, and was subsequently

elevated to the rank of bishop by Catholicos-Patriarch Vasken I, at the Cathedral of Holy Etchmiadzin. In 1992, he received the rank of archbishop. In May 2018, Barsamian announced that he would not seek an eighth term as Primate. Archbishop Barsamian has played a key role in arranging the 2001 visit of Pope John Paul II to Armenia, in bringing together the mass in remembrance of the Armenian genocide at St Peter's Basilica in Rome in 2015, and in organizing the visit of Pope Francis to Armenia in June 2016. He is a leader in religious and ecumenical organizations, including the World Council of Churches, and has received honorary doctorates from the General Theological Seminary, Seton Hall University, and the Academy of Sciences of Armenia.

KATEŘINA KOČANDRLE BAUER

Dr Kateřina Kočandrle Bauer is a researcher and lecturer in the Ecumenical Institute of the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague, where she also earned her doctorate. She teaches systematic theology from the ecumenical perspective, the history of doctrine and Christian spirituality in relationship with other religious traditions. Her main research has been related to the history of Russian emigre theology. She has written widely on Russian religious philosophy, sophiology, and anthropology within Orthodox theology, including collective monographs: Ivana Noble at al., *The Ways of Orthodox Theology in the West* (2015) and Ivana Noble at al., *Wrestling with the Mind of the Fathers* (2015).

SOURAYA BECHEALANY

Prof. Dr Souraya Bechealany is expert in Ecclesiology & Ecumenism and Director of the Research Center of the Faculty of Religious Sciences – University Saint-Joseph Beirut. She is the Former Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches, a member of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and a member of the PRO ORIENTE Forum Syriacum. With 10 other scholars, she cowrote a document on the Mission of Christians in the Middle East: “We choose Abundant Life. Christians in the Middle East: Towards Renewed Theological, Social and Political Choices” (Beirut, 28 September 2021). She also participated in elaborating a synodal document in the Maronite Church on “The Call and Mission of the Woman in the Economy of God and the Life of the Church” (Bkerke, Lebanon, September 2023).

NATHALIE BECQUART

Sr Nathalie Becquart is a Xaviere sister. She graduated from the HEC School of Management, Paris in 1992, with a Master's in Entrepreneurship, and she

obtained a double canonical Baccalaureate degree in Philosophy and Theology in 2006 from the “Centre Sèvres-Facultés Jésuites de Paris”. In 2019-2020 she specialized in Ecclesiology, doing research on Synodality at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. For 25 years, she was involved in youth ministry and served as Director of the National Service for the Evangelization of Youth and Vocations of the French Bishops’ Conference from 2012 to 2018. She took part in the Synod on Youth as observer in 2018. On February 6, 2021, she was appointed by Pope Francis as Undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops. A lecturer and speaker, she is the author of numerous publications on synodality and synods, young people and youth ministry, vocations and religious life, the Church and mission.

MAR PAULUS BENJAMIN

His Grace Mar Paulus (Korosh) Benjamin was born on June 24, 1968; in the village of Qala, Urmia (Iran). He was ordained a deacon by the late Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos-Patriarch; in 1984 at St George Cathedral in Tehran, Iran. He received his B.A. in Sociology and Social Communications from the Azad University of Tehran in 1993. He served the military from 1993 to 1995. After studying at the Pontifical Gregorian University, he received the S.T.B. (Bachelor of Sacred Theology) in Philosophy in 1998 and the S.T.B. (Bachelor of Sacred Theology) in Theology in 2001. He was ordained as a priest in 2001 at Saint George Cathedral in Chicago, Illinois, by Mar Dinkha IV. He is presently a candidate for the S.T.L. (Licentiate of Sacred Theology) in Canon Law and has already finished his doctorate courses as required by the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome. In 2011, he was raised to the rank of Cor-Bishop by His Grace Mar Awa Royel, Bishop of California, at the directive of Mar Dinkha IV. In spring 2012, he was ordained as Archdeacon by the late Patriarch, and on Pentecost day 2012, he was consecrated as Bishop at Saint George Cathedral in Chicago, Illinois, by Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV. Bishop Mar Paulus was designated to preside over the diocese of the Assyrian Church of the East in the Eastern USA which consists of five parishes in Illinois and the states of Michigan, New York, and Connecticut. Mar Paulus is a member of the Holy Synod and Chairman of the Assyrian Church of the East Relief Organization USA (ACERO).

PETER C. BOUTENEFF

Peter Bouteneff is Professor of Systematic Theology and Kulik Professor of Sacred Arts at St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, in New York. Before, he was Executive Secretary for Faith and Order, at the World Council of Churches, where he played a role in establishing the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC. While there, he co-authored, with Anna

Marie Aagaard, *Beyond the East-West Divide: The WCC and "The Orthodox Problem"*. His later publications have included *Sweeter than Honey: Orthodox Thinking on Dogma and Truth*, *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives*, *Arvo Part: Out of Silence*, and *How to Be a Sinner: Finding Yourself in the Language of Repentance*.

FRANS BOUWEN

Fr Frans Bouwen, priest of the Society of Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers), born in Belgium in 1938, has been living in Jerusalem since 1969. For many years he has been a Consultant to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, a member of the International Joint Commissions for Theological Dialogues with the Eastern Orthodox Church and with the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and a member of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. He is also a member of the "Forum Syriacum" and the "Commission for Ecumenical Encounter between the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church" of PRO ORIENTE.

FLORENTIN ADRIAN CRĂCIUN

Florentin Adrian Crăciun studied Biblical Studies at the Faculty of Theology Andrei Șaguna in Sibiu (Romania). He received his PhD in Liturgical Sciences at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Fribourg (CH). Currently he serves as Project Manager for Ecumenism and Interreligious Affairs for the Diocese region of the Catholic Church in the Canton of Fribourg, and as Teaching Assistant at the Chair of Liturgical Theology of the Institute of Orthodox Theology Saint-Serge of Paris. He is a Member of the Scientific and Editorial Committee of the International Colloquium: Week of Liturgical Studies at St Serge Institute, and a Board member at the Center for the Study of the Churches of the Orient St Nicolas at Fribourg.

MAR SHIMUN DANIEL

His Grace Mar Shimun Daniel is the Bishop of the Diocese of Iraq and all Middle East of the Ancient Church of the East, and the Patriarchal Assistant. He was ordained priest in October 2012 and consecrated as bishop in September 2021. In October 2021, he was nominated bishop of youth of the Ancient Church of the East, and delegate of his church to PRO ORIENTE's "Forum Syriacum". He got a bachelor's degree in philosophy and theology from Babel College for Philosophy and Theology in Erbil (Iraq), and a bachelor's degree in theology from the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome, both in 2018.

HYACINTHE DESTIVELLE OP

Fr Hyacinthe Destivelle is a French Dominican priest from the Toulouse Province. After his ordination in 2001 his ministry has been always linked with the question of Christian unity, first as director of the Istina Ecumenical Centre in Paris, then as pastor in Saint Petersburg, Russia, and since 2013 as an official of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity (Eastern section) in the Vatican. Since 2019, he has also been the director of the Angelicum's Institute for Ecumenical Studies.

ANDRIY DUDCHENKO

Revd Dr Andriy Dudchenko is an archpriest of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and a lecturer at Kyiv Orthodox Theological Academy (Liturgical Theology, History of Liturgy, History and Theory of Religions). He researches the "liturgical realism" of Fr Alexander Schmemmann and is author of several books about Orthodox Divine Liturgy in Ukrainian and Russian, including a modern mystagogy into the Holy Eucharist. He compiled a new Ukrainian Orthodox Prayer Book.

GEORGES EL-HAGE

Georges El-Hage was born in Beirut. After a short career in finance and banking he studied Theology (Saint-Serge, ICP, Centre-Sèvres) and History (La Sorbonne) in Paris. He received his PhD degree in October 2022. Georges teaches orthodox Missiology, Dogmatics and History of the Ecumenical Movement in the Catholic Institute of Paris. His research interests include patristics, political theology, and ecumenism. He is the President of Syndesmos and represents France in the Steering committee of Together for Europe.

MERCURIUS ELMACARI

Father Mercurius El-Macari is a monk of the Monastery of Saint Macarius the Great in Wadi el-Natroun (Egypt). He studied at the faculty of engineering, architecture department, at Ain Shams University in Cairo. Before joining the monastery in 1996, he was working as an architect. In the monastery, he is working as its tour guide for English language and for official guests, and as the monastery's translator from English into Arabic for the foreign lecturers. Besides that, he is aiding in cataloguing the monastery's manuscripts and at arranging the local data network of the monastery. He has published several articles, among others, on Ancient Egyptian influence on some feasts, rituals, and events in the Coptic Church.

REGINA ELSNER

Dr Regina Elsner studied Catholic Theology in Münster (Germany) and worked as a project coordinator for Caritas Russia in St Petersburg. Since 2017, she is a researcher at the Centre for East European and international Studies (ZOiS) in Berlin, investigating the dynamics of Orthodox social ethics in Eastern Europe with a special focus on peace ethics and gender-related topics. She is a consultant of the German Bishop's Conference and a member of the PRO ORIENTE Steering Committee for the Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue.

DANIEL SEIFEMICHAEL FELEKE

The Revd Fr Daniel Seifemichael Feleke is a priest of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC). Fr Daniel is the Head of the Foreign Affairs Section of the Patriarchate of the EOTC, and also a member of the PRO ORIENTE "Commission for Ecumenical Encounter between the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church" (CEE). He is known as a theological thinker, teacher, researcher and writer in religion, history, culture, and art.

CARRIE FREDERICK FROST

Carrie F. Frost holds a PhD in Theology, Ethics, and Culture, from the University of Virginia, Charlottesville. She is a lecturer at Western Washington University, and Adjunct Professor at Saint Sophia Ukrainian Orthodox Theological Seminary. She is Book Reviews Editor for the *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies*, Secretary and Board Member in the International Orthodox Theological Association, and Secretary and Board Member at St Phoebe Center for the Deaconess. Notable Publications: *Church of Our Granddaughters*. Cascade, 2023; *Maternal Body: A Theology of Incarnation from the Christian East*. Paulist, 2019; *The Reception of the Holy and Great Council: Reflections of Orthodox Christian Women*, editor. Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, 2018.

MARIO CARDINAL GRECH

Mario Grech was born in Qala (Malta) in 1957. Following priestly ordination on 26 May 1984, he pursued higher studies in Rome, obtaining a licentiate in Utrouque Iure at the Pontifical Lateran University and a doctorate in Canon Law at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum). He held the offices of Judicial Vicar of Gozo Diocese, member of the metropolitan tribunal of Malta, teacher of canon law in the seminary and member of the College of Consultors, the Presbyteral Council and other diocesan commissions. On 26 November 2005 Pope Benedict XVI appointed him as Bishop of Gozo. On 2 October 2019 he was appointed by Pope Francis as pro-Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops. On 15 September 2020 he was appointed as Secretary

General of the Synod of Bishops. He was created and proclaimed Cardinal by Pope Francis in the consistory of 28 November 2020.

ALULA LEMMA HABTE

The Revd Fr Alula Lemma was born in 1984. He is an Orthodox priest and got knowledge of the traditional education required to serve as a priest. After completing his high school, he joined the Holy Trinity Theological College in 2006 and graduated with a degree in Orthodox Theology in 2011. He also graduated from Addis Ababa University with a master's degree. Fr Alula has worked as the head of the Sunday school department in Addis Ababa diocese for more than 4 years. He has an extensive experience in providing training and theological lectures to Sunday school youth. Currently, he is working as an assistant secretary of the Holy Synod of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. He is also working as a guest lecturer at Holy Trinity University of Theology.

DAVID HEITH-STADE

David Heith-Stade (born 1984 in Gothenburg) holds a master's degree in theology (2009) from Uppsala University and a doctorate in theology (2015) from Lund University. Since 2020, he is a post-doc assistant in Eastern Christian Studies and Orthodox Theology at the University of Vienna, Austria, where he also teaches in the bachelor's and master's programs in Eastern Orthodox Religious Education. His research interests are focused on canon law, history of theology, and post-Byzantine Eastern Orthodox church history. He has also been active as a translator and participated in the translation of liturgical texts into Swedish for the Orthodox Church of Finland and the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Sweden and All Scandinavia. He is also active in the Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches.

WILLIAM HENN

Fr William Henn, member of the Order of Capuchin Friars Minor (O.F.M. Cap.), is Professor em. at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, where he has been serving as the ordinary for Ecclesiology and Ecumenism since the year 2000. He has been a consultor at the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, a member in several commissions for ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic Church and other churches, and in the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches.

NATHAN HOPPE

Dr Nathan Hoppe is a lecturer in the Department of Theology and Culture at University College Logos in Tirana, Albania. He directs the Central Children's

Office of the Orthodox Church of Albania. He holds master's degrees from Wheaton College and Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology and a doctorate from St Vladimir's Theological Seminary. Nathan represents the Orthodox Church of Albania at several international theological dialogues on the world level including those with the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran World Federation, and the Anglican Communion. He is also on the boards of the Inter-Confessional Bible Society of Albania and the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative. Nathan is married and has three children.

TIJO IVAN JOHN

Dr Tijo Ivan John, Consultant Psychiatrist from Kerala (India), is a member of the Malankara Orthodox Church. He did his medical studies (MBBS) at Rajah Muthiah Medical College, and MD in Psychiatry at Meenakshi Medical College and Research Institute. He has undergone specialised training in various subspecialties of Psychiatry from the Christian Medical College, Vellore, and the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuroscience, Bangalore. During his school and college days he has actively participated in worship and various church related activities. Currently he is working as a consultant Psychiatrist at Mar Sleeva Medicity, Pala, Kerala (India).

HADI JABBOUR

Hadi Adnan Jabbour (born 1994) lives in Safita City, Tartous Governorate, Syria. He obtained a Bachelor of Computer Engineering from the College of Technical Engineering, Tartous, with a specialization in computer technology, in 2014. He got his Bachelor of Theology, at St Paul Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Lebanon, in 2021. Hadi did a one-year course in Syriac language and liturgy at St Aphrem Seminary in Maaret Saydnaya, in 2022. He is active in pastoral work with orphans, the elderly and people with special needs, as well as with the youth, the homeless and children.

JOACHIM JAKOB

Dr Joachim Jakob is the principal investigator of the research project "The Syriac Works of Nonnus of Nisibis (d. after 862) – Edition and Annotated Translation" at the University of Salzburg, Austria. Dr Jakob studied Catholic theology (Mag. theol., 2011) as well as history (BA, 2011; MA, 2013) at the University of Salzburg. He completed his doctoral studies (Dr theol., 2018) in Salzburg. For his doctoral thesis he received the Karl Rahner Award for Theological Research in 2019, and the award of the "Gesellschaft zum Studium des Christlichen Ostens" (GSCO) in 2021.

SAVA JANJIĆ

Archimandrite Sava Janjić was born in 1965 in Dubrovnik (Croatia), in a Serbian-Croatian family. From his childhood he had the opportunity to learn about both Orthodox and Catholic spiritual traditions in his family. He studied English language and literature in Belgrade. Parallelly, he attended courses at the School of Theology and chanted in the Theological School choir. In 1989 he joined the brotherhood of Crna Reka Monastery in South Serbia and became a novice. He received a monastic tonsure in 1991 and was ordained a deacon in 1992 at the 14th century Visoki Dečani Monastery (Kosovo and Metohija). He took part in several US Congressional hearings and meetings with high representatives and diplomats in the US and EU particularly before the Kosovo war, condemning violence on any side and advocating dialogue. During the Kosovo conflict 1998-1999 he was involved in helping the vulnerable civilian population of all ethnic backgrounds in Kosovo. In June 2011 he was elected abbot of Dečani Monastery.

METROPOLITAN JOB OF PISIDIA

Born in Montreal, Quebec, a Canadian of Ukrainian descent, Ihor Getcha completed post-secondary studies in Humanities at the University of Manitoba and Theology at St Andrew's College in Winnipeg and at St Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, where, in 1998 he received his master's diploma. In 2003, he received his doctorate diploma from the above Institute in cooperation with the Catholic University of Paris and in 2012 he got his Habilitation in Theology at the University of Lorraine in Metz. In 2003, in Paris, Archbishop Gabriel of Comana ordained him as Presbyter, eventually receiving the title of Archimandrite. On 28 November 2015 he was elected by the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as the Patriarchate's representative to the World Council of Churches. On 22 July 2022 he was elected as Metropolitan of Pisidia. He has published a plethora of studies and articles related to liturgical theology and Orthodox spirituality.

MERCY JOHN

Mercy John belongs to the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in India. She is a Teaching Faculty member at St Thomas Orthodox Theological Seminary, Nagpur, India. Mercy has been teaching there since 2011 in the department of New Testament. She holds a bachelor's degree in History from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala, India, and a post graduate degree in Master of Social Work from IGNOU, India. She completed her Bachelor of Divinity (BD) in 1996 and her Master of Theology in New Testament in 1999 from the Senate of Serampore, India. She published a book on *The dignity of Women in Pauline Letters*, both in English and Malayalam. After her studies, she worked as the coordinator of the Bible Publication Project under the Bible Society of India until 2006. After that

she worked for the Student Movement of her Church (MGOCSM) in relation to a Bible Project (until 2011). She is a research student (ThD) under the stream Bible at Dharmaram Vidyakshetram (Pontifical Athenaeum of Philosophy, Theology, and Canon Law), in Bangalore, India.

PANTELIS KALAITZIDIS

Dr Pantelis Kalaitzidis is an Orthodox theologian, involved in Ecumenical and Interreligious dialogue, with a rich record of publications in the areas of the dialogue between Orthodoxy and modernity, religious nationalism and fundamentalism, Political theology, 20th century Eastern and Western theology, and more. Dr Kalaitzidis is Director of the Volos Academy, Greece, Research Fellow in American and European Universities, Co-Chairman of St Athanasius Lutheran-Orthodox Theological Fellowship, Member of the PRO ORIENTE Steering Committee for Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue, Co-Chair of the Political Theology group of IOTA, Editor of the series Doxa & Praxis/WCC Publications, Member of the Advisory Board of various Orthodox and Ecumenical journals, and Member of the Executive Committee of the European Academy of Religion (EuARe).

ASTRID KAPTJN

Astrid Kaptijn is Full Professor of Canon Law at the University of Fribourg (CH), as well as Visiting professor for Eastern Canon Law in Paris, Leuven (Belgium) and in Yaoundé (Cameroon). She is President emerita of the Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches, and President of the Theological and Ecumenical Commission of the Swiss Episcopal Conference. Until 2010, she was Junior Professor and Vice-Dean at the Faculty of Canon Law in Paris. She did her Theological Studies (MA) in Amsterdam, and studies in canon law in Strasbourg, Paris (JCL) and Rome (JCOL). She did her Doctorate in canon law in Paris (2007) on the communities of Eastern Catholics in France from 1821-2000.

NICOLAS KAZARIAN

Revd Prototropesbyter Nicolas Kazarian was born in France, where he graduated with a BA degree at the Institute of Orthodox Theology Saint Serge in Paris. He continued his studies at the University of Cyprus, in Nicosia, and Thessaloniki in Greece, before starting an MA in Orthodox Theology at the Orthodox Theological Institute of Chambéry. He completed his PhD at the Sorbonne. He later attended the 2017 KAICIID International Fellows Program (Vienna) on interfaith dialogue. He is the author of numerous publications about the Orthodox Church, ecumenical dialogue, interfaith relations, and geopolitics in various languages. He serves as Ecumenical Officer and Director of the

Department on Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations at the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. He is the parish priest of St Eleftherios Greek Orthodox Church in Manhattan.

DIMITRIOS KERAMIDAS

Dimitrios Keramidas, born in Thessaloniki, studied ecumenical theology at the “Aristotle” University of Thessaloniki and missiology at the Pontifical Gregorian University. He teaches ecumenism and Orthodox theology at the Pontifical University St Thomas Aquinas of Rome. His research areas include Orthodox contemporary theology, Orthodox-Catholic dialogue, theology of mission and inter-faith dialogue. He is co-chair of the Ecumenical Dialogue Group of the International Orthodox Theological Association (IOTA) and member of CEMES (Centre of Ecumenical, Missiological and Environmental Studies “Metropolitan Panteleimon Papageorgiou”) in Thessaloniki.

ALFONS M. KLOSS

Alfons M. Kloss was born in Graz in 1953. He is married to Anna Maria and father of three children. In 1979, he joined the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As envoy, he worked at the Austrian Embassy in Bonn and then as Consul General in Milan. From 1997-2001 he was Cabinet Vice Director in the Austrian Presidential Chancellery, 2001-2007 Ambassador to Italy, and from 2007-2011 he served as Foreign Policy Advisor to the Federal President. Since the beginning of 2011 he has been Austrian Ambassador to the Holy See. In the fall of 2017, he was appointed President of the PRO ORIENTE Foundation by Cardinal Christoph Schönborn.

KURT CARDINAL KOCH

Kurt Koch was born in 1950. Ordained a priest on 20 June 1982, he worked as vicar in Bern until 1985. He completed his doctorate in Lucerne in 1987. In 1989 he became the professor of dogmatics and liturgy at the Faculty of Lucerne, as well as professor of ecumenical theology at the Educational Institute. On 6 December 1995 Pope John Paul II appointed him Bishop of Basel. From 1998 to 2006 he was Vice-President of the Swiss Bishops' Conference, and President from 2007 to 2009. On 1 July 2010 Pope Benedict XVI nominated him President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (today: Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity). Pope Benedict XVI created him a Cardinal in the Consistory of 20 November 2010. He has published a wide range of publications since 1978.

MANUEL KUHN

Born 1994 in Switzerland, Manuel Kuhn first studied German Literature and History and then Catholic Theology at the University of Salzburg (Austria). During the theological studies he made an exchange semester at the Orthodox Theological Faculty of the University of Sibiu (Romania). After specializing and interested in Oriental Christianity, he graduated 2021 in Theology with a thesis on Abdisho Bar Brikha's East Syriac Theology of Sacraments. Since then, he is working on his doctoral thesis at Salzburg University, on the theology and history of the East Syriac Catholicos-Patriarch Timothy I.

MOR THEOPHILOSE KURIAKOSE

His Eminence Metropolitan Dr Kuriakose Mor Theophilose was born on in 1966. He graduated with a B.A. in Political Science from St Peter's College in Kolenchery (India). In 1990, he completed a B.Th. from the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Theological Seminary, Udayagiri. He was ordained as a Deacon by Metropolitan Mor Gregorios Geevarghese in 1989. He later joined United Theological College in Bangalore (B.Div. 1993). In 1995 he went to Germany for higher studies. He mastered in German and Latin languages from the "Ostkirchliches Institut" and University of Regensburg, and also received his Dr theol. at the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Regensburg. On 12 November 2002 he was ordained as a priest, and on 29 September 2003 he was consecrated as a Metropolitan by His Beatitude Aboon Mor Baselios Thomas I. Since then, he has been serving as the Resident Metropolitan of M.S.O.T. Seminary, Patriarchal vicar of Europe and holding various other responsibilities in the church. Among others, he is the Co-Chairman of the Catholic-Malankara Syrian Orthodox Churches' International Joint Commission for Theological dialogue, a Member of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC, a Member of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between Catholic and Oriental Orthodox churches, a Member of the PRO ORIENTE "Forum Syriacum", and Visiting Professor of Universities in Europe and USA.

ANBA KYRILLOS

His Grace Bishop Kyrillos is the first American-born bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Communication Studies from UCLA and a Juris Doctor degree from the Georgetown University Law Centre. He also earned two master's degrees in theology from Holy Cross Orthodox School of Theology in Boston, and a PhD in History of Christianity from the University of Notre Dame, School of Theology, in Indiana. After serving as a consecrated deacon at the Coptic Orthodox Christian Centre from 2000-2002, he was ordained as a celibate priest for St Paul Brotherhood in 2002. He

served at St Mina Coptic Orthodox Church in Riverside for several years. In 2016, His Eminence Metropolitan Serapion elevated him to the priestly dignity of Hegumen. He was tonsured a monk by His Grace Bishop Sarabamon at the Monastery of Abba Antony in Yermo, California. In the same year, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II consecrated him as an auxiliary (general) bishop to serve alongside His Eminence Metropolitan Serapion in the Diocese, at the Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Mary in Zeitoun, Egypt. He currently oversees Christian education in the Diocese and serves as Dean of the St Athanasius and St Cyril Theological School at Claremont University. Bishop Kyrillos serves as Co-moderator of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches (since 2018). He is also, among others, a member of the Commission for Bilateral Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church (since 2015), and of the Council of Oriental Orthodox Churches in the Western United States (since 2003).

NIGUSSU LEGESSE

Nigussu Legesse (PhD) is the Executive Director of the Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Associations (CCRDA), a not-for-profit membership-based organization of 450 NGOs, CSOs, FBOs, CBOs and Professional Associations engaging in long term development, relief and rehabilitation, advocacy and human rights activities, envisioning a poverty free Ethiopia with vibrant CSOs and assured social justice. As an Executive Director, Nigussu has responsibility for the attraction, engagement, development, and experience of CCRDA's most important asset – its people (both staff and members). Nigussu is also serving as the Vice Chairperson of the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) of the Global Fund, Board Chairperson of the Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations' Forum, Board member of the Coalition of Civil Society Organization for Election (CECOE), President of the newly established Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations' Council and Board member of the Authority for Civil Society Organization (ACSO). Prior to joining CCRDA, Nigussu served as the Executive Secretary for Africa at the World Council of Churches (WCC) based in Geneva (2009-2019). From 2003 to 2009, Nigussu was a Commissioner for the Development and inter-church Aid Commission of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

ARAM MARDIROSSIAN

Aram Mardirossian is Professor of Legal History at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. He is also a Director of Studies at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Religious Sciences Section) – Chair of Rights and Institutions of Eastern Christianity. He is also an Associate of the Faculty of Law (since 2008).

He did his Doctorate in History of Law, with a thesis on Yovhannēs Awjneç'i's Book of Armenian Canons (Kanonagirk' Hayoc'), in 2002. He is a member of the Doctoral Committee of the Faculty of Theology of the Gevorgian Seminary at the Holy See of Etchmiadzin, Armenian Apostolic Church.

RUTH MATHEN

Ruth Mathen is a young woman from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India. She has been with the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), the regional ecumenical organization in Asia, for over three years, and currently serves as Program Associate for the Building Peace and Moving Beyond Conflicts department, as well as the Communications department. She organizes programs related to human rights, peacebuilding, migration and anti-trafficking, and gender. She has been a speaker at the World Council of Churches 11th General Assembly in Germany (2022), and other WCC programs in Jamaica (2018) and Albania (2019), as well as at the CCA's Asian Ecumenical Youth Assembly (2018). She holds a dual degree in Economics and Sociology.

BIDEESH MATHEW

The Revd Fr Bideesh Mathew is a monk in the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, and a member of Mount Tabor Monastery in Pathanapuram, Kerala (India). He was born in 1987, and he obtained a Licentiate in Dogmatic Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome in 2021. Currently, he is working on his Doctorate in Dogmatic Theology, also at the Gregoriana.

BIPIN MATHEW

Bipin Mathew graduated from Rutgers University in 2019 with a bachelor's in computer science. He has been an active member of the youth movement (MGOCSM) of his area, he served on the committee as a board member, parish representative, secretary, treasurer, and council member. Bipin also served as committee member of New Jersey Leadership Camp in 2017 (which is an annual leadership camp held in North America every Summer). He is currently an active member of St George Malankara Orthodox Church in Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania, and serves as diocesan photographer.

BISHOP MAXIM (Vasiljevic)

Bishop Maxim (Vasiljevic) is the Bishop of Los Angeles and the Western American Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church. He earned his doctorate from the University of Athens. He entertained a one-year post-doctoral course at the Sorbonne in Paris. Currently he is teaching at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. He has taught numerous courses on the writings of the Church Fathers and published widely in the field of patristics, hagiography,

church history, and iconography. His bibliography includes *Diary of the Council* (Los Angeles, 2016), *Theology as a Surprise* (New York, 2018), *Wonder as the Beginning of Faith* (Brookline, 2022).

AMPHILOCHIOS MILTOS

The Very Revd Archimandrite Dr Amphilochios Miltos holds a PhD in History (Paris-Sorbonne University) and a PhD in Theology (Catholic Institute of Paris). Parish priest of the Diocese of Volos (Greece), he is member of the Academic Team of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies and a member of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. He is the author of *Collégialité et Synodalité, vers une compréhension commune entre catholiques et orthodoxes*, Paris, Cerf, 2019, collection „Unam sanctam, nouvelle série” 7.

IOAN MOGA

Ioan Moga (born 1979) is Associate Professor of Orthodox Theology (focus: Systematics) at the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Vienna, where he coordinates the bachelor's and master's program in Orthodox Religious Education. Studies and doctorate (on Hans Urs von Balthasar's ecclesiology) were done at the University of Munich, the Habilitation (on the history of theology of Orthodox-Catholic dialogue in Romania) at the University of Vienna. He is an Orthodox priest (Romanian Orthodox Church). Publication list: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7218-3921>.

ALEXANDER I. MRAMORNOV

Alexander I. Mramornov was born in 1984 in Saratov, Russia. Having done his PhD in history (“candidate of historical sciences”, 2006), he became Associate professor (“docent”, 2014). Since 2013 (by now) he is the head of the Non-Profit Partnership for Protection and Preservation of Objects of Cultural Heritage “Spasskoe Delo”, since 2015 also Editor-in-Chief of the “Spasskoe Delo” publishing house. Since 2013 (by now) he is trustee, since 2015 (by now) chairman of the Parish Council of the Church of St Alla of Goths in Potlovka village, Serdobsok diocese, Russian Orthodox Church.

BERND MUSSINGHOFF

Bernd Mussinghoff (born 1975 in Coesfeld, Germany) serves as Secretary General of PRO ORIENTE Foundation, Vienna (since 2018). He worked as official in the Department for International Church Affairs at the Secretariate of the German Bishops' Conference (2016-2018), and as Regional Representative and Director of the Jerusalem Office of the German Association of the Holy Land (2008-2016). He got his diploma in Catholic Theology from the University

of Münster (2003), where he also studied Islam and Religious Studies. He participated in the Ecumenical Study Program “Theologisches Studienjahr” at Dormition Abbey, Jerusalem (1999/2000).

JULIJA NAETT VIDOVIC

Dr Julija Naett Vidovic is professor of patrology, history of ecumenical councils, and bioethics at the Institute of Orthodox Theology Saint-Serge in Paris. She is also an Orthodox assessor at the Higher Institute of Ecumenical Studies of the Catholic Institute of Paris. Professor Naett Vidovic is a member of the French Joint Catholic-Orthodox Committee, of the PRO ORIENTE Steering Committee for Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue, and a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. Her research focused primarily on historical developments in Christian theological traditions and thought. In particular, she explored the 4th-7th centuries of the Eastern Roman Empire. Currently, she is analyzing various methods of approaching and engaging with this tradition in order to address contemporary anthropological questions raised by various bioethical issues.

ARMASH NALBANDIAN

His Grace Bishop Armash Nalbandian is the Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Damascus. He studied Protestant theology in Erlangen and Catholic theology in Tübingen (Germany). A monastic priest at the time, he was the first official parish priest of the Armenian community in the southern parts of Germany before being ordained Bishop.

MIRA NEAIMEH

Mira Neaimeh (born 1990 in Al Maten – Al Ksaibeh, Lebanon) received a BA in Living Languages & Translation (2011), a BA in Teaching Living Languages & Translation (2012), and an MA in Translation – Research in Translation & Translation Studies (2013) from Saint-Joseph University in Beirut. Since 2019 she serves as the Regional Executive – Global Program Director of the World Student Christian Federation – Middle East Region. She is a member, among others, of the Orthodox Youth Movement in Lebanon. She has been a participant and guest speaker in several WCC events, a participant in ecumenical leadership workshops across Lebanon and Syria, and an organizer of mission work and outreach ecumenical programs in many towns.

JOHN NJOROGI

Fr Dr John Njoroge was born in Kiambu County (Kenya) in 1977. In 2000, he joined Bossey Ecumenical Institute, and in 2002-2004 he enrolled for Master of Arts (MA) Intercultural Theology at St Radboud University of Nijmegen. In

2005-2006, he joined the School of Greek Language and Culture, Aristotle University, Thessaloniki, which he finished with a Doctoral Degree in Biblical Missiology. Currently Revd Dr Njoroge is Head of the Department of Theology, Religious Studies and Counselling and Senior Lecturer on Mission Studies at Kenya Methodist University. He is an ordained minister serving as a priest in the Orthodox Diocese of Nyeri and Mt Kenya Region, under the Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. He has published several books, articles and participated in many international and national ecumenical conferences. Revd Dr Njoroge is an expert in theology and ecumenical studies.

MICHEL NSEIR

Michel Nseir is an Orthodox theologian and a co-author of the “We Choose Abundant Life” ecumenical document published in September 2021 in Beirut. He has been working with the World Council of Churches (WCC) since September 2007, where he developed peace building projects and initiated and facilitated inter-religious dialogue processes for social changes and living together in the Middle East. Before joining the WCC, he was lecturer at the Faculty of Theology, University of Balamand, and served as Executive Secretary of the Association of Theological Institutes in the Middle East (ATIME).

JOHANNES OELDEMANN

Dr Johannes Oeldemann is a Roman Catholic theologian and director of the Johann Adam Moehler Institute for Ecumenics in Paderborn (Germany). His research focuses on ecumenical dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox Churches. He is a member of various Orthodox-Catholic dialogue commissions, advisor to the Commission for ecumenical affairs of the German Catholic Bishops' Conference, and member of the PRO ORIENTE Steering Committee for Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue. He is co-founder and Catholic co-secretary of the Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group and, since May 2022, president of *Societas Oecumenica*, the European Society for Ecumenical Research.

YOUSIF OISHALIM AMRW

Yousif Ibraiel Oishalm Amrw lives in Ankawa/Erbil (Iraq). He got a diploma in ecclesiastical sciences from the Babel college for philosophy and theology, and a bachelor's degree in Syriac language at the college of education at Salah-ad-Din University. He taught Syriac language and Christian education at Akito high school and worked as a translator at the Antiquities Coalition, translating data from Arabic to Syriac Kurdish and English, and digitalizing cultural heritage collections at the Syriac heritage museum.

KATERINA PEKRIDOU

Katerina Pekridou serves the Conference of European Churches as Executive Secretary for Theological Dialogue. Previously, she served as academic associate at the Institute for Missiology and the Study of Theologies Beyond Europe, University of Münster. Her professional experience includes consulting for the WCC Faith and Order Commission in 2011. She studied in Thessaloniki, Boston, Dublin and Göttingen, and is currently a doctoral candidate in the area of ecumenical ecclesiology at the KU Leuven. She is member of Volos Academy for Theological Studies and sits on the PRO ORIENTE Steering Committee for Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue.

VIOLA RAHEB

Dr Viola Raheb was born in Bethlehem, Palestine. She gained her master's degree in education and Evangelical Theology from Ruprecht-Karls-University in Heidelberg (Germany) and her PhD in Advanced Theological Studies from the University of Vienna. She is responsible for communication and projects at the PRO ORIENTE Foundation. She has extensive experience in teaching and is guest lecturer at various universities. She is a member of numerous organizations and committees on ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Her publications focus on Christianity in the Middle East.

TEVA REGULE

Teva Regule received her MDiv from Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology (USA) and her PhD in Systematic Theology from Boston College (USA). Her doctoral work focused on liturgical theology and history. Dr Regule has taught at her alma mater as well as the Pappas Patristics Institute. Throughout her life, she has been an active member of the Orthodox Church. At present, Dr Regule serves as President of the Orthodox Theological Society in America (OTSA) as well as on the board of the St Phoebe Center for the Diaconess, an initiative that aims to educate the faithful about the historical female diaconate and advocate for its revival to meet the ministerial needs of the church and society for today. She also holds advanced degrees in music and computer science.

ALEXANDER RENTEL

The Revd Dr Alexander Rentel currently serves as Chancellor of the Orthodox Church in America and assistant professor of Canon Law at St Vladimir's Seminary. He is a graduate of St Vladimir's (MDiv 1995) and the Pontifical Institute in Rome (SEOD 2004), where he studied with the famous scholar of the Byzantine Liturgical tradition, Fr Robert Taft SJ. He taught full time for many years at St Vladimir's Seminary before becoming Chancellor, in the areas of

Church History, Liturgical Studies, Canon Law, and Greek. He has published articles on both the canonical tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church and its liturgical history and tradition. He also serves as a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.

ODETTE RIAD ABDELMESEH

Odette Riad Abdelmeseh belongs to the Coptic Orthodox Church. She lives in Egypt. Odette obtained a Bachelor of Education (English Department). She served in youth meetings and in festivals for her parish, and she has been involved in the work on the official website of the Coptic Orthodox Church. She has been working in a Dutch company for electrical substations, and as an English teacher in a school. Currently she is working in the Papal Residence of Pope Tawadros II in Cairo.

SVETOSLAV RIBOLOFF

Sveto Riboloff was born in 1973 in Sofia (Bulgaria). He studied Classical Philology and Theology at the Universities of Sofia and Thessaloniki. He took part in different programs at the Trinity College Dublin, University of California Santa Barbara, Ostkirchliches Institut Regensburg, International Baptist Theological Seminary Prague, etc. Since 2014 he is an Associate Professor of Greek Patristics at the Sofia University “St Kliment of Ochrid”. Since 2014 he is editor-in-chief of the periodical of its Faculty of Theology – Forum Theologicum Sardicense. Since 2020 he is director of its Centre of Patristic and Byzantine Legacy. He has published four books in the field of Patristics and Dogmatics: *Source of the Chaldaic and Assyriac Christianity* (Sofia 2013, PhD Thesis); *Returning to the Mystical Experience of the Fathers* (Sofia 2014); *Tradition and Context in the Greek Patristic Thought* (Sofia 2014); *Jesus Christ: an Ascetic or the Saviour* (Sofia 2014).

CHARBEL RIZK

Fr Charbel Rizk is a Syriac Orthodox monk living in the Monastery of the Holy Cross in Sweden. He has studied Philosophy, Theology and Semitic Languages at different universities in Sweden. In 2021, he earned a doctorate in Comparative Theology from the University of Paderborn in Germany. He has published a number of Swedish translations of late antique Syriac homiletic texts. His latest publication is a co-edited volume entitled *Syriac Theology: Past and Present* (Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2022).

CHRISTOPH CARDINAL SCHÖNBORN

Christoph Cardinal Schönborn is the Archbishop of Vienna, Austria, and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of PRO ORIENTE Foundation. Before

becoming Archbishop of Vienna in 1995, he served as Auxiliary Bishop in Vienna, from 1991 to 1995. In 1963, he entered the Order of Preachers (Dominicans), and was ordained as priest in 1970. Having received his theological doctorate from the Institut Catholique in Paris in 1971, with a dissertation on theological fundamentals of the Icon of Christ, he was a Professor for Dogmatics and Eastern Christianity in Fribourg (Switzerland) between 1975 and 1991. Archbishop Schönborn was created and proclaimed as Cardinal by Pope John Paul II in February 1998. He is a member of several dicasteries of the Holy See.

AHO SHEMUNKASHO

PD Dr Aho Shemunkasho is the director of the MA Studies Program in Syriac Theology at Salzburg University. Being a native Aramaic speaker from Tur Abdin, he studied theology in Paderborn, followed by an MSt and DPhil in Syriac Studies in Oxford. After introducing Syrian Orthodox religious education into the state schools in North Rhine Westphalia (Germany), he moved to Salzburg in 2006, and established there the MA Program in Syriac Theology and the Beth Suryoye College in 2015. As member of numerous committees and associations, he is a consultant at PRO ORIENTE and works internationally in the fields of eastern and oriental studies, and actively promotes ecumenism.

SORIN ȘELARU

Fr Sorin Șelaru is a Romanian Orthodox priest and Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Bucharest (Romania). He is also the Director of the Representation Office of the Romanian Patriarchate to the European Institutions in Brussels (Belgium). He earned his PhD in theology from the University of Strasbourg (France). His main research interests are: ecclesiology, ecumenism, Christology, and anthropology.

BISHOY THABET GEORGE SHARKAWY

Bishoy Thabet George Sharkawy was born in 1975. Living in Alexandria (Egypt), he is married and has two children. He obtained a bachelor's degree in veterinary medicine. He works as Sales Manager in a Pharmaceutical Company. His Church services include Sunday School Service in the Church of Archangel Michael, as well as Diaconal services in the Coptic Church.

CYRILLE SOLLOGOUB

Cyrille Sollogoub is a full professor of materials science at the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers – University of Paris and president of the orthodox youth movement “Russian Student Christian Movement” (ACER-MJO). He has taught liturgical theology, liturgical arts and missiology at the Orthodox

Theological Institute of Brussels – Institut Saint-Jean. He is also a parish choir director and has conducted several seminars on orthodox liturgical singing.

SALAAM SOMI

Salaam Somi studied theology at Tilburg University (Netherlands). Currently, she works as an Orthodox spiritual caregiver in prisons. She has further represented her Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church, in the Council of Churches in the Netherlands from 1994 to 2008 and in the FUGO consultation of Churches in the Dutch provinces of Flevoland, Utrecht, Gelderland and Overijssel from 2015 to 2017.

CRISTIAN SONEA

Cristian Sonea is an Associate Professor for Orthodox Missiology at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology from “Babes-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, and an Orthodox priest from the Romanian Orthodox Church. His research concerns contemporary theology of orthodox mission and the common Christian witness. He is also interested in ecumenical theology and is actively involved in ecumenical dialogues. He is the director of the “Center for Mission and Nomocanonical Studies” (“Babes-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca) and the Europe representative of the International Association for Missions Studies. He received his Habilitation (2020), a PhD (2011), two Master degrees, (2003; 2005) and a Bachelor diploma (2001) at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Cluj-Napoca. He was the vice-Dean of this Faculty for two consecutive mandates (2012-2020), and the Director of the Orthodox Theological Seminary, Cluj-Napoca (2009-2012). He is the author of numerous articles and several books in Romanian and in English.

PÉTER SZABÓ

Péter Szabó (born 1966), PhD, Dr Habil., is a member of the Metropolitan Church *sui iuris* of Hungary (Byzantine Catholic). He did his doctorate in Catholic Theology & Eastern Canon Law. He is Professor of the Institute of Canon Law of Budapest (president from 2019), and Visiting professor at the PIO (Rome, from 2010) and at the Faculty of Canon Law in Venice (from 2014). He is a Consultor of the Dicastery for Legislative Texts and of the Dicastery for the Oriental Churches, a Member of the Theological Commission of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops and a Member of the „Board of Directors” of the *Consociatio Internationalis Studio Iuris Canonici Promovendo* (since 2011).

DRAGICA TADIĆ PAPANIKOLAOU

Dragica Tadić Papanikolaou is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Theology of the Athens University. After graduating from the Theological Faculty of the Belgrade University, she obtained a Master's degree at the Theological Faculty of the Athens University. Her field of interest is the history of the Serbian Orthodox Church through the prism of hagiology, as well as in the broader socio-cultural context. Her publications are mainly related to this subject area.

ELIZABETH AMDE TEKLEAREGAY

Elizabeth Amde Teklearegay currently resides in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). She was born in 1971. She is a married woman. Elizabeth has a master's degree in Gender Studies, a Bachelor of Arts degree in Educational Administration, a Diploma in Secretarial Science and Office Management, and certificates in Computer Training from various application programs. She worked as a manager in her own Trading Firm (AE Business Center). Additionally, she volunteers in various services in preparing the training materials for Gender Studies, and furthermore, gives training in gender studies, leadership, and development for different firms (from 2011 until now). She worked as a Gender Expert in the African Union (from January 2008 to September 2009). Elizabeth currently is the Executive Director of the Center for Advanced Surgical Eye Care (CASE), since 2017.

NISHA MARY THOMAS

Nisha Mary Thomas is a member of the Assyrian Church of the East, India. She is a Sunday School teacher from 1996 till date. She was the Head Mistress of the Mar Aprem Sunday School at Mar Timotheus Church Bangalore (India) from 2015 to 2019. She is currently the Public Relations Officer (PRO) of Mar Timotheus Parish, Assyrian Church of the East, Bangalore. She completed her master's degree in Mathematics from Cochin University of Science and Technology, Cochin, Kerala, in the year 2003. She received an MPhil in Mathematics from CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bangalore, in 2010, and a PhD degree from the same university in 2014. She currently works (since 2015) as associate professor at CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bangalore.

DIANA TSAGHIKYAN

Diana Tsaghikyan got a MA in Religious Studies from Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City (USA), in 2002, and a MTh in theology from the University of Edinburgh (UK), School of Divinity, in 2009. From there she also obtained her PhD in Ecclesiastical History, in 2015. Diana is a member in

the Postgraduate Committee at The Gevorkian Theological Seminary (University), Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin (Armenia), since 2021. She is also an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Theology, Department of Theology, at Yerevan State University (Armenia), since 2016. Besides that, she is a member (representing the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin) of the Central Committee of the WCC, since 2019.

JUAN USMA GÓMEZ

Rev'd Msgr Juan Usma Gómez is a priest of the Archdiocese of Medellín (Colombia). He is a Doctor of Theology and serves as the Vice-Director of the Institute of Ecumenical Studies of the Angelicum (Rome). Since 2009 he is the Head of the Office of the Western Section of the Vatican's Dicastery for the Promotion of Christian Unity. Msgr Usma Gomez is the Catholic secretary of the International Catholic Pentecostal Dialogue and the Catholic coordinator of the International Consultation with the World Evangelical Alliance.

BABY VARGHESE

Fr Baby Varghese, born 1953 in India, is a priest of the Malankara Orthodox Church, and a professor emeritus of the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Kottayam (India), where he taught Syriac language, Liturgy, and Sacramental Theology for 33 years. He is a Professor of Syriac Studies at St Ephrem's Ecumenical Research Institute (SEERI) in Kottayam, since 1985. He is also a Research Guide in Syriac Studies at Mahatma Gandhi University in Kottayam, and a Visiting Professor at St Thomas Orthodox Theological Seminary in Nagpur, Maharashtra (India), as well as a Visiting Professor at Paurasthya Vidhya Peedom in Vadavathoor (India), at the Seminary of the Syro-Malabar Church (MA Syriac Theology Course). Fr Baby is a member of the Commission for Ecumenical Encounter between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches (CEE) and of the "Forum Syriacum" at PRO ORIENTE. He was a member of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC, representing the Malankara Orthodox Church, from 2006 to 2014, and still is, among others, a member of the Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

METROPOLITAN VASILIOS OF CONSTANTIA AND AMMOCHOSTOS

Metropolitan Dr Vasilios of Constantia and Ammochostos was elected as bishop of Trimithountos of the Church of Cyprus in 1996 and later elected as Metropolitan of Constantia and Ammochostos in 2007. He studied Theology at the University of Athens, then completed his postgraduate studies and a PhD in Theology at Fribourg University (Switzerland), with scholarship from Catholica Unio. His PhD thesis with the title "St Maximus the Confessor. Essence and

Energy in God” (in French) was published by Beauchesne Editions in Paris in 1993 (Théologie Historique 93). His Eminence also completed a second PhD in Theology at the University of Athens with title “The Knowledge of God according to St John of Damascus” in 2020 (in Greek, to be published). His Eminence is a member of the International Commission for the Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. He was a member of the Central Committee of the Word Council of Churches and moderator of the Faith and Order Commission, and has recently been elected as President of the Eastern Orthodox of the World Council of Churches. He teaches Dogmatics and History of Religions at the Theological School of the Church of Cyprus.

THOMAS JOSEPH WHITE OP

Fr Thomas Joseph White is the Rector Magnificus of the Pontifical University of St Thomas (Angelicum) in Rome. He is the author of various books and articles including *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology* (Sapientia Press, 2011), *The Incarnate Lord, A Thomistic Study in Christology* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), *Exodus* (Brazos Press, 2016), *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism* (Catholic University Press, 2017), and *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Catholic University Press, 2022). He is co-editor of the journal *Nova et Vetera*, a Distinguished Scholar of the McDonald Agape Foundation, and a member of the Pontifical Academy of St Thomas Aquinas.

ASTRID WIMMER

Astrid Wimmer is a student of catholic theology since 2019 at the Paris Lodron University Salzburg, since 2019. She was a student employee at the centre for intercultural theology and the study of religions for one semester in the year 2022. Since October 2022 she is working as a student employee at the FWF project “Papyrological Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians”. A special interest for her lies in intercultural studies and especially in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

DIETMAR W. WINKLER

Dietmar W. Winkler is Professor of Patristic Studies and Ecclesiastical History and founding director of the Centre for the Study of the Christian East at the University of Salzburg. His work has taken him as a visiting researcher and professor to SEERI (Kottayam), St John’s (MN), Boston (MA) and Harvard University, Université Aix-Marseille and Jerusalem School of Theology. He is a consultant to the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, member of the board

and „CEE” Oriental Orthodox-Catholic dialogue commission of PRO ORIENTE, and Academic Chairman of its „Forum Syriacum”.

JOSEPH YOUNAN

Joseph Younan was born and raised in Cairo (Egypt), in the Coptic Orthodox Church. This is where he developed his love to Christ and to the Coptic Heritage, church Rites and language. He went to Ain Shams University, where he graduated with a Bachelor in Accounting. In 2012, he moved to the USA and grew in the Retail industry as a Director of Operations at Walmart-inc Sams Club Waldorf, MD. In 2019, he joined the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchat, Papal Residency, in Cairo, as the Pope's Deacon. In October 2022, he graduated from the Ecumenical Institute Middle East, Lebanon. He is an enthusiastic believer in the power of ecumenical relations in impacting lives and shaping relations between churches. He is looking forward to joining the conference, to meet partners, to learn from everyone, and to share his experiences as a Coptic youth.

TIPOGRAFIA VATICANA

“In the dialogue with our Orthodox brothers and sisters, we Catholics have the opportunity to learn more about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and their experience of synodality (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* n. 246).

Inspired by these words, the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and the General Secretariat of the Synod agreed to hold conferences on the synodal experiences of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches. These international conferences were intended to be an ecumenical contribution to the 2021-2024 synodal process of the Catholic Church, on the topic “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission.”

The conferences, entitled “Listening to the East”, were held in November 2022 at the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas (*Angelicum*) in Rome, jointly organised by the Pro Oriente Foundation in Vienna and the *Angelicum*’s Institute for Ecumenical Studies. More than one hundred theologians, historians, and canonists, from different Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox traditions, were invited to present the synodal experiences of their Churches, through keynote speeches, case studies and workshops.

This volume brings together the proceedings of the conferences, with the conviction that “The journey of synodality undertaken by the Catholic Church is and must be ecumenical, just as the ecumenical journey is synodal” (Pope Francis to Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III, 19 November 2022).

