

INTRODUCTION

**ALOYSIUS LOPEZ CARTAGENAS AND
EMMANUEL SERAFICA DE GUZMAN**

Synodality has been accelerating in the Catholic Church worldwide since 2021. Far from being merely a sociological survey of Catholic opinion or a parliamentary procedure of discussion and debate, synodality is a privileged instance of the sense of the faith of the faithful (*Lumen Gentium* 12). The reach and intensity of the consultation process have been unprecedented, not to mention the robust composition of delegates to the event itself. What is most extraordinary though is the method of communal discernment not only during the synodal event but also in its preparatory stages which enabled the local churches to seek a deeper grasp of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their contexts and our world. By dialoguing with each other in open and free speech (*parrhesia*), the local churches honestly submit their convictions to the judgment of the whole. At the same time, by generous and humble listening (*hypomene*) each one seeks to discover the kernel of truth in the other, especially in moments of discussion, debate, and even disagreements.

The theological reflections in this volume and their respective recommendations are time-bound. They are situated in between the First Session (October 2023) and the Final Session (October 2024) of the Synod on Synodality. Nonetheless, they seek to capture some of the essential fruits brought about by the call for a synodal church, reflect on critical points of convergence and divergence, and sketch outlines for the local church to journey along the synodal way.

In this edition, Hapag opens with a sharing of reflections by Jessica Joy Candelario and Estela Padilla, members of the Philippine National Synodal Team. The participation of

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Candelario and Padilla is historic to our local church, and their account of the momentous event is first-hand, not to mention the crucial roles they both played at the national and Asian levels of preparation for the event. Padilla was among the more than 450 participants during the first session of the global Synod on Synodality in October 2023, which was held in the Vatican. They are thus in a unique location to read the experiences of the Synod, both as process and event, and revisit *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution of the Church) by analyzing its reception in terms of communion, participation, and mission. As they bring to bear the fruits of their experiences in our local church, they highlight at least three pathways of synodality already in the making, namely: the popular religiosity of Filipinos both in its evangelizing power and as space for listening to their ultimate concerns, the circles of discernment at the grassroots as *sine qua non* to decision-making in ecclesial and social concerns, and the practice of collaboration and networking of all stakeholders in its social action projects and programs. They end their reflections with a summons to their fellow local theologians to help shape synodality by enduring in their commitment to building up the Christian Tradition as an ongoing and dialogical project, renewing the ecclesial imagination in creative fidelity to the Gospel, and undergoing the paradigm shift in theology recently advocated by Pope Francis in his motu proprio document, *Ad theologiam promovendam*.

The second essay is by Pablo David, Bishop of Kalookan and a Scripture scholar, who was one of the three Filipino bishops appointed by Pope Francis to represent our local church as full voting members in the October 2023 Synod. Bishop David informs us that Pope Francis is not concerned only with the communion and collegiality of fellow bishops with his Petrine office. Equally paramount for the Pope is to make sure that the bishops “are also genuinely in communion with the local churches or communities of the faithful entrusted to their care,” says David. Drawing heavily on how the nascent church resolved its earliest crisis as narrated in Acts 15 (and Galatians 1-2), the essay argues that, by convening a Synod on “synodality” Pope Francis has not only reimagined an ecclesial process rooted in Scriptures and tradition. He has also used it, argues David, as an encompassing mechanism to strike a

balance between the *magisterium* (or the Church's teaching authority), on the one hand, and the *sensus fidei* (or sense of the faith of the whole Church), on the other. In synodality the Pope is standing firm on church doctrine regarding the participation of all in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly role of Christ in our salvation, thus emphasizing the mutuality between the common priesthood of all baptized and the ministerial priesthood of the ordained (Lumen Gentium 10 and 31). David's exciting narrative on his participation in the Synod of 2023 already bears witness to the robust appreciation of the *sensus fide fidelium* (sense of the faith of the faithful) as a vital resource for dialogue and consultation, discernment and deliberation within the Church unprecedented in centuries.

If the realization of the synodal vision is akin to journeying together requiring attentiveness to the Spirit, it is at once a challenge and a burden, a promise and a peril. No less than Randy Odchigue, a priest-theologian from the southern island of Mindanao, would remind us in the third essay. He reflects on how the fusion of horizons between the renewal promulgated by the Second Vatican Council and the context of Mindanao led to the creation of the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC) in the 1970s, a pan-diocesan assembly of bishops, priests, and lay leaders that sought to embody a local church with a theology and praxis of communion, participation/co-responsibility, and mission. As to why the MSPC eventually became saddled with internal fissures that led to a dramatic disengagement and its painful dissolution in the 1980s, Odchigue highlights the failure of its protagonists to bridge the gap between a juridical ecclesiology and a personalist view of church as communion, to resolve the conflict between the idea of a "people's church" and church as "people of God" with their respective ideological underpinnings, and to grapple with the divisive issue on the use of social analysis, particularly Marxist structural analysis, as mediating tool in reading the signs of the times. He then extracts lessons from the Mindanao ecclesiological project by appropriating the Pope's emphasis on listening to the Spirit and dialoguing with fellow theologians (Kasper and Zizioulas, Bieringer and Ellsbernd) on the "normativity of the future." Moving forward, Odchigue offers fresh proposals for a broad

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framework of a Mindanaoan synodal church and pleas for a “spirituality of interruption...along the trenches of epistemic humility and prophetic certitude of hope.”

The project of incarnating a synodal church never runs out of challenges. In the fourth essay, Levy Lanaria, a faculty member of the University of San Carlos in Cebu City, points out a host of ambiguities in *Lumen Gentium* (LG), the document on which Pope Francis primarily anchors his synodal vision. In a textual analysis of LG 10, Lanaria argues that the doctrine on the difference “in essence” and “in degree” between the priesthood of all baptized and the priesthood of the ordained beclouds its positive teaching on the ecclesiological principles of equality in dignity and co-responsibility of all in the church by virtue of baptism. Moreover, the application of the concept of apostolic succession exclusively to the hierarchy (LG, Chapter 3) has given tacit doctrinal support to the relegation of the laity or the non-ordained into ‘subordinate if not second-class members of the community of faith’. Thus, while the teaching on the hierarchy and clergy’s ontological being is clearly defined in LG, the doctrinal portrayal of the laity’s fundamental identity is not robust. In LG 37, for instance, the laity are mainly defined according to the duty of Christian obedience to what is decided by the pastors and, although they are duty-bound to express their opinions on matters which concern the good of the church, they must carry out this duty ‘through the institutions established by the church for that purpose’. Two opposing approaches may have underpinned the document, but Lanaria has high hopes for the synodal vision of Pope Francis to resolve its ambiguities. The enthusiastic response of the lay faithful from all over the world to the synodal processes and events to re-imagine the Catholic Church has been a tremendous outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit to the People of God where Baptism, not Holy Orders, is its primary sacramental reality.

The final essay by Aloysius Cartagenas examines the contours of the ordained ministry in the Philippine Catholic Church in light of the synodal themes of communion, participation, and mission. Drawing on his rich experience as a former diocesan priest and formator/professor of future priests and religious as well as lay leaders, Cartagenas appreciates the synodal

journey led by Pope Francis as a prompting by the Spirit to account for the promises made by the Philippine Church during its Plenary Council in 1991 (PCP II) whose pathways of communion, participation, and mission somehow antedates if not anticipates the synodal vision three decades earlier. He argues that, if the communion of all baptized is both a right and a need (LG 3), it behoves to address the appalling inadequacy in the numbers of ordained ministers by engaging our local church in communal discernment on the current theology of Orders, particularly the presbyterate and the diaconate, that continue to exclude women and the married. If the synodal pathway of participation places the power and authority of the church's leadership in the trajectory of co-responsibility and accountability (LG 32), it is propitious to create mechanisms that promote and defend the right of the laity to assess the conduct of their ordained ministers, evaluate the effectiveness of their prior pastoral decisions and current church programs, and redress their grievances in the event of discrepancies and abuse. And if journeying together in mission hinges on the laity's proper vocation to holiness and charism for action in the temporal sphere (LG 30-31), the Philippine Church needs to appreciate the phenomenal drive for religious authenticity and agency of the Filipino laity by addressing the gaps and failures of its current formation programs, to dialogue with our modernizing society and discern its promise and perils in concert with other moral/ethical or religious stakeholders to aid legislation and public policy formulations, and to disengage once and for all from the privileged moorings of being the counterpart of the State and instead continue to insert itself, like leaven in dough, in the bosom of civil society (i.e., NGOs, POs, etc.). The Philippine Church may not be a stranger to synodality, yet it has a long way to go in the journey and there is no going back.

Finally, it is fitting to publish the Philippine National Report on Synodality 2024 in this volume. It is the fruit of the second round of consultations at all levels in all the dioceses in response to the 41-page Synthesis Report on Synodality held in Rome in October 2023. Like all others, the said Report will be submitted to the Synod Secretariat in Rome for due consideration in the Final Session of the Synod in October 2024. The first part

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of the Report is entitled “*Salok*: Drinking from the Wells of our Synodal Experiences,” “which reflects on the noteworthy experiences of synodality in our local churches”, while the second part called “*Salya*: Crossing over to a Deeper Praxis of a Synodal Church” is an exploration of “the different proposals and pathways to cross over to a more authentic living out of a more synodal Church in mission.” Interestingly, many of the intuitions and views expressed by the authors in this volume resonate well with the Report, a ripple of indications that the local church in the Philippines is well on the road of synodality, drinking from its wellspring of a much deeper faith and crossing over towards God’s kingdom with audacious hope.

In closing, the essays in this volume are in no way exhaustive. Nonetheless, as proceedings of an annual conference of Filipino theologians, they represent, as Pope Francis puts it, the commitment, “in the first place, to being a fundamentally contextual theology, capable of reading and interpreting the Gospel in the conditions in which men and women live daily, in different geographical, social and cultural environments, and having as its archetype the Incarnation of the eternal Logos, his entry into culture, the vision of the world, the religious tradition of a people.”¹

Aloysius Lopez Cartagenas, SThD/PhD

Bettystown, Ireland

louiecartagenas@yahoo.com

Emmanuel Serafica de Guzman, PhD

Antipolo City, Rizal

imanwelsdg7591@gmail.com

¹ See the apostolic letter issued ‘*motu proprio*’ by Pope Francis, *Ad theologiam promovendam* (1 November 2023) in https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/la/motu_proprio/documents/20231101-motu-proprio-ad-theologiam-promovendam.html