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Editor's Preface

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

On October 4-29, 2023, the Synod of Bishops will celebrate the first session of its 16th Ordinary General Assembly, with a second session that is scheduled to be held around the same time next year. Since its first assembly in 1967, there has been a total of fifteen ordinary or regular general assemblies, three extraordinary general assemblies, and eleven special assemblies to tackle regional concerns. However, this coming Synod is different in many important ways.

First, it is a Synod that has Synodality itself for its theme. Whereas previous synods focused on special areas of concern for the Church, here the Church reflects on being in synod itself, not only as an occasional event, but as a way of life that she wants to embrace. Thus, the Pope emphasizes that synods are not just one of the many activities or structures of the Church, but synodality is “the path which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.” Synodality is a way of life that embodies the spirit of being in synod, as the people of God gathers to listen to one another and to the Holy Spirit. The *Vademecum* for the Preparatory Phase expresses it beautifully: “Synodality calls upon pastors to listen attentively to the flock entrusted to their care, just as it calls the laity to freely and honestly express their views. Everyone listens to one other out of love, in a spirit of communion and our common mission” (2.3).

Second, it is a Synod that involves the Church in all levels. While the Synod of Bishops was originally conceived by Paul VI as a regular gathering of bishops in continuation of the experience of collegiality during the Second Vatican Council, Pope Francis extended the process in this Synod

to include a Diocesan Phase and Continental Phase to encourage participation at the local level. In some places, there was even a Vicariate Phase or Parish Phase, allowing many of the priests and laity to personally experience being in synod themselves. More than any output, this highly formative and potentially transformative encounter is the Synod's fundamental aim. The *Preparatory Document* states that the purpose of this Synod is "not to produce documents, but 'to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to be nourished, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands'"(PD 32). Indeed, the Pope revolutionized the process further by inviting to the October Assembly not only bishops or clergy but laity – many among them women – and not merely as observers but as full participants with voting power.

Third, this is a Synod that the Pope expects will carry on long after the actual assembly itself has ended. Ordinarily, a synod culminates in the publication of a related apostolic exhortation where the Pope gathers the fruits of the synodal discussions. However, as Pope Francis expressed in "The Pope's Video" produced by the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network for October 2023, he is praying that this will become a Synod where "nothing is over, but here an ecclesial path continues." Hopefully, the spirit of communion which was experienced in various phases of the Synod will still be lived out, nourished, and strengthened in all the areas of Church life. Hopefully, the empowerment and participation, especially of the laity – and in a special way of women – will still be sustained not only in the coming synods but in all ecclesial activities. Hopefully, the mission

of the Church will become even more dynamic and effective by her practice of synodality as a way of life, bearing witness to the power of the Holy Spirit and reaching out with particular solicitude to the peripheries. Only thus will this long Synod on Synodality bear its desired fruit: to be a synodal Church.

On this note, *Loyola Papers* is excited to bring you this issue, with the first two papers connected to the theme of synodality.

The first article, titled “Synodality in the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines” by **Roel Joe E. Abonal** surveys recent Church documents, from Vatican II to the preparatory documents of the ongoing Synod that pave the way for our current understanding of synodality. Then it proceeds to show how the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines has been trying to live out these synodal principles long before the present Synod. At the same time, he points to some challenges in living the spirit of synodality that have been encountered, particularly in connection with the RH Bill debates. As the Church continues to aspire to be a listening Church and new issues continue to arise that put the listening ability of her leaders to the test, this article serves as a relevant and prophetic reminder of the kind of Church we are trying to be.

“Conversations by the Well: A Lesson on Synodality” by **Aldo Miguel Constantino M. Bonifacio** delves into what he calls the “healing agenda of the Synod on Synodality” and calls our attention to how the ongoing synodal process is actually promoting no less than a paradigm shift within the Church. Anchoring his reflection on the Johannine story of the Samaritan Woman who encountered Jesus by the well, he draws lessons on how the Church today can come to terms with her own sinfulness and “unbelonging” so as

to receive the healing she needs to become her true synodal self. At the same time, there is a parallel invitation to imitate Jesus in dealing with “others” with a welcoming attitude that allays fear, encourages self-disclosure, and opens the way to encounter and dialogue.

Edryan Paul J. Colmenares, SJ’s “A Framework for Christian Social Involvement from the Writings of Dean Brackley SJ: Scriptural and Theological Foundations” explores the work of the El Salvadorian Jesuit liberation theologian, Dean Brackley, and its scriptural and theological foundations. Beginning with a brilliant exposition of the theology of the Reign of God and its implications, it proceeds to compare Brackley’s thoughts with the ideas of two other great theologians, namely, Karl Rahner and Gustavo Gutierrez. It then gathers the insights of Brackley into a framework that can complement the pastoral cycle and compares this with two other frameworks: one by Jacques Maritain and the other by Juan Luis Segundo. What results is a proposal towards a more level-headed, contextually-rooted, interdisciplinary, and spiritually grounded framework for Christian social action that is hoped to be more politically effective in responding to current and future social issues in the light of faith.

Next, we have “Paul’s Conversion Experience and His Post-Conversion View of and Relationship with Judaism” by **Diogo Roger D’Souza, SFX** which is an attempt at an exegetical exposition of Paul’s encounter with the Risen Christ that opened the way for his conversion, as narrated by Paul himself and by the evangelist in Luke-Acts. Moving forward, it questions the application of the word “conversion” (*metanoia*) to Paul’s experience based on Paul’s self-understanding of what happened to him. Instead, the words transformation or reconfiguration are suggested, or an added nuancing of the word “conversion” is proposed

to more accurately describe the shift in Paul's perspective and the corresponding changes in his life, including his relationship with Judaism.

“The Theology of Begging in the *Spiritual Exercises*” by **Jose John B. Fuertes** invites attention to a notable feature of the Ignatian Exercises where one is asked to beg for the grace that one desires from God as a practice of spiritual poverty. Looking at the practice and notion of poverty and mendicancy in Christianity from Christ and the apostles down to the founders of the Mendicant Orders, who greatly influenced Ignatius in his conversion, the article goes on to trace the Ignatian experience and understanding of poverty and begging. What follows is an interesting scriptural and theological exposition of the meaning of begging and how it can be applied to prayer and spirituality. The author concludes with a personal testimony of how the practice of begging in the *Spiritual Exercises* led him to experience the loving desire and infinite graciousness of God.

Le Dac Thang, SJ’s “Understanding the Baci-Soukhwan Ritual: A Step Towards Inculturation in the Lao Catholic Church” examines the practice of the *Baci-Soukhwan* ritual, as adapted by the Catholic Church in Laos. Noting that there are no official guidelines issued by the local Church up to now to guide the faithful regarding this widespread cultural practice, he indicates the key points of intersection as well as to critical points of divergence or confusion, which calls for clarification from the Church to avoid misunderstanding. Clearly explaining these important doctrinal aspects will help the faithful in Lao to practice their cultural tradition in harmony with and enriched by their Christian faith.

Last but not least, we have **Ryan Janelle A. Salvacion**’s “Mary: The New Ark of the Covenant in Revelation 11:19-12:6,” an exegetical commentary on the famous passage that has sometimes been applied in the Catholic tradition to the Blessed

Virgin Mary but has also been interpreted by some scholars as an allusion to the Church. After comparing various interpretations of the text, the paper also turns to other biblical accounts as well as extra-biblical catechetical and theological resources, including the Church Fathers, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Pope Benedict XVI, and Bishop Robert Barron in support of the Marian interpretation.

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For this issue, we are also happy to showcase one synthesis paper from the Philosophy program and two synthesis papers from the Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology Program.

Martin Wang SJ's "Fathoming Faith: A Philosophical Synthesis on Faith and Reason" integrates his experiences as a seminarian struggling to understand his Christian belief in a growingly secular and atheistic Chinese society. Having undergone a crisis of faith himself, the author presents a sincere and uncontrived quest for truth and meaning amidst life's unending questions.

"Diakonia as Lived Theology" by **Cosme Carlo A. Lacang, SJ** draws from his personal experience as a newly ordained deacon in an attempt to synthesize the fundamental teachings of Christian faith where he uses as framework the words addressed by the bishop to the newly ordained deacon in the rite of ordination: *"Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you have become. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach."*

Finally, we have **Michael George M. Villasis'** "'Grant Me Only to Love You': The Contemplation to Attain Love in the Spiritual Exercises" which draws its inspiration from the "Contemplation to Attain Love" in the Fourth Week of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*. He then develops an interesting theological synthesis revolving around Ignatius' points

about love and his lovely prayer, popularly known as the *Suscipe* – a creative Filipino translation of which, included as an appendix, is not to be missed.

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From the parish to the continental level, the ongoing Synod used the prayer, *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, that was said at the opening of every session of Vatican II and in many other Councils, Synods, and Church gatherings for hundreds of years. It is a lovely prayer attributed to Saint Isidore of Seville and can also be used by theologians whether in private study or public discourses. Let this be our prayer, too, not only for the current Synod but for ourselves, as we work together to become a truly synodal Church:

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.
With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.
We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.
Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.
All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever. Amen.

Leo-Martin Angelo R. Ocampo