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TINIG LOYOLA

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THE LOYOLA SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY



Fanning the Flames of Hope

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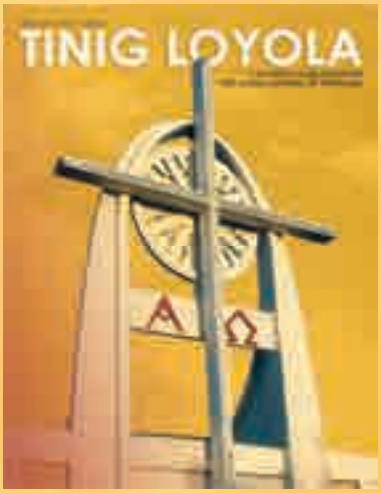
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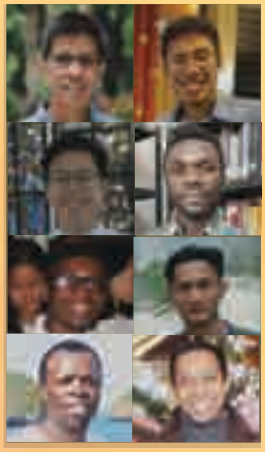
FANNING THE FLAMES OF HOPE

ABOUT THE COVER



We live in times fraught with volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. In the Philippines, this has been most palpable since the results of the national elections. As a school of theology in the Philippines, the Loyola School of Theology affirms its integral role in shaping the minds and hearts of its students so that they may become effective instruments of God's saving work. Now more than ever, we are called to be heralds of hope to one another, especially to those in the margins of society. Jesus is our Hope, the Alpha and the Omega, our Model in this endeavor. May this issue contribute to the flames of hope that shall keep the world ablaze for God and God's beloved people.

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ABOUT THE ISSUE



As a student publication of the Loyola School of Theology (LST), *Tinig Loyola* attempts to capture the universal experiences of LST's students, faculty, staff, and administrators through articles and reflections guided by a particular theme. The previous issue centered on becoming "a voice of hope and a ray of light amid the ongoing pandemic."[1] Interestingly, though not quite unexpectedly, the Editorial Team has been moved to follow through this theme of hope and give more flesh to it in this new issue.

We are already in the second year of the pandemic and we continue to find ourselves navigating through different mazes of complications and challenges. We recognize the blessings we have received in the past two years and we draw much consolation from them. However, we also acknowledge the innumerable difficulties we had to brave through in order to keep everything in balance. Amid all these, we turn to the Lord who steers the boat of our lives and calms the storms that so frighten all of us. In Him alone is our hope, as we very well know and sing and believe.

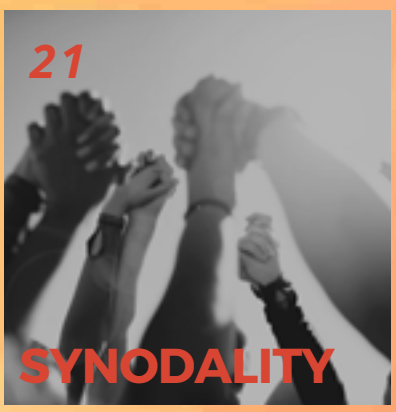
It is in this light that this new issue features articles related to the pandemic and its effects on teaching and learning at LST. This is strengthened by articles related to the Synod on Synodality, in which Pope Francis enjoins everyone to participate. In a special way, the readers are presented works that narrate experiences from relating and working with people in the grassroots: the urban poor, the women, and the Indigenous Peoples, among others. These stories place our academic endeavors in the spirit of service and mission. A particular article is devoted to rejoicing for the 500 years of Christianity in the Philippines: a wonderful backdrop for our training. A tribute to the emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, who has turned 95, has also been prepared, as well as a separate 'In Memoriam' page has been set aside to remember LST students and faculty who have passed on during this pandemic. Finally, the readers shall behold the faces of LST's graduates and completers, who concretely embody the hope we profess and wish to strengthen.

With this present issue, we pray to remain rooted in hope and communicate this to others whether in studies, pastoral endeavors, social and ecclesial life, and other avenues of human encounter. Hope is a gift and a mission: a gift to be ever grateful for and a mission which flames we need to fan.

ISIDORE KAWAYA IDUMBO
Editor-in-Chief

PARTS









[1] Editor-in-Chief ST. PAULS EDITORIAL TEAM, Presentation of Tinig Loyola, Vol. 22/AY 2020-2021.

LST EVENTS

2021 - 2022



18 SEPT 2021

LST Faculty Online Recollection with Fr William "Bill" Abbott SJ on the theme, "Biblical Reflections on our Ministry of Teaching." Fr. Bill is the Secretary of the Provincial of the Philippine Jesuits.



29 SEPT 2021

LST celebrates the Season of Creation. Organized by Dr. Carmen Valdes, President of Sacred Springs of Loyola School of Theology, and assisted by the LST Student Council led by its President, Rob Rizzo SJ, the community gathered online to pray for our Common Home. LST international students led the community in praying "The Beatitudes of Creation," spoken in the many languages of LST students. Archbishop Antonio J. Ledesma, D.D. of Cagayan de Oro, Board Member of Sacred Springs, and Fr. Enrico C. Eusebio SJ, LST President, shared their reflections.



21-24 SEPT 2021

Graduate Research Symposium organized by the Global Theology Initiative (GTI), networking program of the Seven English-Speaking Theological Centers of the Society of Jesus: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, India; Vidyajyoti College of Theology, New Delhi, India; Loyola School of Theology, Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines; Hekima University College School of Theology, Nairobi, Kenya; Jesuit School of Theology, Santa Clara University, California, USA; School of Theology and Ministry, Boston College, Massachusetts, USA; and Regis College, Toronto School of Theology, Canada.

Two LST students presented their papers at the Symposium: Fr. Cristino Pine OFM's "A Comparative Study on Pauline and Johannine Soteriology of Creation in Romans 8 and John 1:1-18" and Pauline Angela Bautista's "The Church's Response to the Land Dispossession of the Agta Dumagat Tribe Due to the Development Aggression of the Aurora Pacific Economic and Freeport Zone."



13 DEC 2021

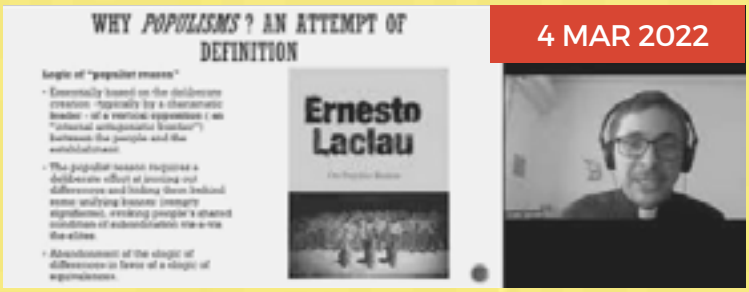
LST's Advent Mass and Memorial of St. Lucy presided by Fr. Enrico C. Eusebio Jr. SJ, LST President, with Fr. Silvino L. Borres, SJ as homilist. The face-to-face celebration of the Eucharist was held at the Richie Fernando Covered Court of the Loyola House of Studies.

24 JAN 2022

Launching of the new Diploma in Integral Vocational Accompaniment. The program proposes a fundamental and integral approach to the accompaniment of members of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life and diocesan seminarians in their vocational journey from candidacy to ongoing formation after ordination. Designed for current and prospective formators of consecrated men and women and diocesan seminarians, vocation promoters, vocation, and spiritual directors and counselors, the program engages the participants in an interdisciplinary way, integrating the principles and insights of theology, philosophy, sacred scriptures, spirituality, and canon law with psychology in an effort to develop a Christian vision of vocation, i.e., what the human person is and can become in answering God's call.



Theological Hour with His Eminence Charles Cardinal Maung Bo SDB of Myanmar, President of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC). Topic: The Role of Women in The Mission and Evangelization of Asia



Theological Hour with Fr. Cesare Sposetti SJ of Aggiornamenti Sociali. Topic: Populisms vs People. A Possible Catholic Response.

13 MAY 2022

LST's Year-End Thanksgiving and Tribute to Graduates in the Degree and Non-Degree Programs and Blessing of the New Laudato Si' Patio.



23rd Baccalaureate Mass and Commencement Exercises of Loyola School of Theology as an Ecclesiastical Faculty with Presider and Homilist Most Rev. Honesto F. Ongtioco, D.D., Bishop of Cubao and Graduation Speaker Fr William Abbott SJ, Former Executive Secretary of LST, Formator at San Jose Seminary, and current Secretary of the Provincial of the Philippine Jesuits. Venue is at the Singson Hall of the Ateneo de Manila Grade School.

NEWS BRIEFS



"Conversations" is a theologico-cultural online Asian "coffee or tea room" where students, faculty members, and alumni can share their theological reflections on select aspects of their respective Asian cultures. The programme is designed to engage students in critical reflection on various cultural contexts in light of the Gospel. Participating Jesuit Theological Centers of the Jesuit Conference of South Asia and the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific were Jnana-Deepa Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Pune, India; Vidyajyoti College of Theology, New Delhi, India; St. Joseph Jesuit Scholasticate, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; Wedabhakti Faculty of Theology and Faculty of Theology, Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia; Loyola School of Theology, Quezon City, Philippines; Fu Jen Faculty of Theology of St. Robert Bellarmine, Taipei, Taiwan; Graduate School of Theology, Sogang University, Seoul, Korea; Jesuit Scholasticate, Tokyo, Japan. The following Conversations were held:

1 DEC 2021 Conversations with Fr. Rogel Anecito L. Abais SJ of Loyola School of Theology. Topic: "Collective Identity in Suffering: The Relevance of the Exodus Narrative to the Filipino Search for Identity."

16 FEB 2022 Conversations with Dr Kwon Youngpa of Sogang University, Seoul, Korea. Topic: "Understanding the Faith Within History Through the Eyes of Asian Believers."

23 FEB 2022 Conversations with Fr. Antony Rodrigues of Jnana Deepa Institute of Philosophy and Theology, Pune, India. Topic: "Braving the Present: Towards an Inter-Religious Spirituality in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic Based on a Christian-Buddhist Perspective."

2 MAR 2022

Conversations with Fr. Jeffrey Chang SJ of Fujen Faculty of Theology of St. Robert Bellarmine Taipei, Taiwan. Topic: "Religious Freedom and Peace: Modern Catholic Perspectives and Contemporary Taiwan Society."

9 MAR 2022

Conversations with Fr. Heru Prakosa SJ and Siwi Dharma Jati SJ of Wedabhakti Faculty of Theology and Faculty of Theology, Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Topic: "Jesuit-Muslim Relations in Indonesia: A Paradigm Shift."

6 APR 2022

Conversations with Fr. Anthony Nguyen Huy Quyen of the Society of the Divine Word, Vietnam. Topic: "Ngắm Đứng (Standing Meditation) as an Instrument for Missionary Evangelization in Today's Vietnam."

LST RESUMES FACE-TO-FACE CLASSES



On 24 January 2022, LST resumed in-person classes with a hybrid learning set-up. The initial pilot group consisted of First to Fourth Year students enrolled in the ecclesiastical Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology Program (STB). The decision was reached in coordination with the Loyola Schools of the Ateneo de Manila University and after due consultation with the LST Faculty, Students, and Religious Superiors of various religious congregations. The Prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education, in an Instruction "On the Use of Distance Learning in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties" dated 13 May 2021, has expressed the need especially for those in the STB Program to resume even limited face-to-face classes if allowed by government authorities. In fact, Jesuit faculties of theology in countries which have achieved relative success in containing the COVID-19 infections have already cautiously reopened their campuses.

LST'S GLOBAL CLASSROOMS: OUR WINDOW TO THE WORLD THROUGH HYBRID LEARNING TECHNOLOGY

Beginning Academic Year 2022-2023 (August to December Term), students will have the chance to avail of an LST theological and ministerial formation on a distance learning hybrid mode - right from the comfort of their homes. From any point in Luzon, Visayas, or Mindanao, wherever they are in the world, they can join their in-person classmates in their chosen courses and academic programs through Zoom as well as through LST's Learning Management System, Canvas. Our classrooms have been equipped with wireless presentation displays, smart TVs, and cameras for this purpose. LST's academic programs that will be open for full distance learning are the following non-degree programs only:

Professional Diploma in Family Ministries
Diploma in Theological Studies
Diploma in Pre-Theology Studies
Diploma in Pastoral Ministry
Diploma in the Pastoral Care of Migrants
Diploma in Integral Ecology
Diploma in Basic Pastoral Ministry
Diploma in Integral Vocational Accompaniment
Non-Certificate Students (Auditors, "Walk-Ins")

LST also welcomes cross-enrollees from other schools to full online mode with the permission of their Registrar or Dean.



SECOND TERM OF FR. ENRICO C. EUSEBIO, SJ AS LST PRESIDENT

In a decree dated 15 February 2022, the Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, Most Rev. Giuseppe Cardinal Versaldi, D.D., has confirmed the appointment of Fr. Enrico C. Eusebio Jr., SJ, to a second three-year term of office as President of the Ecclesiastical Faculty, Loyola School of Theology.

In his letter to Rev. Fr. Arturo Sosa Abascal, SJ, Jesuit Superior General and Chancellor of Loyola School of Theology, the Cardinal Prefect informed him of this confirmation and thanked him "for appraising us of Fr. Eusebio's achievements, which merited the unanimous support of the LST Faculty and Student Representatives' Assembly, as well as of the LST Corporation Membership." Fr. Eusebio's second term, ad alterum triennium, is effective 17 May 2022.

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LOYOLA SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY'S

GLOBAL CLASSROOMS



Our Window to the World Through Hybrid Learning Technology

PARADIGM SHIFTS IN TIME OF PANDEMIC

Sem. Jearim Leandro P. Famoso

Our situation now seems to be defined by, so to say, a schism: the time before the onset of COVID-19, and that of the post-pandemic era, which we now coin as the “new normal.” Because of this, perspectives are shaken, long-held beliefs are questioned, the old system is critiqued, and our lives are never as before; thus, a paradigm shift. A paradigm shift happens when the usual way of thinking or doing something is replaced by something new, and this pandemic has forced humanity to restructure how we live and how society operates, from our lives as individuals to something as big as work, education, and even how we identify as a Church.



BORDERLESS CLASSROOMS

The way we understand the word “borders” in the classroom setting are the physical classroom walls themselves. But with the pandemic, the borders set by the traditional way of teaching, wherein a teacher organizes and teaches students in one classroom, waned and even stopped during the earlier onset of the virus. For a time, it was replaced by a virtual classroom, in which teachers and students could only see each other through the screens of their gadgets.

The use of Zoom, Canvas, Google Meet, Google Classroom, and other platforms in order to make virtual learning possible did not just become popular; it has even become a norm. The terms ‘synchronous’ and 'asynchonous’ were used, with synchronous classes referring to real-time face-to-face or virtual lectures, and asynchronous classes, which allow the students to read and study at their own time and pace. But then again, not all people have access to the Internet. With this educational revolution, schools have been forced to adapt their facilities to pave the way for a hybrid mode of learning, mixing the customary way of teaching (face-to-face instruction) and other alternative modes of education.

This paradigm shift in education is happening and it appears that it is inevitable. In fact, this has now become part of the new life of teachers and students. The education sector is still just “testing the waters.” Amid such, one thing is for sure though: no virus can shatter society’s thirst to search for knowledge.



WORK REDEFINED

Advances in technology have drastically shifted the use of remote working options. These advances have led to increased potential flexibility as to how and where individuals work. This flexibility has also enabled individuals across the globe to collaborate remotely as

technologies continue to evolve (e.g., webcams, hosting software, and faster and more reliable internet connections). As the reality of COVID-19 set in, remote work quickly went from the exception to the norm.

Many businesses and organizations looked for ways to adapt to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Working from home became a 'standard,' replacing daily commutes and meetings with flexible hours and virtual conference calls.

The value placed on different members of the workforce has also been redefined. There has been some increased recognition of key workers which we now call frontliners: from healthcare workers to teachers, from supermarket staff to Grab and Food Panda delivery drivers.

The pandemic has also exposed social inequalities. According to Ana Yang, acting executive director of the Hoffmann Center (an independent policy institute in London with a mission of providing commentary on world events and offer solutions to global challenges), there are workers who, because of the need to provide for their families, are "…being forced to make the decision to risk infection rather than lose precious income."

The pandemic has indeed opened the world to the use of hybrid working models – a mix of office-based teams and those working in their respective homes – are more likely to be used in the future. It also opened our eyes to those unsung heroes working in the background: silently saving lives and keeping society afloat.



A VIRTUAL CHURCH

The COVID-19 pandemic has also forced the Church to resort to drastic means of allowing the faithful to at least "hear" and "see" the Mass through radios, televisions, or live streams. For some, it may have opened up a totally new world of evangelization, giving rise to valid questions to ponder upon: Now that the churches are closed, where can we worship God? Does this mean that religious services are not essential? Where can we avail the sacraments?

There has been a shift towards 'wandering' upon the possibilities of spreading the Gospel on a broader scale and reaching the 'unchurched,' people of other faiths, and people who do not subscribe to any faith. This has provided an opportunity for Christians to be exposed to other forms of worship, liturgical practices, and ways of preaching other than what were present before. Strikingly, there has been an increased use of social media for catechesis, so much so that most parishes now have institutionalized a ministry solely dedicated to social communications.



There has been a shift towards 'wandering' upon the possibilities of spreading the Gospel on a broader scale...

The ancient practice of spiritual communion instead of physically receiving the Host has become popular as well. This gave rise to the question: Can we not do this all the time? There are some, including Pope Francis, who expressed concern that becoming comfortable with live-streamed Mass "is dangerous." In a homily at his morning Mass in the chapel of his residence on April 17, 2020, he said that relationship with Jesus "is intimate, … is personal, but it is in a community," and this closeness to Christ without community, without the Eucharist, and "without the sacraments is dangerous."

Indeed, it is spiritually unhealthy to grow accustomed to such a practice since online masses can also make Catholics mediocre and complacent, especially in terms of living their relationship with God "just [for] myself, detached from the people of God." This promotes an individualistic kind of faith. The Pontiff even went to great lengths by saying that "online Masses and spiritual communion do not represent the Church" and that we are "in a difficult situation that the Lord is allowing, but the ideal of the Church is always with the people and with the sacraments — always."

Historically, the Church has undergone innumerable changes given the context and signs of the times. She was a church in the catacombs, then She became the church of the Roman Empire. She went through the trials of the Protestant Reformation, experienced persecutions from the state, and opened herself to the world with the Vatican II Council. Now, the Church is making herself available both physically and virtually. We can be sure that the Church will not be the same as before, but it is always centered on Jesus and His Gospel of love.



HEALTHCARE REVAMP

The worldwide crisis has brought the public's attention to the importance of their health, a shift in perspective that some doctors feel will live on even after the pandemic has toned down. "People are thinking about their own health and the health of their loved ones in ways they probably did not before," says Leana Wen, MD, a doctor and public health policy professor at the George Washington University in Washington, DC.

There are also new norms of precautionary measures. Wherever we go, we almost cannot find any establishment without any alcohol dispensers, thermal body temperature scanners, or a security guard asking you to present your vaccination card before he/she lets you enter a particular establishment. Little things, such as sanitizing hands with alcohol regularly or keeping facemasks on most of the time, seem to continue.

The pandemic has also revolutionized healthcare, with the rise in popularity of telehealth services. When many doctors' clinics across the country closed and hospitals were overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients, many patients became more familiar with virtual doctor visits, propelling the popularity of telehealth services. Patients are now considering virtual clinic visits as an alternative to in-clinic services. The pandemic has also served as a wake-up call to everyone that mental health matters. Cases of anxiety

The pandemic has also served as a wake-up call to everyone that mental health matters.

and depression were prevalent worldwide in the first year of the pandemic, even up to the point of a 25% increase, according to a scientific brief released by the World Health Organization (WHO). One key reason for the surge is the tremendous stress brought about by social isolation. Loneliness, fear of infection, pain, sadness, financial problems, and death are identified as stressors that contribute to anxiety and depression. Exhaustion is linked to suicidal thinking among health workers. Thus, WHO is seeking to encourage the integration of mental health and psychosocial assistance across and within all parts of the global response during the pandemic.



BREATHING WITH THE EARTH

The pandemic has also challenged our mindset towards the environment, particularly in adopting more sustainable practices that do not hurt the environment and letting go of the throw-away culture that seems to pervade society nowadays.

At the start of the pandemic, the planet seemed to be able to “breathe” better: animals were freely walking the streets, the skies were much clearer, etc. However, as society went back to normal, greenhouse gasses again suffocated the Earth.

While enduring COVID-19 lockdowns, French anthropologist and philosopher Bruno Latour proposed an exercise of reflection. He suggested that we consider which suspended activities we would like to see gone or good and which we would

like to resume; which brand-new activities or habits we would like to develop in the aftermath of the pandemic; and how workers or entrepreneurs disenfranchised by a reshaped economy might be helped to transition into other, more sustainable or more resilient roles or activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has indeed created multiple paradigm shifts as everyone scrambled to react to the rapid changes brought on by the pandemic. But this is what exemplifies humanity:

the creativity to adapt even in the direst of situations.



Reimagining Our Teaching and Learning Spaces

Fr. Rogel Anecito L. Abais, SJ



The term that has gone around during the pandemic is VUCA. It stands for volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Indeed, when we look back on the past two years, it is easy to describe our world as a VUCA World. Clearly, the challenge at Loyola School of Theology was to respond to a new world which rapidly and continues to metamorphose before our eyes. Behind the seemingly negative connotation of VUCA, I would like to explore four graces that were showered by our Lord upon us.

The grace of flexibility against volatility

When the first news of the virus threat hit us, we held our breath only for a very short moment. There was no time to be wasted in disbelief and denial. We were thrust into a series of sudden changes that required immediate responses. From March 2020 to February 2022, we have gone from a week-long preemptive campus lockdown to almost three months of total lockdown to over a year of curtailed mobility and to our current relaxed mobility. In the span of two years, we have changed our learning/teaching setup in ways that would have taken years of discussions and planning prior to execution. With much trepidation, we started to adapt online instruction and learning using Canvas and Zoom as our online platforms. We shifted our delivery from semestral to quarterly in AY 2020-2021 and back to semestral in AY 2021-2022. Even in our administrative functions, we have shifted to more online-based transactions.

All of this required for faculty, students, and staff to assimilate, adapt, and adjust rapidly. For the administration, it required a lot of quick thinking and the openness to try new things. Flexibility meant setting up systems and being prepared to change, modify, or even abandon one to create another which can better serve the learning community.

The grace of boldness against uncertainty

The surge in COVID-19 cases which we experienced last January 2022 threatened to bring to nothing all of the preparations we made starting early December to start limited in-person classes at the start of the second semester. In the end, we delayed the implementation of this scheme to the second week of February. We have been faced with this kind of uncertainty in these past two years. Regardless, we have fixed our gaze on how we can best prepare the school to welcome what many are anticipating as the "new normal."

Every step of the way, it is distinctly a grace of boldness that has allowed us to take steps into a changing world before us—one which is unfamiliar, unknown. When one thinks of how most of our professors have achieved various degrees of comfort in dealing with the technical aspects of online teaching, one can only think of a miracle. This is especially true when prior to the pandemic, we only had three courses offered online by a professor. One of the bold steps the administration took was to forge on with infrastructure improvement. We have subscribed to EBSCO Host to bring ease to student and faculty research even when they are confined at home. The school is now equipped with a universal hotspot for internet accessibility wherever you find yourself in the LST complex. During the last two years, we

have also made renovations to office and classroom spaces as well as open spaces. These various updates will hopefully redound to better ease for faculty and students especially as we look forward to a new era of learning at LST.

The grace of innovation against complexity

Things have become more complicated because of the pandemic. We hear a lot of times people saying that things will never go back to how they used to be pre-pandemic. Thus, we have to anticipate the changes that tomorrow brings. This anticipation calls for a lot of creativity—the grace of innovation. What were frightful challenges brought about by the pandemic has allowed us to rethink our ways of doing our work in academic formation and it has made us rapidly adapt to the needs of online learning and teaching.

The blessing in all of this is that we are all exploring new things. We have done hurriedly organized workshops to help teachers cope with a radically changed environment. Now, we are more relaxed and we are ready to do a better prepared ongoing training reaping from the learnings of the past two years of trials and errors. We are also exploring how the avenues opened to us with online learning and teaching can better be incorporated as a regular feature in some of our programs.

The grace of possibility against ambiguity

It seems that the past two years have made our academic life quite ambiguous. Are we delivering better or not? Are students learning better or not? Is the online platform more effective than the traditional classroom setting? It will take time to assess these questions. However, we can hazard a guess that there are some very obvious pros to an online learning platform and also some downsides to it. A good deal of possibilities have arisen from much ambiguity. We were given an opportunity to expand our reach to individuals who are able to join our programs despite their geographic distance.

Because the pandemic has forced us out of the comfort of tried and tested formulae, we are able to test new approaches, new ways of doing things. Faculty and student feedback are crucial for us as we navigate through so many possibilities that present themselves before us. In the end, we have to tailor these possibilities to fit the teachers and the learners.

How has it been? The simple answer is that there has never been a dull day. *Semper ad meliora ad maiorem Dei gloriam!*









Scarred Communities are BEAUTIFUL

Sr. Hazel L. Ladiero, ADC

"I now proclaim you graduates of the School Year 2020-2021."

Tears rolled down my cheeks as memories of hardships experienced with my students and their families, with my sisters in the community, and with the faculty and staff of our school during the entire year came to me alongside that grace-filled moment of joy and success. Then, I took a deep breath and whispered to the Gentle Breeze, "It is finished." Truly, we were able to walk forward together as a Marcelo Spinola School Family by the grace of God.

We are a humble school, and the only learning modality that we were able to offer to our students during the first year of the pandemic was Modular Distance Learning Modality. Learning modules could be accessed by parents in hard copies through a scheduled module releasing and retrieval. Soft copies could also be downloaded from the school's learning management system called Digital Mobile Campus (DMC). Output submissions could be in hard or soft copies.

We produced our own modules in our desire to continue to offer quality education to our students. However, since not all of us, teachers, are writers, many struggled at first, but were able to make it through. This struggle was accompanied by many other difficulties. After the first quarter, many students were not able to finish the activities in the modules, had high risks for depression, and showed tendencies for dropout. We teachers also had so much difficulty in checking the outputs all together in a short period of time given the many other things that we did in order to really accompany students from a distance, not only in their learning process but also in their struggle to cope with the new normal set up. Thus, many of us also slowly lost the motivation to continue.

Our students' parents also struggled a lot seeing their children struggle and not knowing how to deal with the reality that their children were 24 hours at home. We, the community of sisters assigned in the school, had different assignments from the non-teaching to the teaching and to the administrative positions. And so, it was quite difficult to understand what each one was going through. With all these things happening, there was a great tension in the school community.

It was during this time of great tensions when we felt the need to pray harder as a community for us to find the way to continue journeying together. It was during this time

when we heard God telling us to listen to Him and to one another. And so we had circles of dialogue. We opened opportunities for our parents to express their difficulties and for the school to assure them that we were all together in this desire to move forward for our children. As a community of sisters, we gathered as well to talk about our concerns in the school, how we were, what we were going through, what God's invitation was for us, and in what possible ways we could step forward together.

Each of us sisters is a member of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC), together with our teachers. And so from our community, we gathered our teachers by BEC. In our BEC, where members of each community have already established trust among one another, we shared about the great tension we were in. Then, the School's Administrative Council, in which the composition also represents each BEC, gathered together to listen to one another in order to know where the Spirit was leading us. The process of dialogue and constant seeking of the will of God went on and guided us to make significant adjustments protecting the mental health of each member of the school community without compromising the quality of education we offer.

It was never easy to slowly make steps forward because each of us was pained one way or another. However, it was possible because God's grace abounded. Our community's penitential rite, the circle of love we had with our teachers, and our encounters with the students and their parents helped us to reconcile with one another and to gather strength to continue walking together, to carry one another's burden, and to see difficulties in a positive way.

The school year 2020-2021 did not just end with the graduation of our Grade XII students and the recognition of all our students who were promoted to the next grade level, but also with the conviction of all of us, members of the school community, that God would never abandon His people.





He gives us the company and comfort of our Blessed Mother Mary, who is our model of listening, of pondering in our hearts the many events and people that God uses to talk to us. He sends us His Holy Spirit to enlighten us and to give us strength to go through and overcome difficult times. He reminds us that we are made in His image and likeness and so, like Him, we are a community bound by love.

The dark days had already passed away and now God is making something new. As the school year 2021-2022 dawned on our school, we carried with us the lessons we learned from the first year of the pandemic and committed to integrate them with our decision-making as a community.

We began the new school year still with modular learning but already with online classes and a well-adjusted school organization and members of the school community. We successfully went through the first three quarters by the grace of God. Of course, we still encounter difficulties as they normally come, but we are already stronger as a community because we value community and the importance of listening to God and to one another.

We opened for limited face-to-face classes on March 28, 2022. All are grateful. All are excited. And all are ready to continue sailing as a community led by the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, when we walk together and listen to one another in order to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit, God guides our human efforts and leads us to a deeper communion for the mission that He has entrusted to us. His Spirit strengthens and inspires us to do the right thing in every decision we make. He makes use of pains and difficulties to turn them into opportunities for us to grow as His people in order to serve and love one another. He truly makes our scarred communities beautiful.



One of the discernment sessions conducted in processing the pandemic and preparing for the new school year at Marcelo Spinola School.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF ONLINE LEARNING

Lawrence Adrian A. Rubrico, MS



"Online Learning is not the next big thing; it is the now big thing."

Donna J. Abernathy

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed not only the way we live, but also the way we learn. The administrators, teachers, and students of Loyola School of Theology (LST) have adapted to a new way of learning – online. In simple terms, online learning means education that takes place over the Internet. It is sometimes called e-learning. The question is, "Are we ready to take on the challenge of online learning?" Let us find out as we discover the benefits and challenges of online learning.

Online learning has many benefits. One benefit of online learning is efficiency.[1] Online learning makes teachers and students more efficient. LST offers teachers and students to use Canvas, which is a course management system that supports online learning and teaching. Through the help of Canvas, teachers have an efficient way to deliver the lessons to their students. Teachers can easily post PDFs or PowerPoints of the lessons, eBooks, articles, and videos that can help students in learning. Students also study the lesson efficiently because in Canvas, doing so is very organized and easy to follow. Teachers can measure their learning by conducting quizzes and assignments such as reflection papers or discussion boards in every module. Discussion boards are very enriching because it encourages everyone to actively participate in the class. It is enriching because students can learn from one another by expressing their own views and opinions on a certain issue. Indeed, Canvas is a very helpful learning tool to both teachers and students because Canvas can maximize online learning. Learning in this time of pandemic has become convenient and easy because of Canvas.

Another benefit of online learning is that it allows students to attend classes from any location of their choice. Loyola School of Theology is an international community. That is why LST has professors and students from abroad. Some foreign students were not able to travel to the Philippines because of the pandemic. There are professors who stay abroad. They were able to conduct classes online. LST uses the Zoom application to gather virtually the professors and students in different places of the world to conduct online classes. It also allows schools to reach out to a more extensive network of students, instead of being restricted by geographical boundaries. LST was able to reach out to different countries to conduct Theological Hour regarding Conversations on Asian Theologies and Cultures. This aims at enhancing the quality of students' theological formation for mission. This kind of Theological Hour became possible because of online learning. Professors and students from other countries were able to connect with LST through the Zoom application. Additionally, online lectures conducted through Zoom can be recorded, archived, and shared for future reference. This allows students and teachers to access the learning material anytime. Thus, online learning offers students the accessibility of time and place in education.

1 "Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Learning," E-Learning Basics, https://elearningindustry.com/advantages-and-disadvantages-online-learning, accessed April 5, 2022.

If there are benefits in online learning, there are also challenges. One of these is is internet connectivity. A consistent internet connection without decent speed is a problem. Without consistent connection for students and teachers, there can be a lack of continuity in learning. There are instances in online learning when the students cannot attend or understand the lesson simply because of a slow internet connection.

Another challenge of online learning is the sense of isolation. Students can learn from one another. However, in an online class, there are minimal physical interactions between students and teachers. This often results in a sense of isolation for the students. Not all teachers conduct their online classes synchronously. Some professors conduct online classes purely asynchronously. It is a challenge for students because they can interact with their teachers through email only. In the case of new students, who are in their 1st year and 2nd year in the time of the pandemic, they were not able to know each other and were able to see their school physically. This time of pandemic made us isolated. Pope Francis responds to this by speaking of "culture of encounter," that we must be passionate in meeting others.[2]

We cannot avoid challenges in life. Challenges will always be there. The important thing is that with every challenge that we encounter in online learning, we are ready to face and overcome it. Learning in this time of pandemic is not very easy; that is why the cooperation and participation of students and teachers are very important to help one another. LST always gives its best to offer quality theological formation to the students enrolled.

As I experience online learning, there are both advantages and disadvantages that I've encountered. It is an experience of adapting in this time of situation. Personally, online learning helps me more to save time and to study independently. The biggest problem that I've encountered is unstable internet connection. Sometimes I was not able to join class because of our unstable internet connection. The goal of education is to learn. Despite the situation, I can say that I still learn a lot from our classes and not only from our classes but also to embrace this kind of learning method.

I believe the time will come when we go back again to face-to-face classes. Little by little, the school is beginning again to have full face-to-face classes. Since February 2022, through the efforts of the LST administration, hybrid classes have been made possible. A hybrid class is an educational model where some students attend in-class persons while others join virtually at home.[3] At this moment, only STB seminarians are allowed to go to school. I cannot wait for the resumption of full face-to-face classes. At this moment, online learning is now the big thing for us.

2. Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter: Fratelli Tutti (Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020), 216.
3. "What is Hybrid? Here's Everything You Need to Know," Owl Labs, https://resources.owllabs.com/blog/hybrid-learning,





Interculturality at LST

Richard Niyukuri, SX

In his message for Urbi et Orbi 2021, Pope Francis underscores that the Word became flesh in order to dialogue with us. He continues saying that God does not desire to carry on a monologue but a dialogue. For God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is dialogue, an eternal and infinite communion of love and life. By the coming of Jesus, the Word made flesh, into our world, God showed us the way of encounter and dialogue. Indeed, Jesus made that way incarnate in himself so that we might know it and follow it, in trust and hope.[1]

I was deeply touched while reading and meditating on the said message of the Holy Father. I directly felt the need for and importance of dialogue among us. God shows that it is possible to dialogue until we become one. I can relate this message to the ideal of the founder of the congregation where I belong, the Xaverians – Saint Guido Maria Conforti – who calls us to make the world a single family in Christ.

Our faith involves a number of paradoxes. God, in His transcendence, chose to be one of us. He is immanent to our life and nature forever. God chose to become human so that we may be one in Him. And so we can enter into dialogue with Him. Such a dialogue should be extended in our relationship as humans. But how? What modalities are we going to take in order to bring about a dialogue that leads to unity?

In his last days on earth, Jesus prayed that we be one as he and the Father are one (cf. Jn 17:21). How can we be one without being one person? How can we build up unity in our diversity? How can we value our cultures while seeking to make one culture of the children of God? Finally, how can we conduct a dialogue of cultures and religions while keeping our identity intact?

First, our different cultures are laden with values. Every culture has riches and values that need to be cherished and cradled for growth. They are vehicles or mediums to express God's revelation, that is at the core of faith.[2] In our eyes, cultures are human-made; however, God's hand is the invisible element that helps us shape our cultures. Moreover, God speaks to people through their cultures and sows the seeds of His Word (cf. Ad Gentes, 11) in every human culture because God wants all people to be saved. [3] Each culture has what it takes to contribute to the manifestation of God among us, His beloved people.

Cultures make us different from each other. They contribute to expressing the love of God in different ways. On this, we understand that we are culturally different. Some of us are more intellectual, objective, and subjective, while others are more emotional. Some are either more abstract or more concrete in thinking. Some are logical, while others are more experiential. Some are more scientific, while others are more imaginative and are good at fine arts and music. Some insist on their rights, duties, and responsibilities, while others underscore love, kindness, sympathy, hospitality, and gentleness. Some value stronger self-expression; others insist on self-control. Some insist on discipline; others on freedom. Some assert individualism, while others value group spirit. Some are more serious; others are more lax, cheerful and fun-loving. Some emphasize greater exteriority, while others value greater interiority. Some are more active and energetic, while others are calmer, detached, and gentle.[4]

[1] "Urbi et Orbi "message of his holiness Pope Francis, Christmas 2021, vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/urbi/documents/papa-francesco_20211225_urbi-et-orbi-natale.html), (Accessed 13 February 2022).
[2] Vincente Cajilig, Dialogue between faith and culture (Manila, Lucky Press,1998) ,48.
[3] Ibid., 37.
[4] Ibid., 21.



All these characteristics show that our native cultures shape our personalities. We realize this when we encounter others who are not of our cultures. The differences are sensed in our way of thinking, acting, and speaking. The experience of embracing another culture very often leads to a culture shock, which I myself experienced when I left my country for the first time. I seemed lost because I could not find myself as I would be in my culture. Many gestures of my confreres seemed strange, and sometimes I was tempted to correct others in order to bring them to my culture. I also considered my culture stronger than theirs. I was thus attempting to influence other cultures that I considered weak. In the end, I realized that I had to accept changes and differences; and thus, open up in order to enrich my culture.

We are called to be involved in intercultural communication, which is important, especially for us Christians. Being aware and informed on cultures, the Church is able to really dialogue within and between cultures and make the Gospel known in cultures. It also helps to prepare the ground for better respect and understanding between people and their cultures.[5]

Intercultural dialogue is highly encouraged because every cultural form bears meaning, values, attitudes, and connotations which have to be communicated.[6] By coming into dialogue with the cultures of others, Christians are challenged to expand their horizons, reexamine prejudices and preconceptions, and learn to respect others and their ways of living.[7] While dialoguing, we find ourselves in a place of giving and receiving. We share our culture, and we are open to learning from other cultures.

As time goes on, we change our view of culture. Having been in a foreign country for some years, I can say that I don't have my “pure” culture anymore. My native culture undergoes a transformation even as I continue to learn new realities. I have been doing my best to cope with new environments, i.e., my flexibility to answer and react to new situations. This journey of self-discovery leads me to a healing process until I feel at home in any culture. There is thus an invitation to feel the need for docibilitas, i.e., the capacity to be always open to learning. One does never cease to learn.

Meanwhile, while engaging in dialogue, we gain the same dialogue that is applicable to all of us. We gain a new culture that is not the culture of this or that. Each one can express him/herself and feel at home. Just as hydrogen and oxygen produce something independent, H2O, so also in communication and dialogue. It is not the two individuals but their joint ventures, what they produce together.[8]

As a student of LST, I can sense the interculturality among us students and board members. We are from different cultures; however, we are able to walk hand in hand towards the plenitude of truth. We learn from one another by allowing our cultures to be transfigured by the Gospel. We need to listen not only with the ears but also with the heart. Listening with the heart calls for compassion, criticism, challenge, and confrontation. When listening is absent, dialogue remains sterile and barren.

Therefore, cultures are of great importance. We are the fruit of our cultures and we are invited never to be galvanized to stick to our cultures. We are called to be trained in absorbing and transforming external realities while keeping on being ourselves. For Pope Francis, there is no dialogue with others without a sense of our own identity. Openness to others is possible if there is love of one's own land, one's own people, one's own cultural roots. Moreover, it is impossible to welcome others who are different and value the unique contribution they have to make unless we are firmly rooted in our own people and cultures.[9]

On one hand, we must not be engulfed by other cultures because we believe that no culture should be superior. On the other hand, we should realize the incompleteness and limitations of our cultures. We need to let our cultures be pricked by evangelical values. In essence, we are called to confront our cultures with the Gospel and other cultures. We are called to open up to the world and go beyond the borders of our family and kin, circles of friends, and community, among others. May we learn from others and be ready to appreciate whatever is good, true, and beautiful in other cultures.

[5] Franz- Josef Eilers , Communicating between cultures, An introduction to Interreligious Communication, (Manila: Divine world publications,1992),14.
[6] Ibid., 30.
[7] Vincente Cajilig, Dialogue between faith and culture, 37.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, On fraternity and social friendship (Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana,2020), 143.





PREPARATIONS FOR THE SYNOD ON SYNODALITY

Bp. Honesto F. Ongtioco, DD

Once we received the mandate to conduct the first phase of the preparatory phase of the 2023 Synod of Bishops, I immediately appointed a priest who formed his team to spearhead the synodal consultation. Through a video presentation by Cubao Media Ministry, information was disseminated to parishes. The team, after a month-long preparation, initiated preliminary Zoom meetings in the six vicariates with the Parish Priests and PPC leaders in attendance. Inputs were helpful not only in ensuring the commitment of the parishes, but also in clarifying issues and addressing concerns foreseen in the conduct of the consultations.

I officially launched the synodal consultations on October 2, 2021 with a simple celebration of the Holy Eucharist attended via Zoom by the clergy and PPC leaders. The long wait for the Vatican document provided the time for the training of facilitators and note-takers on the process and procedures of the spiritual conversation, the method adopted for the synodal consultation. Upon reception of the official document in September, a questionnaire was formulated and sample-tested; a template for the final report was also constructed. For the last time, facilitators and note-takers were briefed on the use of those instruments, completing the tedious process of preparation. Consultations started to roll in the parishes, quasi-parishes and a mission station – fifty all in all – by the middle of October.

Important dispositions on the part of the faithful

Dispositions play an important role in the synodal consultation. Some emerged remarkably during the spiritual conversation – belongingness and friendship, trust and honesty, openness and transparency – curbing the initial reluctance of some. The cordial setting disposed the participants to speak freely of their joys and dreams, as well as their pains and disappointments.

In the course of the conversation, individual biases and ideological orientations emerged, which sometimes led to disagreements and arguments. Whatever came out in the sharing, participants prayed together and lifted their sharing in prayer. Led to listen to the Holy Spirit, they became docile. The assertive turns receptive; the divergent thoughts turn into a common consensus, enabling them to discern where the Holy Spirit was leading them.

This is the defining moment in the spiritual conversation. Here, the Holy Spirit is the game-changer working decisively in three dispositions: prayer, listening, and docility. This is the synodality that Pope Francis wants the Church to take: a journeying together that is rooted in prayer, in listening, and in docility. Synodality is not about majority or statistics; it is not discerning how to win an argument or how to push a project. Synodality is discerning about where the Holy Spirit is leading the Church. It is an ecclesial event, and the Holy Spirit is the lead agent. In order to be formed to this synodal mentality, the Holy Spirit needs these three dispositions in us – prayer, listening, and docility. Let us practice them daily.

The Holy Spirit leading us in this direction… Challenges… Graces…

The parish reports – a total of 50 – show a lot of things. Synthesizing them into a 10-page report was tough but it is our precious contribution to the Church for the 2023 Synod. But more than documents, they "plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands" (Vademecum, #32). Taking cue from this quotation, the Holy Spirit is leading us back to our parishes, from which the synodal church begins and takes shape (#31). Hopefully whatever the results of the May Elections, we will be able to continue journeying together: (1) to pursue those dreams; (2) to heal the wounds and build trust and relationship; and (3) to explore and create new resources in our parishes.

Continuing our journey poses a lot of challenges. With the aging and diminishing population in our parishes, we need to think of the future; we need to dream for our youth and children. For this, we ask for the grace of mindfulness for the future of our Church. Secondly, ours is a wounded community. We need to heal those wounds through forgiveness and reconciliation. Healing builds trust and relationship. For this, we ask the grace of humility and forgiveness. And lastly, exploring new resources calls us to go down to our communities and get involved with our parishioners. As we know them, we learn from them; and from them, we explore new resources. For this, we ask for the grace of community involvement and participation. BEC is the framework of synodality.

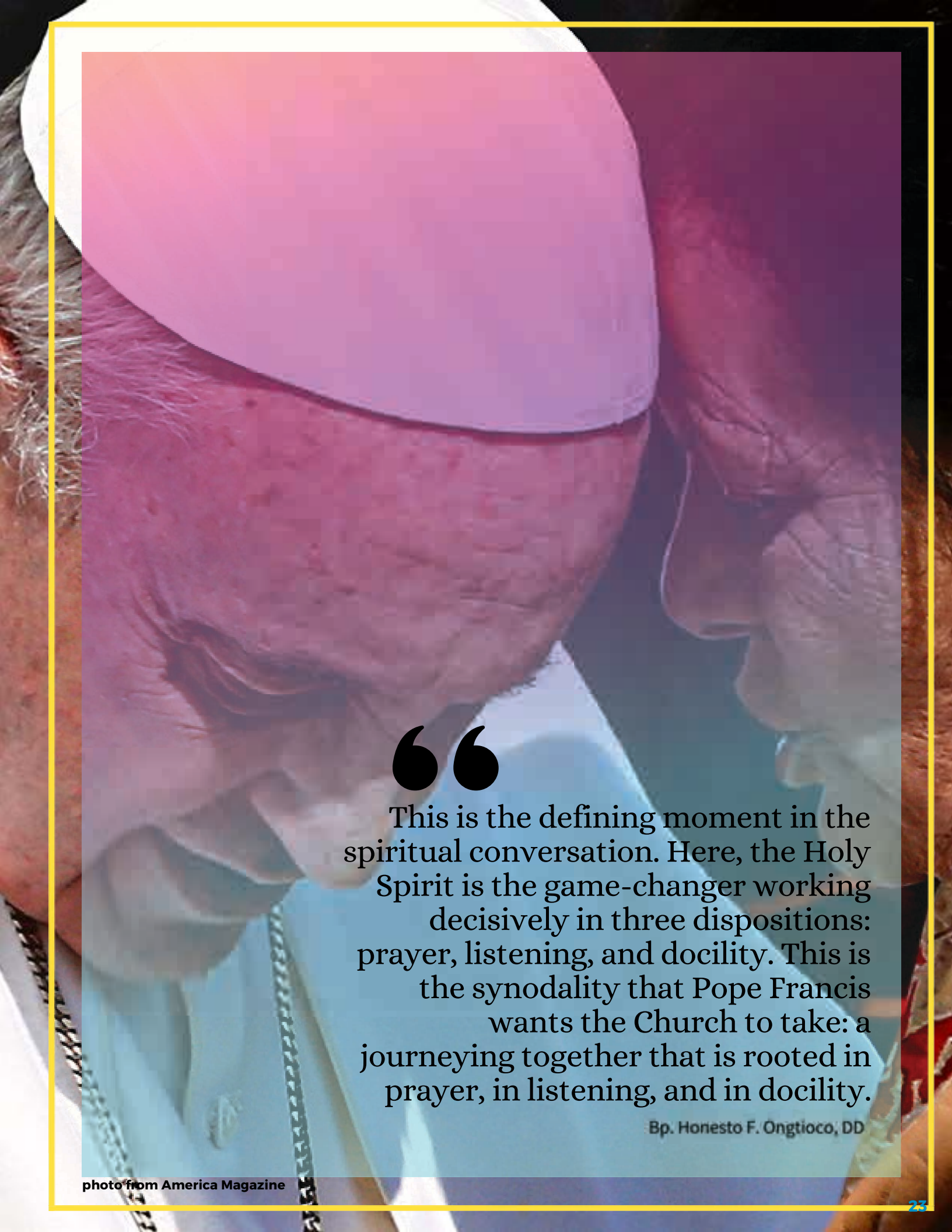
The direction that the Holy Spirit is leading us is downward: parishes. But this direction should start from the top – diocese – as it provides the pastoral direction. It is recommended here that the parish synodal journey be given priority attention in the diocesan planning. Above all, the journeying together must be led by the parish priests. A synodal priest means a synodal church.

Despite the difficult situation of the pandemic and other intervening activities, the synodal consultations in the parishes went smoothly. Two remarkable factors for this success were the ample time provided for the preparations and the support of the Parish Priests and PPC leaders. To date, 46 reports have been submitted. The team is now collating, consolidating and going over them. With such an enormous task, we hope to finish the Diocesan Report by April. The draft will then go through a two-phase validation: with the parish leaders per vicariate in the middle of April, and in the Presbyteral Council on May 12. The Diocesan Report – with some amendments that may be included – will be presented to me for final approval during the Clergy Assembly on May 19.

To culminate our preparations for the Synod on the Synodality, a closing Mass will be held on May 31 at the Cathedral to be attended by the clergy, representatives from the religious communities, and PPC leaders. This closing activity serves as the Diocesan Pre-Synodal assembly, an expression of support and solidarity with the Holy Father, Pope Francis, in his call for a synodal Church. The Diocesan Report will be submitted to the CBCP Secretariat on June 1.



photo from www.abc.net.au



> This is the defining moment in the spiritual conversation. Here, the Holy Spirit is the game-changer working decisively in three dispositions: prayer, listening, and docility. This is the synodality that Pope Francis wants the Church to take: a journeying together that is rooted in prayer, in listening, and in docility.
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> Bp. Honesto F. Ongtioco, DD

photo from America Magazine



SYNOD ON SYNODALITY: REFLECTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Fr. Matteo Rebecchi, SX

The Synod on Synodality involves the whole Church at all levels. The resources dedicated to the synod and the length of its process signal the Pope's desire for a fundamental change in our being Church. The pyramidal setting, which has been implemented in the relationship within the Church so far, needs to meet the evangelic logic of communion. For this reason, we need to avoid the temptation to take the reflection on synodality superficially by saying, "We are already fully living in a synodal way!" This would mean missing the chance to be more coherent with the gospel. It is far better to recognize our need for conversion humbly. Our model for synodality is the communion of the Father and the Son in the Trinity. No less than that.

Synodality (sun-odos) means "walking the same way." A possible reference is the experience of the disciples of Emmaus who walk together with Jesus (cf. Lk 24:13-33). It is not only a matter of synchronizing our paces (what we do), but rather to agree, to synchronize our thoughts and hearts. The conversion to synodality has, therefore, a lot to do with obedience and community discernment.

Conversion to synodality implies two premises. First of all, we need to rediscover that obedience is reserved for God alone and not for other leaders, not even superiors. We synchronize our walking together, only if we walk at the pace of Jesus, our Master. Synodality is, therefore, a new set of relationships where all, including those in authority, are members of the same flock and follow the sole Shepherd, the only Master, Jesus. We are all disciples, though with different roles in the flock. Secondly, synodality requires discerning the will of God in a collective way. Both those in authority and subjects need to collaborate in listening to the voice of the Spirit and walking His way faithfully. Community discernment enhances and brings to completion the traditional individual discernment, because the voice of the Spirit is better heard in communion, in synodality (…it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us,…. Acts 15:28) .

Two movements are needed:

On one hand, those in authority should give room to all to listen to the voice of those who are often unheard. Saint Benedict says that sometimes the will of God is discovered through the opinion of the youngest member of the community. In the same line, Pope Francis wants the first synodal stage to be dedicated to listening to all the church members. In this vision, a superior is not supposed to possess the truth and to give answers to all questions. Rather, he or she is called to facilitate the sharing of each one's contributions and talents, so that the voice of the Spirit may be heard in the community. Once again, those in authority need to consider themselves part of the flock, all sheep with different characteristics and roles, but all sheep… Of course, those in authority have the function to draw the conclusion and synthesize a final decision, especially when the consensus is not fully reached.



At the same time, the “subjects” need to take responsibility for the Church and communities. Being responsible is unsettling because it compels all the sheep to get out of passivity and comfort zone (being a slave may be... cozy: it spares us from thinking, deciding, taking up responsibilities…). At the same time, the "subject" positively contributes to the discernment process only if he or she listens to the voice of the Spirit first, just as those in authority. He or She should share the result of his or her discernment in front of God rather than personal opinions or egoistic desires. What he or she brings into the community discernment, therefore, can be disturbing, unsettling, driving towards radical choices if the Spirit asks so (the famous *Caritas Christi Urget Nos*). Synodality is not mere democracy, but rather, it is listening to and obeying the Master – together. Finally, the game of synodality calls each community member to uphold the result of community discernment with faith humbly. Nobody knows the will of God for sure, but we believe that discerning together helps us get closer to its discovery.

Some considerations...

Does anybody like synodality? The world does not. It wants and promotes individualism instead. And probably we do not like it either. Synodality is a beautiful word, but it is also a demanding process that requires faith and courage. It is enough to see how difficult it is to share our plans, ideas, desires, difficulties, etc. We prefer to decide on our own or, at most, communicate our decisions once they are taken because we are afraid of seeing our plans modified in the game of communion. We want our voices to be heard, but we become resistant when it comes to putting our ideas and plans in communion.

Being ready to avoid the risk to interpret communion only from the vantage point of one's culture: harmony, fraternity, family, setting of relationships provided by our respective cultures are good starting points, but they need to be lifted up to the level of the culture of the gospel, the culture of Jesus, the Trinity. At the same time, the contribution of all brings in specific lights to the collective discernment according to our different cultural backgrounds and personalities. The “culture of the gospel” is “incarnated” within the interaction of real people, with their particular cultural and personal characteristics, and then it is never standardized to fit an ideal model. Furthermore, our being "foreigners" within an autochthonous and homogeneous culture is also beneficial because foreigners are "disturbing elements" who see things from different and new (for a specific place) perspectives.

Synodality means to take care of the cry of humanity which is inside our communities (taking care of our people, our treasures!). It may happen that, with the excuse of doing mission, we overlook the quality of our relationships and the care for those who are living in difficulties, crises, etc.

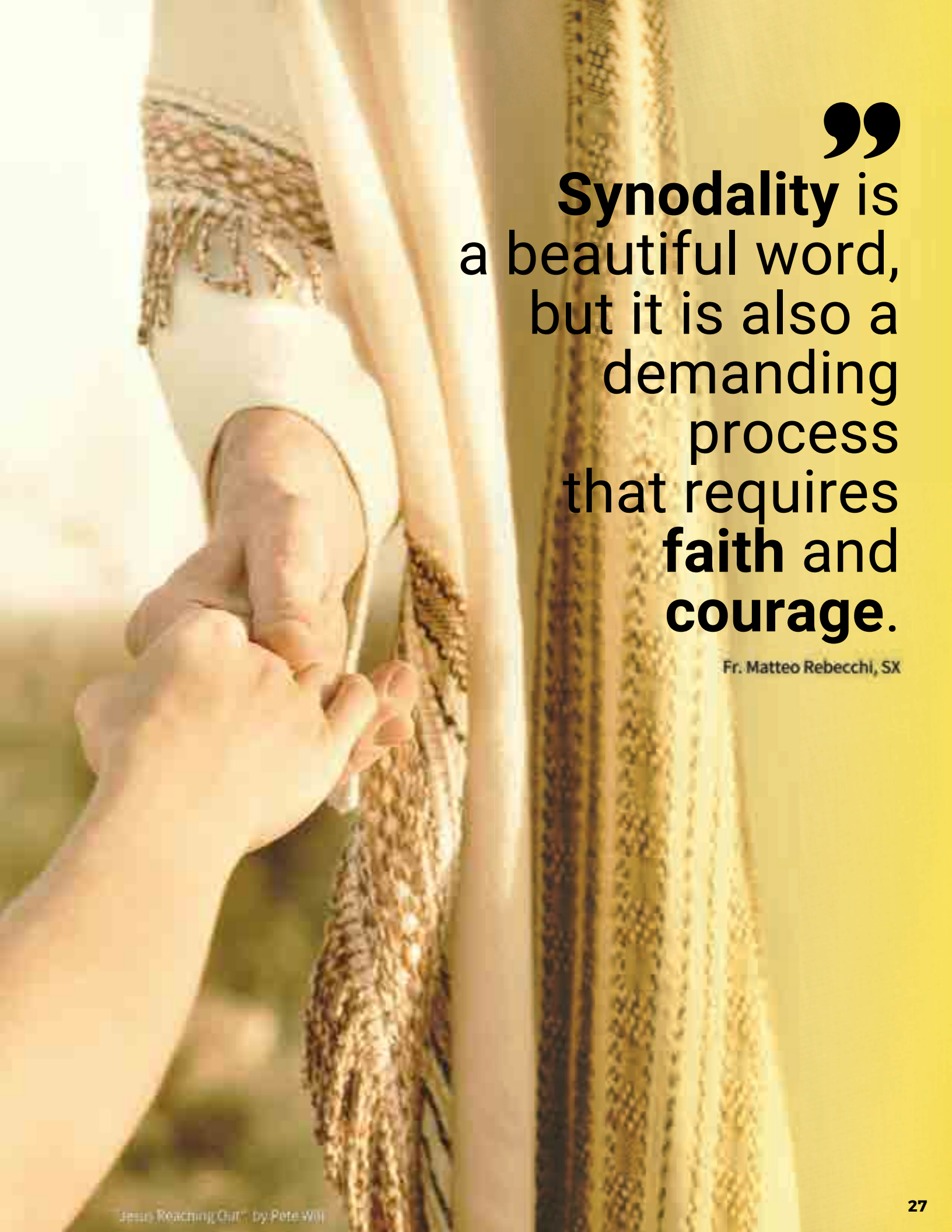
In specific circumstances, we need to do less but in communion. Walking together means going at the pace of the weakest. Moreover, community discernment is a longer process than the individual one (i.e., the Ignatian discernment), which involves only the person and God. Are we ready to implement the community discernment at the cost of doing less and wait for the times of fraternity?

Those who slow down the pace need to know that others are waiting for their contribution. Anybody has talents to share. Hiding them means damaging the collectivity. In synodality, there is no place for passivity and laziness. And walking is fatigue.

The mission is the third element of synodality after communion and participation. Synodality means deeply listening to the cry of the world. If we grow in communion, starting from our communities, we will be trained to be synodal with the world, too.

Synodality is walking together in a path of sanctity, walking together with the Saint among us. I can accelerate or slow down the pace of my brothers and sisters, according to how I try to live the gospel. If I do not strive for my personal sanctity, I damage synodality and the path of others.

A more synodal Church probably will not be more appealing for the world and also for the youth. It will be attractive and beneficial only for those who are looking for God. Others, who are eaten by materialism and numb to the Spirit, will not sense the change. So, it might be wise to keep realistic expectations in these difficult circumstances. Time will come when people finally realize that the world's promises are, in fact, lies. Then, the synodal Church will be ready to welcome them home as a patient mother who never neglects her children.



> **Synodality** is a beautiful word, but it is also a demanding process that requires **faith** and **courage**.
>
> Fr. Matteo Rebecchi, SX

PAANG NAKABABAD SA PUTIK: SYNODALITY IN KALOOKAN JESUIT MISSION STATION

Sch. Joseph Patrick Echevarria, SJ

When we entered the narrow street, the people were already waiting for us outside their homes – standing reverently with lit candles and framed pictures. It was not quite twilight so the candlelight reflected on the remaining puddles from a drizzle that afternoon. A few mothers cradled urns and brought out keepsakes of their loved ones as well.

A somberness hung in the air as our procession moved in rhythm with the voices of people praying the rosary. At the head of the line was Boy-Boy, a part-time dock worker, who raised high a heavy wooden crucifix. Walking right behind him in our religious garbs were myself and Fr. Willy Samson, the chaplain of the Sacred Heart Jesuit Mission Station in Kalookan.

This procession for the dead was unusual for All Souls' Day. Normally, Filipinos would go out and visit their deceased loved ones in the cemetery. But because of the pandemic and strict health protocols, the cemeteries were closed. So, Fr. Willy got creative and thought, "If the people cannot go out, why don't we be the ones to visit them at home?"

We started from the chapel and walked all around the barangay – alley to alley and house to house, to anyone who pitched candles and placed pictures outside their homes. We moved slowly, pausing and praying at each makeshift altar before sprinkling it (and the family) with holy water. And as we did so, I would hear part of the story behind how each person died – an accident at work, COVID, a house fire, a prolonged illness, a victim of extra-judicial killing.

When I think of synodality, it is experiences like this that come to mind.

For sure, like most Catholics, I have heard "synodality" explained using its etymology and the image of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus – to journey together with wider participation and shared mission. Not anymore just Rome and the clerics talking and dictating, while the rest of the faithful followed. Instead, there must be real conversation, especially with the poor and the excluded.

I get it. And the Jesuit Mission Station in Kalookan did its part in the preparation for the Synod on Synodality when it organized small group conversations with different sectors, particularly marginalized groups – with the elderly, with street vendors, with trash collectors, with children and families of EJK victims, with young people with mental health concerns, and other groups. These conversations covered a range of topics – what their life is like, their main concerns, how they see the Church and its role in their lives, and what they hope for the future. This data gathering is important because it will be summarized and sent to Rome for the Synod.

But I feel this is the technical and administrative side to synodality. Deep down, if I were the one asked to explain synodality, I would still return to experiences like our procession during All Souls' Day. My experience is that more than conversations, information gathering, and journeying together, "synodality" in the Jesuit Mission Station means actually being with the people day after day – living beside them, eating together, and knowing their families. Sometimes it also means visiting their sick or blessing their dead, consoling the distraught, fighting injustice, feeding the hungry, and even looking for scholarships for promising youth.

Fr. Willy remarked one time that a priest whose feet are in the mud (*paang babad sa putik*) thinks differently from a priest who stays in his comfortable church or school – *iba ang pag-iisip ng paring nakababad ang paa sa putik*. Synodality in Kalookan is not just a figurative journeying together through conversations; it is actually being with the poor and excluded.

There is a story about Bishop Pablo "Ambo" David of Kalookan who was once asked in an interview, "Can the Gospel be preached to the hungry?" It was a valid question because if a person is hungry and worried about where he is going to get his next meal (or his family's next meal), then why would he listen to the theology and exegesis of a well-fed priest?

The easy answer is "No, we need to feed them first." But Bp. Ambo did not answer right away. He took a moment before saying, "Yes… the Gospel can be preached to the hungry." And then added, "But the preacher must also be hungry." The preacher must also be hungry. If the preacher is in the same boat with them, is struggling and suffering with them, is one with them – then he can speak and they might listen.

As a gifted preacher himself, this must have been what the bishop was thinking when he first received information about the alarming number of drug-related killings in his diocese and decided to set up Mission Stations in the most affected areas. "This is one way by which the Church reaches out to the poor to make them feel that we are one with them," he explained.

Instead of waiting for people to run to the cathedral or parishes to ask for help, the Church in Kalookan should be the one to go out and be with the poorest and most vulnerable.

It is no wonder then that Fr. Willy readily thought of a house-to-house procession to bless the dead on All Souls' Day when the cemeteries were closed. It was another way to reach out to the poor and make them feel included.

When the pandemic started, Barangay 12 (where the Jesuit Mission Station is located) was hit particularly hard. Not just with high infection rates but with the effects of the strict lockdowns. In fact, for many families, hunger was the primary concern, not COVID.

Living in the community, Fr. Willy quickly saw this threat of hunger. So, he responded by organizing neighborhood volunteers and contacting benefactors to get food and essential supplies, especially for the poorest families. This was the beginning of the Busog-Puso Feeding Program, which is still ongoing and has expanded from just one to all 17 mission stations.

In the same way, the Palliola Youth Center was opened as a response to young people struggling to find a quiet space for online classes. And when mental health issues started emerging, community activities and formation sessions were added. In connection with this, I remember having several one-on-one *Kumustahan* (How are You) sessions with our youth volunteers just for them to have a safe space to talk about their interior life. "*Salamat sa pakikinig* (Thank you for listening)," they would often say afterwards.

Thus, we see the pattern – with food insecurity, the challenges of online school, mental health concerns, even in grieving for and remembering the dead – having one's "feet in the mud" and experiencing the situation firsthand has made all the difference when it came to identifying and acting on the needs of his community. Beyond the round table conversations, this was how synodality was practiced in Kalookan.

Admittedly, even after four years of progress, the situation around the Jesuit Mission Station still has a lot of room for growth and improvement. Teen pregnancies, gangs clashing in the streets, joblessness for many – these are still realities there. And with the upcoming elections, even with the clear need for better leadership, so many are still wont to vote for popular but morally questionable candidates.

I have to admit, it can be a disheartening and frustrating situation sometimes. For some, the temptation to just pack up and leave is a serious consideration. But if I have learned anything in the Jesuit Mission Station, it is that in the face of a crisis, the courage to stay with and not give up on people is also very much a part of synodality.







PHOTOS: The writer participating in the various activities and programs at the Jesuit Mission Station in Kalookan.

THE FEMINIST STRUGGLE AND REDEMPTION IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

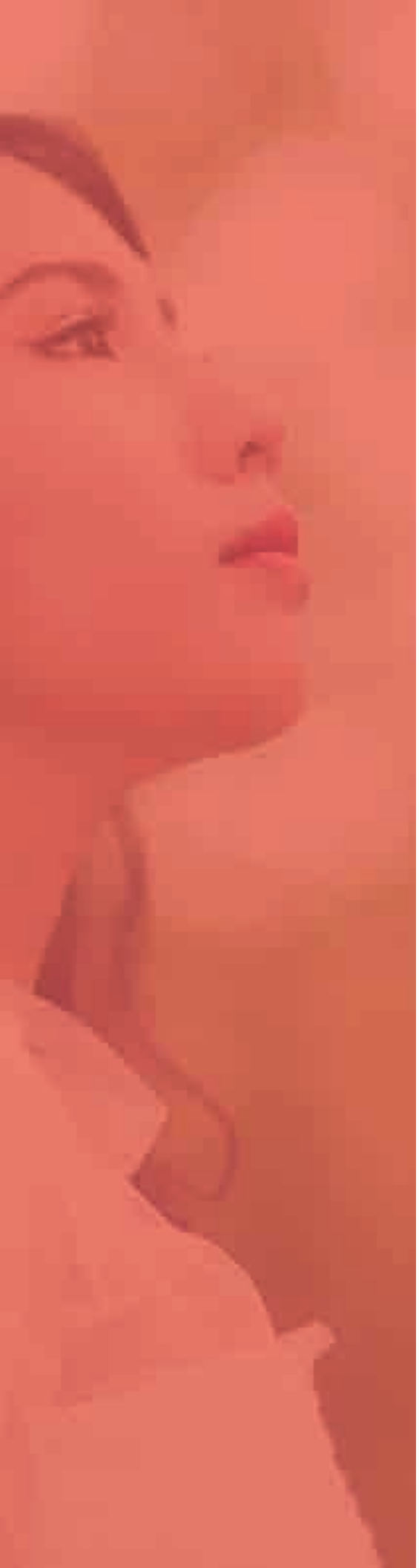
Johanne Lorren Arceo

A typical school-day in the life of a male student in LST is vastly different from that of a female student's. There are no statistics to back this up; the sample size of female Theology students in the Philippines might just be too small and dispersed. To validate this claim, one must only try to find a female Theology student and ask her the number of times she was tagged as the "unique" perspective in most classroom discussions, or got used to male-oriented language and conversations, or had a ready answer to the question, "Isn't Theology only for priests?" in casual conversations. It is hard to find one who does not have a strong opinion about the need to assert more intently the role of women in the Church, because for most female Theologians, this culture of patriarchy and clericalism is daily and institutionally felt.

At the onset of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII opened the windows of the Church and allowed it to engage with the modern world. Its pillar constitution, "Gaudium et Spes" stressed the need to eradicate every type of discrimination, "whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language, or religion." With Vatican II, women gained the right to read the first and second readings, distribute Holy Communion, and act as commentators during the Mass. Girls were given the power to be sacristans and Mass servers. In the years succeeding Vatican II, popes addressed the dignity of women in their speeches and documents, recognizing women's developing role and influence in society and relationships. The Church moved with the signs of the times in the 80s, as feminist movements around the world inspired feminist theologians who were formally educated to call out and resist the Church's patriarchal traditions. In 1990, the Philippines opened its doors to women seeking degree programs in Theology at the Institute of Formation and Religious Studies.

Navigating clericalism and patriarchy

Today in 2022, however, the Philippine Catholic Church is still largely dominated by men. Homilies, sacraments, and Church administrative positions are exclusive to male clergy, and women's ministerial duties are confined in classrooms or retreat houses. Countless times have I heard my female Theologian friends lament how they've been told that a PhD in Theology is the only way their voices can reach the decision-makers in the Church. Some who desire to contribute to the formation of priests are deterred by the lack of opportunity to get formal training in doing so and would even have less opportunity to practice it.



One female friend admitted that her leadership role in her parish was entirely dependent on her deference to the decisions of their Parish priest, with little to no room for democratic consultation. It has become common among female Church members to experience internal conflicts and suppression when they feel the urge to speak out against their male leaders at the sight of clerical abuse in any form. Much is yet to be done for women to be seen not just as mere service-providers for the Church, but as decision-makers and leaders.

Conservatism on gender issues

Beyond their practical role in the institutional Church, women are also confined by the Church teachings' conservative view of them. I have personally witnessed among my female peers how their catechism has deeply ingrained in them that they must fully submit to their husbands, a teaching that is potentially dangerous in a society where domestic violence is prevalent and unaddressed. The insistence on broken families as un-Christian has forced battered women to stay in and endure violent marriages. The old interpretation of the Adam-and-Eve narrative where Eve is the temptress who caused Adam to sin gave rise to a perception of women as the cause of fallen priesthood vocations. Women who are victims of rape and other forms of sexual abuse have been made to feel guilty and impure because of the prevailing premium on virginity.

Feminism as hope

With the desire to assert a grounded and intentional gender equality within the Church, lay and religious women theologians developed what we now call a feminist theology of liberation. With the task to dismantle oppressive narratives in the Catholic tradition, this theology seeks to define its hermeneutics towards a liberative language for the female experience and perspective. This movement frees not only the women who are at the disadvantageous end of the oppressive narrative, but also the men who struggle with the myopia of a deep-seated patriarchy. With more female students being encouraged to enter formal Theological schools, the feminist theology of liberation is set to expand and evolve further in its contribution to the Catholic faith and way of life.

Younger priests and seminarians who are exposed to the plight of their female peers and are in touch with the pressing signs of the times are also observed to be more open and progressive when it comes to gender equality. Male theology scholars have also been sharing their platform with female theologians in public discourse, supporting their cause as allies. Pope Francis himself, despite putting a final "no" on the possibility of women priests, recognizes the feminine dimension of the Church and emphasizes the unique and important role of women in ministry and evangelization.

Allowing the voice of women in the Church to spread the Good News further and deeper into the world can reveal to the faithful a deeper glimpse at the mysterious face of God, as we see in the example of the weeping women by the empty tomb to whom the resurrected Christ first revealed Godself. Perhaps it is the movement of the Spirit to recover our unified Body of Christ where there is neither man nor woman, and we are merely called to cooperate and co-create.

FEATURE

KUY, PREY LANG, AND SYNODALITY IN CAMBODIA

Fr. Gabriel Lamug Nañawa, SJ

As the surrounding trees slowly became smaller and farther away from each other, the forest opened up, we exited the greenery and made our way back to the village. After spending four nights on forest patrol with the villagers, many of whom were Kuy or of Kuy descent, I was the most tired, dirty, thirsty, and smelly person I have ever been in the entire year. However, we were quite satisfied with being able to confiscate eight chainsaws from illegal loggers and in some way, prevent that much illegal logging from occurring in their forest. Working with these Kuy communities is one of my more significant experiences which make my ministry and priesthood most meaningful. In fact, they are the ones who come to my mind when Pope Francis speaks about the people of God and synodality. Thus, I believe it is worth asking: How does the pope's call on synodality relate to indigenous communities and their land? How can Pope Francis' vision of synodality inform mission work in considering people and planet?

We began the Ecology Program under Jesuit Mission Cambodia in 2013, with mainly planting native hardwood trees in public schools, church grounds, and Buddhist pagodas. But by the following year, we started to be more community-based, collaborating with specific local villages, especially with those who have taken it upon themselves to protect their own community-forest, such as those who care for the Prey Lang forest. Many of the villagers who live around this forest belong to the Kuy indigenous minority. The Kuy people are recognized as the aboriginal inhabitants of Cambodia and are referred to as Khmer boran meaning "ancient Khmer." In centuries past, the Kuy were known for their production of iron, supplying processed iron to the centers of power during the Angkor Empire. Today, they continue to live and find their cultural and spiritual identity in Prey Lang. Their sacred sites are found in specific locations within the forest, and also large Dipterocarpus trees from which they harvest liquid oleoresin for their livelihood. It is said that "Prey Lang" comes from the Kuy language which means "the forest which belongs to us all."

The forest of Prey Lang is central to the life and livelihood of the Kuy communities that surround it. It has a large diversity of flora and fauna, with a number of Asian Elephants and many native hardwood trees with diameters between one to two meters. With such a high biodiversity value, Prey Lang became part of a system that was named in 2015 as one of the 36 biodiversity hotspots in the world. The forest also lies within three watersheds, all of which support the Mekong River-Tonle Sap Lake hydrological system. This Mekong-Tonle Sap system has long been acknowledged as the largest and most productive freshwater fishery in the world, from which Cambodians, especially the poor, have been getting the majority of their protein nutrition. Thus, protecting the integrity of this forest against deforestation and degradation is very important not only for the Kuy people but also for Cambodia and the greater surrounding region as well.

I found it unavoidable to think of the Kuy indigenous communities with their struggles to protect the Prey Lang forest when I heard about Pope Francis' call for the synod on synodality last October 2021, even if none of them was Catholic. The Kuy people fall within the broad spectrum of Buddhist-Animist. As expected, front and center of the synod are the local churches, as Pope Francis says, "In the Church, everything starts with baptism. Baptism, the source of our life, gives rise to the equal dignity of the children of God, albeit in the diversity of ministries and charisms. Consequently, all the baptized are called to take part in the Church's life and mission…[F]or baptism is our identity card."[1] However, in the context of Cambodia where 98% follow Theravada Buddhism, I believe the pope was not only speaking to the 0.3% of the population who identify as Christian. In fact, the Amazonia Synod in 2019 attests to the importance of indigenous communities in the pope's vision of synodality, with Fr. Antonio Spadaro, SJ saying, "[T]he periphery speaks from the center with the awareness that its experience is heard as a prophetic voice for the whole church."[2] Thus, below are three aspects of Pope Francis' vision of synodality which I find particularly helpful for our ministry to indigenous minorities in Cambodia such as the Kuy communities.

1. Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Opening of the Synod, 9 October 2021.
2. Luke Hansen, Top Five Takeaways from the Amazon Synod, America Magazine, 11 November 2019.





PHOTOS ABOVE: The writer (red top) together with the Kuy community members and volunteers he encountered, related, and worked with as a Jesuit missionary in Cambodia.

First, I believe that the emphasis on listening is much appreciated. As a missionary to a foreign land, with their own language, culture, religious beliefs, etc., it is very important to maintain the stance of listening, not only when one has newly arrived. It is quite easy to impose our own perspectives and biases, and drown out the very voices of those we are committed to serve. Listening also entails encounter, a sincere befriending, beginning a meaningful relationship. Our listening is in the context of our friendship, not simply a kind of listening in order to implement a project. Pope Francis refers to the quality of Jesus' listening during his encounter with the rich young man, "[H]e is completely present to this person. He is open to encounter. Nothing leaves Jesus indifferent; everything is of concern to him. Encountering faces, meeting eyes, sharing each individual's history. That is the closeness that Jesus embodies[3]."

Surely, we are called to listen to the cry of the poor. But we are also reminded to listen to the cry of the earth, for we know that "the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now[4]." If we are sufficiently tuned-in to the climate and ecological crises of the world, we can hear the distress and destitution of creation. At the same time, the cry of the earth is most especially heard through the voices of indigenous communities, those who have close relationships with the land. Such that to listen to these people is also to listen to the land. Thus, the call to synodality, our journey together, entails sincere listening to both the people and the land.

Second, one of my more important learnings as a missionary for 16 years is that it is not necessary that we play a leading role all the time. In our dealings with the Kuy communities, our primary position or approach has not been that of leader but of supporter. They have their own words for what is important to them, they have their own ideas of how to care for the forest and what they need in order to achieve that. What we can do is to help clarify their voices, amplify what they want to say, support them in their goals by trying to identify gaps and help in filling them.

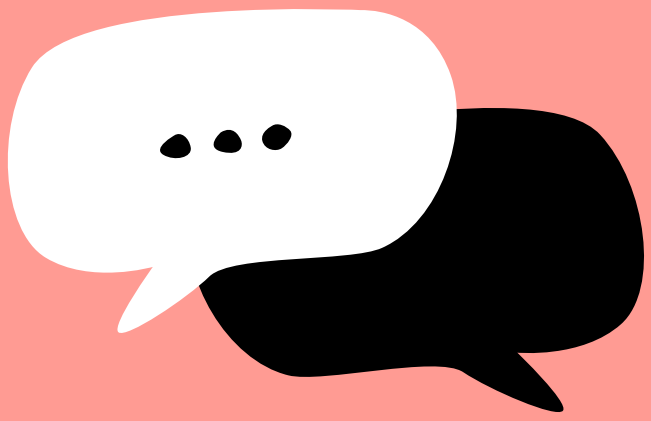
As Pope Francis says, "A good shepherd should move that way: in front to lead, in the middle to encourage and preserve the smell of the flock, and behind, since the people too have their own 'sense of smell.' They have a nose for finding new paths for the journey, or for finding the road when the way is lost."[5] We have many things to learn from indigenous peoples, especially on how they relate and care for the land. We will do well by supporting them and letting them lead.

Finally, it is consoling to be reminded by Pope Francis that the process of synodality is not simply a meeting of ideas or a collecting of opinions. It is also not a gathering of members whose views turn into votes where majority wins, or that the superior is then free to decide as he/she wishes. Rather, it is a journey centered on the Holy Spirit. The role of the Spirit is central, as the pope says, "It guides the Synod, preventing it from becoming a Church convention, a study group or a political gathering, a parliament, but rather a grace-filled event, a process of healing guided by the Spirit."[6] The pope declares unequivocally, "If the Spirit is not present, there will be no Synod."[7] Being sensitive to the Holy Spirit transcends artificial boundaries, for the Spirit is eternally present and active. The Holy Spirit's self-manifestation can be felt through our collective history and in all of creation, that is, even within the Kuy communities and the Prey Lang forest.

Thus, we pray for this journey together. May it be a true time of listening to those in the margins, including the voice of creation, of bringing them to the center and offering support, and that the Holy Spirit inspire us all: "Come, Spirit of love, open our hearts to hear your voice! Come, Holy Spirit of holiness, renew the holy and faithful People of God! Come, Creator Spirit, renew the face of the earth!"[8]

3. Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis, Opening of the Synodal Path, 10 October 2021.
4. Romans 8:22.
5. Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Faithful of the Diocese of Rome, 18 September 2021.
6. Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis, Opening of the Synodal Path, 10 October 2021.
7. Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Opening of the Synod, 9 October 2021.
8. Ibid.





KUWENTUHAN AND WALKING TOGETHER

Sch. Jaime Martin P. Candelaria, SJ



"*Baka 'di magbayad ng* tax," "*Sana may malasakit sa tao at takot sa Diyos*," "D*apat may maayos na* leadership *at* governance."

These are some responses of participants of the Kuwentuhang Bayan (KB) in San Jose del Monte, Bulacan last March 2022 when asked what their fears, hopes, and demands (their *baka*'s, *sana*'s, and *dapat*'s) are for and beyond the upcoming May 2022 national and local elections.

The KB is a political and civic education program by the Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan (SLB), the socio-political apostolate of the Society of Jesus in the Philippines. It is a safe space where people can listen to and speak with each other about pressing realities in the community and country. The participants identify problems that hinder them from achieving their vision for the community and country as well as action plans to achieve this vision, all in the spirit of sincere and respectful *kuwentuhan*.

In the same spirit of *kuwentuhan*, participants in previous KB runs during this election period are also invited to name, even if tentatively, their candidate of choice for either national or local office. They do so after sharing and articulating their thoughts on identified problems and actions needed to address those. In some other runs, this is simply left as a point for further reflection after the input on the national situation and on guides in discerning and choosing candidates. The KB is a very flexible program whose ultimate aim is greater citizen engagement and action.

Kuwentuhan

In the San Jose del Monte run, the facilitators drew engagement by first helping the participants surface their *baka*'s, *sana*'s, and *dapat*'s, asking them to write these down, then allowing them to share the same in a dyad or triad. More often than not, participants find more common ground than differences in sharing with and listening to one another. Gathering all written responses, the facilitators then walked through these with the participants, finding common, fundamental, and striking ones, mirroring these back to the participants, and asking them to clarify and articulate further their responses if needed – a *kuwentuhan* indeed!

This gesture of walking with each other is important, especially in a time when the nation is so politically divided. Such division often makes one think he or she cannot do anything and pushes him or her to disengagement and hopelessness. On the other hand, genuine *kuwentuhan* and walking with one another makes one feel he or she has a voice, he or she is part of the community and the country, and he or she can actually be part of the solution.





Jesuit scholastics Gerard Enriquez and Rogelio Nato, Jr. facilitate a segment of the Kuwentuhang Bayan (KB), the political and civic education program of Simbahang Lingkod ng Bayan, for Barangay Muzon, San Jose del Monte, Bulacan.

This is what Zacchaeus felt when Jesus beckoned him down the sycamore tree. Zacchaeus felt that someone was interested in him – the Lord himself. Their kuwentuhan presumably in Zacchaeus' house then moved Zacchaeus to voice out: "Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over" (Luke 19:8). He was moved to action.

On a more communal level, the more voices of people are heard with genuine interest and compassion, the more they are moved to action. The more people walk with each other, the more they walk together along the path of engagement. Recall the long lines of young people registering to vote for the 2022 polls. In ages 18 to 21 alone, Comelec logs four million new voters[1], an indication of greater engagement among the young.

Walking together

The 2022 elections come right in the middle of the Catholic Church's Synod on Synodality which began last October 2021 and will end in 2023.

The aim of the synod is to "provide an opportunity for the entire People of God to discern together how to move forward on the path towards being a more synodal Church."[2] It is a "journey of sharing, reflecting, and listening at all levels across the entire Church."[3] In this synod, "everyone has a voice" and "everyone must be heard,"[4] says Cardinal Jose Advincula of Manila.

1. Comelec logs 4M new voters aged 18 to 21. Philippine News Agency. https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1156804. April 24, 2022.
2. What is the Synod 21-23. Synod 2021-2023. https://www.synod.va/en/what-is-the-synod-21-23/about.html. April 24, 2022.
3. Paparella, Julian. What is the synod on synodality? SL Media. https://slmedia.org/blog/what-is-the-synod-on-synodality. April 24, 2022.
4. On synodality, Cardinal Advincula says 'no one should be left behind.' Synod 2021-2023. https://synodphilippines.com/on-synodality-cardinal-advincula-says-no-one-should-be-left-behind/. April 24, 2022.

SLB, through KB, is only one among many other groups directly or indirectly contributing to the synodal process by providing spaces of "sharing, reflecting, and listening" in socio-political discussions and preparations for the upcoming elections.

In the visioning, problem analysis, and action planning portions of the KB, participants are grouped together to share, listen, and come up with a collective output, that is their community vision, problem analysis diagram, and action plans which they then share with the big group. Whether in standard or adapted forms of the KB, participants are always divided into discussion groups. Here, *kuwentuhan* becomes, or is, a mode of synodality. One point emphasized by the KB is the importance of collective action – the same invitation of walking together given to us by the synod, for it is only collectively that we can achieve our hopes for the country.

The KB normally ends with a signing of an accountability pledge signifying the participants' promise to engage in the life of their community and of the country, and a community singing of "*Pananagutan*" by Fr. Eduardo Hontiveros, SJ, reminding them that we are all accountable for each other. It is a pledge to walk with others.

Walking beyond

What we have seen in this campaign period for the May 2022 elections is rather unprecedented – sorties and rallies with thousands and thousands of people expressing their support for their chosen candidates, making their voices heard in creative ways. In some rallies, supporters even walk together from a meet-up point towards the designated venue – a visible sign of synodality.

This proves Filipinos can come and walk together, and may this continue beyond the elections. A truly engaged citizenry beyond elections is perhaps also unprecedented in the Philippines. This can only happen if we walk together.

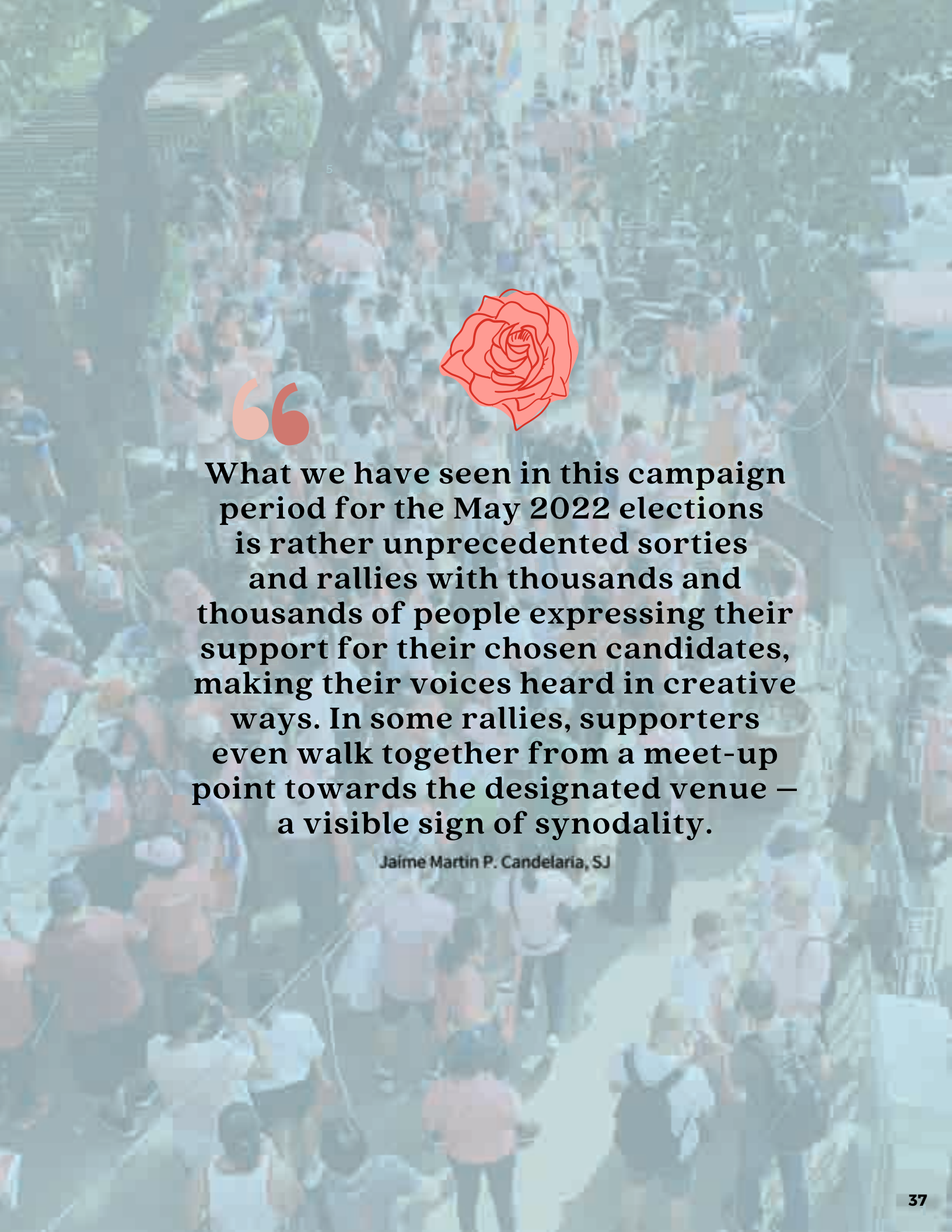
May we walk together and walk with each other regardless of color, gender, economic class, or political convictions. May our walking with each other also inspire our elected leaders to walk with us.

PHOTOS BELOW: Responses of the participants of the KB for Barangay Muzon to the statements "*Baka / Sana / Dapat _____ ang susunod na lider ng ating bansa.*"



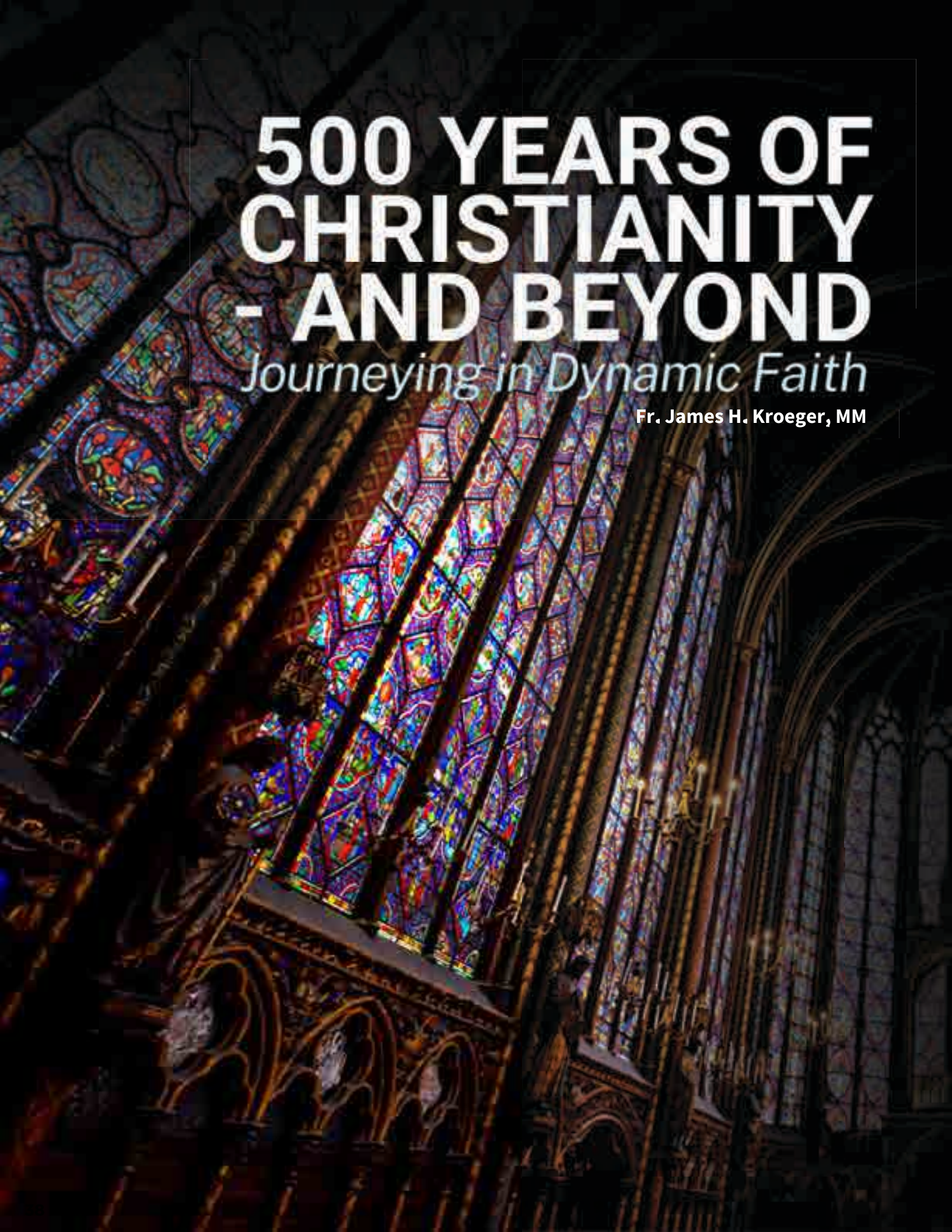






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Jaime Martin P. Candelaria, SJ



500 YEARS OF CHRISTIANITY - AND BEYOND

Journeying in Dynamic Faith

Fr. James H. Kroeger, MM

In 2021 the Church in the Philippines marked half a millennium of Christianity. The Philippines is the world's third largest local Church (after Brazil and Mexico). This quinquennial event not only looks back to the past; it is a time of expressing profound gratitude and, more importantly, looking forward to the future. Having received the gift of faith, it must be deepened, developed, and shared with others through mission. The advice of Jesus to his disciples should be our guide: "What you have received as a gift, give as a gift" (Mt 10:8). Indeed, as the CBCP logo for the 2021 event asserted: we are all "gifted to give." This is a challenge to both celebrate our faith and be vigorously motivated to share this precious gift with others.

This presentation unfolds in two major sections. First, it notes only a few of the many contributions Christianity has brought to the Philippines. Secondly, building on these foundations, the essay explores various paradigms on how we are called to develop these gifts and pass them on to others, shaping the kind of Church needed for contemporary realities.

PIVOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE CHURCH

Gift of Christian Faith

After the introduction of Christianity by Ferdinand Magellan in March 1521, an organized program of evangelization was begun in 1565 by the Augustinians who accompanied Legazpi's expedition. They were followed by Franciscans (1578), Jesuits (1581), Dominicans (1587), and Augustinian Recollects (1606) from both Spain and Mexico. Manila became a bishopric in 1579 and an archbishopric in 1595.

Education and Social Services

These tasks were almost exclusively the concern of the Church during the entire period of Spanish rule. Before the end of the sixteenth century, Manila had three hospitals, one for Spaniards, another for natives, and a third for the Chinese. In 1595, the Jesuits opened a grammar school for Spanish boys that later developed into the University of San Ignacio and had attached to it the residential college of San José, founded in 1601 and today the San José Seminary. The year 1611 saw the beginnings of the Dominican University of Santo Tomás. Various religious communities of women established themselves in Manila. Among these sisterhoods, that was begun by Ignacia del Espírito Santo, a Chinese mestiza, in 1684 and today known as the Religious of the Virgin Mary (RVM), deserves special mention.

War and Church Services

Japanese forces invaded the Philippines in December 1941. Allied forces under General MacArthur returned in 1944, but severe fighting continued until the Japanese surrender in August 1945. Priests, brothers, sisters, and dedicated Catholic women and men exhibited great faith and heroism during the war; many suffered imprisonment. The origins of what isknown today as the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) can be traced back to February 1945 when Apostolic Delegate William Piani, even as the war was still raging, appointed John Hurley, SJ, to take charge of relief work and created the Catholic Welfare Organization (CWO). The 1945-1965 period in the life of the local Church in the Philippines is characterized by: quite rapid recovery from the ravages of war, greatly expanded school system at upper levels, involvement of Catholics (laity, sisters, clergy) in social action, and growing Filipinization of Church structures.

Authoritarian Rule and Restoration of Democracy

Ferdinand E. Marcos, first elected president in 1965, declared martial law in 1972 and imposed a form of "constitutional authoritarianism." The martial law period posed new challenging questions for the Church and nation. Among the more pernicious effects of the two-decade Marcos era (1965-1986) were: increased militarization, insurgency, the absence of juridical procedures, the destruction of democratic processes, economic decline, and pervasive fear. This period proved a time of testing and growth for the local Church. Prophetic stances were often met by military abuse, imprisonment and torture, and even deportation for foreign missionaries. The "bloodless revolution" of February 1986 and the roles played by Church people and Cardinal Sin are truly remarkable.

Emergence of Filipino Missionaries

A definite sign of a vibrant local Church is its mission outreach. In mid-2000 Catholic Filipino missionaries numbered 1,329 women and 206 men from 69 religious congregations serving in some 80 countries. The Catholic bishops established the Mission Society of the Philippines (1965). Maryknoll founded the Philippine Catholic Lay Mission (1977). Cardinal Sin established the San Lorenzo Mission Institute (1987), whose goal is serving the Chinese. A major local Church mission milestone was achieved in the 1991 month-long Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-II).

Implementation of Vatican II

The vision of the Second Vatican Council has taken root in the Philippine Church. The presence of strong Base Christian Communities (BECs) provides grass roots structures for spiritual, catechetical, ministerial, and social growth. Important strengths are present in this vision of Church: the inductive and experiential approach of theology; its inculturated social teaching; its spirituality of human development; its renewed ecclesiology and missiology; its concrete service to many Filipinos facing diverse dehumanizing social ills; its engagement in social issues in a non-partisan but active manner; its efforts to promote and practice non-violent approaches to socio-political crises; its commitment to create structures of participation in Church and society.



CONTINUING CHALLENGES AND FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

Building on the strong foundations of the first five centuries, the local Church now looks to a renewed evangelization. Although no one can predict the details of the future, one can be guided by a helpful vision of the Church's involvement. One recalls an insight from the book of Proverbs: "Without a vision, the people perish" (Prov 29:18). For its future involvement, the Philippine Church can draw many insights from three pivotal sources: Vatican II, FABC, and PCP-II.



Second Vatican Council

A Vatican II ecclesiology emphasizes a "People of God" vision of the Church; "God gathered together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and established them as the Church that for each and all it may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity" (LG 9). The Council also affirms that charisms are available to all the faithful; "God distributes special graces (charisms) among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church" (LG 12). In a word, this demands an inclusive model of ministry for effective evangelization.

Saint Pope Paul VI who promulgated all the documents of the Council gave a timely reminder for an engaged Church. "Modern men and women listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses… It is therefore by its conduct and its life that the Church will evangelize the world… The first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life" (EN 41).

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

The FABC has been the most influential body in the Asian Church since the Second Vatican Council. The theological, pastoral, and missiological concerns of FABC reflect a unique vision, one that is marked with "great breadth, hope, and courage." The FABC has enunciated an "ecclesiology of the Asian Churches"; FABC documents are an essential source for comprehending the fruitful development of mission, theology, Church, dialogue and evangelization in all of Asia's dynamic local Churches.

The FABC is an episcopal structure that brings together eighteen bishops' conferences and ten associate members. In total, twenty-eight countries are represented in the FABC, which grew out of the historic gathering of 180 Asian Catholic Bishops with Pope Paul VI during his 1970 Philippine visit. Succinctly, the FABC paradigm of renewed integral evangelization can be visualized as follows:



Second Plenary Council of the Philippines

PCP-II convened from January 20 until February 17, 1991. Its avowed theme was Church renewal and evangelization. The 490 delegates included: 94 bishops, 226 priests, 12 sisters, 2 brothers, and 156 laity. The paradigm of renewed integral evangelization that emerged from PCP-II can be expressed in the following diagram (each of the roman numerals corresponds to one major part of the conciliar document):

CONTEXT/ SITUATION	AREAS OF RESPONSE	AREAS OF RESPONSE
I. Lights and Shadows	II. Renewed Church	Council Decrees; National Pastoral Plan [1993]
	III. Renewed Evangelization	
	IV. Renewed Agents/ Communities	

Conclusion

Evangelization and renewal for the Philippine Church in the coming decades (even centuries) will draw much profit from its five centuries of experience; in addition, the insights of Vatican II, the FABC, and PCP-II will prove invaluable. Undoubtedly, the local Church will face many unforeseen challenges. Yet, the words used by Cardinal Tagle as he thanked Pope Francis for his 2015 pastoral visit, capture the Church's sentiments and mission commitment; he said: "Every Filipino wants to go with you—not to Rome—but to the peripheries, to the shanties, to prison cells, to hospitals, to the world of politics, finance, arts, sciences, culture, education and social communications. We will go to these worlds to bring the light of Jesus, Jesus who is the center of your pastoral visit and the cornerstone of the Church."Let us all rejoice in the Philippine Church —ever ancient and ever new!



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The Heart of Faith

A Tribute to **Pope Benedict XVI on** his 95th Birth Anniversary

Sem. Michael George Villasis



On Holy Saturday, the 16th of April 1927, Joseph Alois Ratzinger was born in the picturesque little town of Marktl am Inn in the lush Bavarian countryside of Southern Germany. From his humble beginnings, he would be called to priestly formation and ministry (interrupted, and yet shaped by the trauma of the rise of Nazism and the outbreak of war), and a distinguished professorship in theology. Ordained to episcopal ministry as archbishop of the historic See of Munich-Freising, he would eventually be called to Rome as head of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, and would succeed John Paul II as Pope, taking the name Benedict XVI. His long years of ministry would yield an impressive theological harvest, a wealth of encyclicals, speeches, homilies and addresses, as well as books and other works that have contributed immensely to Catholic theology, and indeed, the faith lives of countless people. With this, he is considered to be one of the most important theologians of this century and the last.

Yet, for all this, the faith Benedict would tirelessly profess, examine, explain, and reflect on is not removed from the faith of the young Joseph, a faith shaped by his family's piety and religious zeal, and the practice of the Catholic Faith in his native Bavaria. Recalling his mother's passing, he would write in his memoirs:

"On the day after Gaudete Sunday, December 16, 1963, she closed her eyes forever, but the radiance of her goodness has remained…. I know of no more convincing proof for the faith than precisely the pure and unalloyed humanity that the faith allowed to mature in my parents."

Indeed, Benedict's faith, at its core, will always remain personal and close to the human condition. Writing his first encyclical, he would constantly refer to the interplay between human experience and the Love of God:

"Only my readiness to encounter my neighbour and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbour can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me."

But what is this Christian faith, according to him? The branches of Benedict's theological thought may be manifold, but its roots are watered by certain principles of faith, which are, in the end, not simply conceptual and academic, but truly cut to at the heart of Christianity and Christian living.

I believe…

In Introduction to Christianity, Benedict's systematic exposition of the Creed, he begins not with each individual article of faith, but a reflection on belief itself. What does it mean to believe? How is this belief practiced in the world today?

For Benedict, belief is a basic option towards reality that goes beyond what can be seen or felt. The attitude of belief says that what counts, what makes our existence meaningful and truly human, is not what is tangible and visible, but what lies beyond our vision. It is therefore not simply a case of having one's own convictions, in a subjective sense, but rather, a going beyond what one can subjectively feel and see. And in letting go of this subjectivity, one begins to see all the more, to see more clearly, and further than what human seeing is able to do.

Belief, then, at its core, is a con-version, a change of direction and orientation in the believer's life, away from only what can be grasped and owned, a receptivity towards what is beyond one's ken, and an escape from the illusion of self-sufficiency. And because we all too often go back to what is in front of us, belief requires a constant conversion, a lifelong turning; in short, a process towards greater and greater believing, and seeing.



A young Joseph Ratzinger



Ratzinger family: (right to left) Joseph (father), Maria, Mary, Georg, Joseph (son)

Belief in today's technical world seems to mean holding on to something unstable and unsure. As opposed to what it is material, what is capable of being made, or examined, or analyzed, belief seems to be ethereal, unreal. It seems to mean, particularly for the Christian, grasping at the Cross that is tossed to and fro by the waves of uncertainty. Indeed, for the Christian, belief is often threatened by doubt, the small voice that whispers that "all this" may not be true.

But believing gives access to a mode of reality, and a knowing that is different from our technical knowing. Drawing from the richness of Scripture, Benedict considers belief not under the category of "make-know" (what I can make, I can know), but of "stand-understand" – if I do not stand firm, I cannot understand. Faith, then, does not mean lack of knowledge, but of a giving of one's self over and thus standing firm before Him, and that allows us to know in a way deeper than our own. In Christianity, this means a surrendering to what is ultimate and transcendent, to what gives life. This ultimate meaning gives meaning to everything else that is visible and tangible, to human existence itself.

Faith then, is not an irrational, illogical act, but one that is grounded on relationship, grounded on the firm foundation of the One who gives life and meaning to all.

I believe in Love...

What is specifically Christian about Christian faith? What is the kernel of Christianity? Reflecting on the Gospel accounts of the rich young man and the final judgment, Benedict notes the finality of Jesus' answer: Love.

Faith then, is not an irrational, illogical act, but one that is grounded on relationship...



For Benedict, quite simply, the Christian is the one who loves. Love, not confession of dogma, is the heart of Christianity, contains all that Christianity is and says. It is nothing less than Love which makes us live and act like God which is demanded of our faith in Jesus. It is nothing less than Love which gains for us eternal life. In the end, we will be judged on Love. For God is Love, and loving means living like him, who loves us "even in the ragged raiment of the prodigal son, who is no longer wearing anything lovable." This demand of Love makes Christianity both utterly simple… and utterly difficult.

In reflecting on Love that is at the heart of the Christian message, Benedict notes three central ideas: the law of being-for, the law of excess, and the primary of receiving.
Love as being-for

Being a Christian means "changing over" from a life lived for oneself to one lived for others. A Christian existence is thus one not centered on the individual "I," but in relationship with others. Indeed, this being-for gives rise to the desire for eternity; for eternity inheres not in the individual, but in the experience of love, which makes eternity meaningful. And the nature of love is not to be closed in on one's self, but to always be for someone.

In Jesus, we see this "being-for" carried out to the full, and to the end. In the outstretched arms of the Crucified, Benedict sees the image of true worship, which reaches out to God, and yet also embraces all people in utter devotion. Jesus, truly and utterly "being-for," is the pattern of our Christian living, our Christian love.

Love as excess

Benedict writes that for someone who truly loves, it is not a matter of doing just enough, but of overflow, of generosity. Indeed, the deepest mysteries of our faith are informed by this excess. The Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery are, then, not a calculated effort in the "balance sheet" of good and evil, of grace and sin, where God cancels our debt by sending his Son. On the contrary, God does not calculate; the Son becomes like us, not because of necessity, but because of the superabundance of the Love that seeks the Beloved. Love has its own logic, and only this excess that is sufficient: "Only a lover can understand the folly of a love to which prodigality is a law and excess alone is sufficient."

"[Love], if it is to be genuine, includes faith. Only thus does it remain what it is. Without faith… a term expressing man's ultimate need to receive and the inadequacy of all personal achievement, love becomes an arbitrary deed.

This superabundance also informs our moral life. Christianity seen through this law of excess is not a minimalist, calculated view of morality that toes the line and avoids mortal sin, and nothing else. Love sees differently, and thus goes beyond mere conventions, beyond mere requirements – it genuinely desires the good of the other, not only what is merely "proper" and "right." The Christian is one who seeks the good, without any calculation. Here too, we find Jesus as our model and guide.

The primacy of receiving

In Christian living and Christian love, what is central is not what we do, but what we receive:

> *"From the point of view of the Christian faith, man comes... to himself, not through what he does, but through what he accepts. He must wait for the gift of love, and love can only be received as a gift. It cannot be 'made' on one's own, without anyone else; one must wait for it, let it be given to one. And one cannot become wholly man in any other way than in being loved, by letting oneself be loved…*

Even if we demonstrate Christian love, all too often, we find that our poor human love often falls short of what is needed, or even, what can be done. Too often, we are plagued by our inability to love as we ought, held back by our failures of love. But that is exactly the reason why Benedict underlines the primacy of receiving: it is not that we love first, but that Love has acted on us first. What we can give in love is only that which has been given to us by Love.

And so, with love, if it would really be true, we need faith, a faith that waits for our inadequate loves to be filled to overflowing with God's love, acting on our behalf. We need hope too, which goes beyond the inadequacies of the present, and looks to the future with expectation.

"[Love], if it is to be genuine, includes faith. Only thus does it remain what it is. Without faith... a term expressing man's ultimate need to receive and the inadequacy of all personal achievement, love becomes an arbitrary deed. It cancels itself out and becomes self-righteousness: faith and love condition and demand each other reciprocally. Similarly, in the principle of love, there is also present the principle of hope, which looks beyond the moment and its isolation and seeks the whole... 'Faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.'"

I believe in you…

Love, for Benedict, is not a disembodied, abstract, reality. Nor is it expressed only in our individual human acts. Rather, the form and object itself of Christian faith is Love. For the Christian thing, in its most basic sense, is the belief that Love itself has taken human form in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Logos. Logos, Word, is not here only words or even self-communication, but the entire meaning of humanity, of the world, of existence itself. This meaning has taken flesh, has entered human history in the person of Jesus.

The Christian faith is not built, therefore, on principles, or propositions, or articles of faith, no matter how important these are. Ultimately, Christian belief is an encounter, not with truths, but with Truth. It is an encounter, not with principles, but the very principle of meaning of Life itself.

It is the encounter with the mystery of God enfleshed in Jesus Christ that is the heart of our belief. In him, the eternal, the divine, is present in the world. And so, the meaning of life is now present to us as love, a love that is beyond self, that is totally open, that is totally self-giving.

The meaning of life is in this "you" that gives itself to me completely, makes my life worth living, and promises me a love unfading and ever-unfolding. Christian faith is finding not only that existence has meaning, but that this meaning is personal: it knows me, loves me, saves me. And so, for Benedict, the pure and most basic act of faith is not believing in something, but in believing in someone. It is not merely a conceptual act of believing, but one that involves the whole person: an attitude of trust, openness, self-giving to One who makes sense of who makes sense of all that happens in one's existence. It is not self-destruction, but, paradoxically, a self-discovery of true life in handing ourselves over to the One who holds everything in his hands.

For Benedict, all other confessions of our faith revolve around this central Credo: "I believe in you, Jesus of Nazareth, as the meaning (logos) of the world and of my life."

Love is the eye...

In reflecting on the Pierced Heart of Jesus, Benedict quotes a beautiful passage from Richard of St. Victor, which can sum up this all-too-brief sketch (or caricature, if one is less charitable) of the core of his message. Richard writes, "Amor oculus est et amare videre est." Love is the eye, and to love is to see.

Love, the heart of belief, the heart of Christian Faith, is that which allows us to see beyond a purely material existence. It allows us to see what gives meaning to our lives, what makes life worth living, what is ultimately the reason for the entirety of the created order. But it is not a love that is primarily ours to give, for it is not our initiative. Love has long sustained us even before we have recognized him, upheld us even before we can love him.

This Love has a face – Jesus Christ. In him, we can truly see the hidden and ineffable God, and his will for us all. In him and in his constant self-giving is truly manifested the meaning of everything in creation. In believing in him, we see the reason for our existence. And in our communion with him, we are opened to life itself, a life no longer lived for ourselves, but one that is lived in fullness of Love with each other for all eternity. It is only this Love, in the end that is eternal; it is only this life that is worth living.
Benedict sums it up thus:

"In the Heart of Jesus, the center of Christianity is set before us.... This Heart calls to our heart. It invites us to step forth out of the futile attempt of self-preservation and, by joining in the task of love, by handing ourselves over to him and with him, to discover the fullness of love which alone is eternity, and which alone sustains the world."



Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Pope Francis

In memoriam...

"In the evening of my life I shall look to the sunset
At the moment of my life when the night is due
And the question I shall ask only God can answer
Was I brave and strong and true?
Did I fill the world with love my whole life through?"

We remember our beloved LST students and faculty who joined our Creator in this time of pandemic.



Valentino Nguyen Phuoc Thong, CSsP
Vietnam
Baccalaureate
in Sacred Theology



Fr. Didik Bagiyowinadi
Indonesia
Doctorate
in Sacred Theology



Fr. Ruben Tanseco, SJ
Professor Emeritus
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