

Ecclesial Governance in Unusual Times A Theological Exploration of the Relationship between Synodality and Global Solidarity

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Abstract. — Roman Catholic ecclesiology has remained largely hierarchical and so, synodality as a more inclusive and participatory model of ecclesial governance is still underdeveloped. This is notwithstanding the promotion of decentralization by Pope Francis as well as insights from ecumenical dialogue, particularly with the Orthodox and the Anglican Communion. Yet, there are historical accounts of how moments of crisis (pandemics, wars) have altered the processes of decision-making in both the church and state. This article therefore examines the possibility of such realignment of ecclesial governance on account of solidarity. In other words, one asks: In what ways can the solidarity provoked by a pandemic, such as the COVID-19, lead to an intensification of synodality in Roman Catholic ecclesiology? Besides providing some historical and contemporary narratives of the relationship between solidarity and synodality in ‘unusual times’, the arguments provided in this article bring the sub-disciplines of theology into a fruitful conversation. Overall, the article aims to draw out the implications of solidarity for the self-understanding of the church.

1. Introduction

Defining any historical moment as ‘unusual’ is to indicate the abnormal nature of things at the particular time in question. Hence, such historical moments are marked by crises of various dimensions occasioned by natural or human calamities such as war, pandemics, famine or drought. At times, such a crisis assumes a global nature, affecting different parts of the world at the same time as in the case of the 20th century Spanish Flu or the present COVID-19, while at other times the crisis might be localized like the Ebola crisis in West Africa. The historical operationality of globalization, in terms of economy and mobility, often determines the spread and reach of any global crisis.¹ A dramatic change is seen in

1. For instance, the Spanish Flu reached the West African region through the shipping lines of European merchants and may not have affected areas that had no

the spread of COVID-19, facilitated by the free movement of people across nations today. However, exploring such unusual historical moments in the context of ecclesial leadership, particularly of the Roman Catholic Church, requires putting into consideration the dual dimension of leadership that ought to operate in this case. On the one hand is the leadership from the center that exercises a universal function in galvanizing the needed global solidarity of churches, while on the other hand, we have the leadership that ought to be exercised at the various local regions of the world (particular churches). Reconciling the tension between the centripetal dimension of regional leadership that contributes from the periphery to the center and the centrifugal dimension that moves from the center to the periphery has always been a bone of contention in most ecclesiological debates. The question is whether an extra-ecclesial crisis of a global nature, in this case, a pandemic, can offer some reasons for a theological reexamination of the relationship between these two intra-ecclesial leadership structures in a way that intensifies synodality. The suggested synodality is however not limited to the interaction between the universal or local churches but features more importantly in the participatory nature of ecclesial governance at all levels of church life as I shall explain later. If a pandemic necessitates such an approach, then to sustain solidarity, synodality ought to be sustained as well. I shall proceed in this article by providing a narrative on the relationship between solidarity and synodality within the context of some historical instances of global crisis. Following this, I shall explore the theological understanding of solidarity together with the inherent tension in both John Paul II's *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*² and Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate*.³ Thereafter, I shall show how Gerald Beyer's interpretation of contemporary Catholic Social Teaching (CST) provides a link between solidarity and synodality, before concluding on how both concepts could help in formulating an *ecclesiology of synodality* that aims at maintaining internal coherency within theology.

contact with Europe at that time. See, Jan-Bart Gewald, *Spanish Influenza in Africa: Some Comments Regarding Source Material and Future Research*, ASC Working Paper 77 (Leiden: African Studies Center, 2007).

2. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical on the Twentieth Anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html (accessed 11/09/2020).

3. Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth, *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html (accessed 11/09/2020).

2. 'Unusual Times': Pandemics, the COVID-19, and a Narrative of Global Solidarity

In so many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic has reorganized the world and life in general, leading to what Kyle Lambelet has referred to as 'viral sovereignty'⁴ in which the coronavirus exerts compelling authority over humanity. On a general note, this sovereignty affects as it were human relationships, the economy, education, politics, mobility and most importantly religion. The virus has indeed "brought into question our patterns of social cooperation."⁵ Unfortunately, it has equally affected the "previously normal practices of human solidarity – a hand-shake, relative proximity, shared space and shared table, physical gestures of care," which have now become "behaviors that put loved ones, neighbors, and strangers unknown at risk of deadly infection."⁶ While breaking the common embodied forms of human solidarity, the situation of the pandemic has equally broken higher levels of solidarity among nations as is evident in some instances of racism and xenophobia.⁷ Yet there might be some tectonic shifts in the perceptions of ecclesial leadership on both the global and local levels in this time of crisis. A careful observation shows a greater tendency towards more integrated and inclusive forms of relationality and interdependence within the church, which is best captured in the concept of synodality.

Ecclesial leadership has always responded to global crises, even in ways that require internal reforms. Given the negative toll of the pandemic on the health, economic, religious and social well-being of the people, one common question has remained: "where is the church?"⁸ Questions like

4. Kyle B. T. Lambelet, "Editorial: Viral Sovereignty," *Political Theology* 21, no. 3 (2020): 169-171.

5. *Ibid.*, 169.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Examples include the Chinese treatment of Africans as well as the controversy concerning the origin and name of the virus. See, Human Rights Watch, "China: Covid-19 Discrimination against Africans: Forced Quarantines, Evictions, Refused Services in Guangzhou" (5 May 2020): <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/05/china-covid-19-discrimination-against-africans> (accessed 26/06/2020); The Conversation, "Calling COVID-19 a 'Chinese Virus' Is Wrong and Dangerous – The Pandemic Is Global" (25 March 2020): <https://theconversation.com/calling-covid-19-a-chinese-virus-is-wrong-and-dangerous-the-pandemic-is-global-134307> (accessed 26/06/2020).

8. Jabin J. Deguma, Melona C. Deguma, Jemima N. Tandag, and Harlene Marie B. Acebes, "Where Is the Church in the Time of COVID-19 Pandemic? Preferring the Poor via G. Gutierrez' 'Liberation' and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching in the Philippine Setting," *Journal of Social and Political Sciences* 3, no. 2 (2020): 363-374, at 364. Deguma et al. argue that the church's response should be shaped by its social teaching, particularly as articulated in the liberation theology, while the interest of this article is

this are not only directed to the spiritual mission of the church but also towards the social responsibility of the church which requires both global and local responses. Interestingly, this is not an entirely new question if one pays attention to historical instances of similar situations. While reacting to the crisis of the First World War (WWI), Pope Benedict XV in his *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum*⁹ decried the situation of the war and recognized that “bishops have a very heavy burden in consequence of the difficulties of the times, and heavier still in their anxiety for the salvation of the flock committed to their care” (§29). In other words, the pope recognized the indispensable role of bishops who exercise leadership at the local churches. Their contributions remain very critical for the effectiveness of the central leadership that was provided by the pope and more importantly for the survival of the church at large. Additionally, Benedict XV would later issue several appeals and suggestions for peace, particularly in his *Allorché fummo chiamati* (28 July 1915) and *Dès le début* (1 August 1917).¹⁰ Similarly, the effects of the Second World War (WWII) also necessitated a response from the church, notwithstanding the controversies.¹¹ Most importantly, reflection on the war brought about a radical self-critique and reform in the church which came to a head at Vatican II, leading to greater openness towards other religions.¹² Besides the universal leadership of the church, global world leadership was equally compelled to institutionalize solidarity following the devastating effects of WWII. The short-span of peace between the time of the WWI

to determine if the situation of the pandemic (qualified as ‘unusual’) could deepen the debate on synodality as the appropriate leadership for such a situation, and perhaps for all times.

9. Pope Benedict XV, Encyclical Appealing for Peace, *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum* (1 November 1914): http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xv_enc_01111914_ad-beatissimi-apostolorum.html (accessed 10/06/2020).

10. Some of the pope’s ideas were later adopted by the U.S. president Thomas Woodrow Wilson without acknowledgement. See, Yale Law School, “President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points (8 January 1918),” *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp (accessed 11/06/2020).

11. Pope Pius XII, “The Pope’s Five Peace-Points,” *Blackfriars* 21, no. 240 (March 1940): 139-141; John F. Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism, 1914-1958*, Oxford History of the Christian Church (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 291-308. Evidences of Pius XII’s effort during WWII have vindicated him against some authors like Garry Wills, James Carroll, and John Cornwell, who had portrayed him as a Hitler sympathizer. Such accusations were best voiced in John Cornwell, *Hitler’s Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), and Jacques Kornberg, *The Pope’s Dilemma: Pius XII Faces Atrocities and Genocide in the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

12. See, Vladimir Latynov, Gerard Mannion, and Jason Welle, eds., *Catholicism Engaging Other Faiths: Vatican II and Its Impact* (Cham: Springer, 2018).

(with the Spanish Flu) and the WWII uncovered the fragility of human integration and so required a more robust response at the global level. Hence, in the aftermath of WWII, the world woke up to the necessity of alliances, co-operations and collaborations of various dimensions. At this time, the United Nations (UN) was born with most of the member countries submitting their ratification of the UN Charter in 1945. Within that period also, the allied forces (United States, France and the United Kingdom) had endorsed an intergovernmental military alliance known as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on 4 April 1949. Meanwhile, on the part of alliances among Christian churches, the ecumenical movement had to finalize the preparations for the inauguration of the World Council of Churches (WCC) which was halted due to the war but later took place on 22 August 1948.¹³ This event was followed by the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10 December 1948).¹⁴ However, apart from the global structures, there were also transnational movements for integration that were defined by the joint collaboration of member nations. Over time, both global and regional forms of solidarity have continued to increase in both ecclesial and secular spaces.

With the emergence of regional solidarity, identified by the national and sub-national movements, the critical question has always centered on the nature of solidarity that is practiced at this level. An emerging concern is whether the model of leadership at the regional level is sufficiently participatory as to account for a model of co-responsible solidarity. An isolated example of a particular church might offer some insight. In the *Open Minds Initiative* webinar of 8 June 2020 entitled: “The Church in Nigeria, Living Through the COVID-19 Crisis,”¹⁵ attempts were made to evaluate ecclesial leadership at a local level in Nigeria in a time of crisis. One of the guest-speakers, Matthew Kukah, a popular public intellectual in the Nigerian political space and also the Catholic bishop

13. See, Oliver Stratford Tomkins, “The Roman Catholic Church and the Ecumenical Movement 1910-1948,” 675-693 in Stephen Charles and Neill Ruth Rouse, eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, 2nd edition (London: S.P.C.K, 1967), 691.

14. John Nurser argues that the contributions of the ecumenical movement in the emergence of the UNDHR was in a way influenced by a vision of ‘Christendom’ in which international social order is governed by Christian principles for justice and peace. See, John Nurser, *For All Peoples and All Nations: The Ecumenical Church and Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 11.

15. Open Minds Nigeria YouTube Channel, “The Church in Nigeria, Living through the COVID-19 Crisis,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RpIeBDU11xs> (accessed 18/06/2020).

of the Sokoto diocese, narrates how the pandemic has opened up the administrative affairs of his diocese to an increased synodality on two counts. The first is the formation of a diocesan task force on COVID-19 that is chaired by a lay professor of medicine, who hitherto was the diocesan president of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, one of the sodalities that functions at the periphery of the local church. Relying on the expertise of such a professional lay person becomes an enrichment to ecclesial governance that should not be limited to unusual times. The second, which is linked to the first, is Kukah's strong advocacy for what he termed a 'shared leadership'. The possibility of such shared leadership is hinged on the concurrent functioning of, on the one hand, an acknowledgement and confession of 'insufficiency' by ecclesial authorities and on the other hand, the inclusion of the broad range of gifts (charisms) within the church, as represented by the laity, specifically women (*Evangelii Gaudium* [EG] §§103-104)¹⁶ and young people (EG §§105-106). Of course, Kukah's approach might be an isolated case, but it could as well represent a wake-up call for the church. In other words, are we not witnessing a *kairos* for a truly synodal church as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic? But then, a theological justification of an emergence of a deepened synodality from the solidarity that is necessitated by the pandemic needs to be proven rather than merely conjectured or assumed.

3. Solidarity in CST and the Pathway to Synodality

Solidarity remains one of the buzzwords in theological and ethical circles, one that has been developed not only in CST but has equally been appropriated in secular studies on human rights, leadership and social organization.¹⁷ The development of the concept is traceable to multiple

16. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013).

17. See, Lisa Eckenwiler, Christine Strahle, and Ryoa Chung, "Global Solidarity, Migration and Global Health Inequality," *Bioethics*, Special Issue: The Role of Solidarity in Bioethics 26, no.7 (2012): 382 and 390; Ina Kerner, "Solidarity across Difference Lines," *Social Politics* 25, no. 1 (2018): 44-49; Braden Leap and Diego Thompson, "Social Security, Collective Identity, Resilient Communities: Two Case Studies from the Rural U.S. and Uruguay," *Social Sciences* 7, no. 12 (2018): 250-269; Harald Bauder and Lorelle Juffs, "'Solidarity' in the Migration and Refugee Literature: Analysis of a Concept," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46, no. 1 (2020): 46-65; Michael Hechter, *Principles of Group Solidarity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987); Darryl Li, *The Universal Enemy: Jihad, Empire, and the Challenge of Solidarity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020).

fronts. In that sense, Karl Metz's contention that the idea of solidarity emerged in the context of responding to the problems of social injustice and poverty in post-industrial revolution Europe¹⁸ would amount to a historical and cultural naïveté if he claims to speak globally. Today, the African worldview of Ubuntu, the philosophical dimensions of Hinduism and the unique experiences of African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans equally constitute original sources for understanding solidarity.¹⁹ Basically, solidarity is a common human phenomenon. Most philosophical reflections on the concept of solidarity, such as those advanced by Habermas, Durkheim, Rorty, McIntyre and Taylor, represent attempts at universalizing the understanding of the term as a fundamental human experience. Meanwhile, within the Roman Catholic tradition, scriptural sources (Gen 1:26-27; 2:18-21; Eccl 4:9-10; Prov 18:19; Matt 5:7; 10:40-42; 20:25; Luke 22:25-27; John 13:35; 1 John 3:17; Acts 27:26-27; Eph 4:6; Col 1:16) are presented as the theological justifications of solidarity. Remarkably, the theological understanding of solidarity as a God-willed human form of relationality, interdependence and communality have consistently been advanced in the CST, from Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (15 May 1891), Pius XII's *Summi Pontificatus* (20 October 1939), John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* (15 May 1961), Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* (26 March 1967), Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965), John Paul II's *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), to Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013) and *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015) to mention but a few.²⁰

18. Karl H. Metz, "Solidarity and History: Institutions and Social Concepts of Solidarity in 19th Century Western Europe," in *Solidarity*, ed. Kurt Bayertz (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999), 191-207, at 191. Metz narrowed his claims to Western Europe while integrating the ideas of solidarity that were developed by Jürgen Schmelter in his 1991 dissertation at the University of München with the title: *Solidarität: Die Entwicklungsgeschichte eines sozial-ethischen Schlüsselbegriffs*.

19. See, Leonard Tumaini Chuwa, *African Indigenous Ethics in Global Bioethics: Interpreting Ubuntu* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014); John N. Sheveland, "Solidarity in Three Sacred Texts: Bhagavad-Gita, Dhammapada, 1 Corinthians," *Vidyajyoti: Journal of Theological Reflection* 74, no. 8 (2010): 593-605; Juliet Hooker, *Race and the Politics of Solidarity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

20. The CST contains an elaborate account of the multiple dimensions and understandings of the concept of solidarity. Virtually all the popes from the beginning of the 19th century to date have made significant contributions to the development of the concept in the light of the prevailing historical and cultural challenges. The intention of this article, however, is not to review the various documents. There is enough scholarly analysis on the subject matter of solidarity in the CST. The overriding interest here is to determine how an understanding of solidarity could help in deepening the praxis of synodality in the church.

Theologically, solidarity is rooted in the recognition of the common origin of all creation, and in that sense, it belongs not only to the *old order* of creation but also to the *new order* of redemption in and through Christ.²¹ The Christological dimension of solidarity involves a human participation in the universal salvific mission of Christ (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* §§2,13,22,32; John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* §§8,16).²² As such, it constitutes a ‘Christian virtue’ (John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* [SRS] §§38,40) that imposes upon humanity moral and social responsibilities. Thus, solidarity is manifest in “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all” (SRS §38). The validity of the ‘virtue’ of solidarity is activated when members of the society “recognize one another as persons” and not simply as objects for “exploitation, oppression and annihilation” (SRS §39). This understanding of solidarity is evident in the efforts by the various popes to condemn the sins and ‘structures of sin’²³ that aid the scandalous poverty, lack of development, modern forms of slavery, systemic racism, conflicts and oppressions that prevail in the world today. By confronting oppressive social structures, solidarity from a global dimension is not just a matter of charity but primarily of justice – justice against any form of economic, political or social oppression, exploitation and dehumanization; a form of justice that equally functions in positively working for the flourishing, inclusion and emancipation of all, whether as persons, communities or nations.

21. Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun make a similar argument in the theology of human flourishing in which the ‘home of God’ marked by the images of ‘Garden’ (Creation) and ‘New Jerusalem’ (Consummation) finds its center in Christ. See, Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019), 73-77.

22. In relation to this, Pope Francis has shown that the Christological dimension is not only to be understood in a detached sense of participation but as a process of journeying with Christ in the complexities and challenges of human conditions. See, Meghan J. Clark, “Pope Francis and the Christological Dimensions of Solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching,” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2019): 102-122.

23. SRS §§36,39, see, Pope Paul VI, Encyclical on the Development of Peoples, *Populorum Progressio* (26 March 1967), http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html (accessed 11/09/2020), §21; Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013 (Rome: Vatican Press, 2013), §59. In fact, John Paul II, distinguishes between ‘personal sin’ and ‘social sin’, and demonstrates how the latter emerges from the former such that “the real responsibility, then, lies with individuals.” Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (2 December 1984), §16, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.html (accessed 16/06/2020).

Some critical voices have however pointed out that this understanding of solidarity by the church is often hampered in some ways. There is an observation that the moderate shift that one finds in CST from a justice-centered approach to a charity-centered approach may weaken solidarity of a global nature. Uzochukwu Njoku raises critical questions as to the reasons behind this shift in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, particularly at the point where Pius XII's papal motto *Opus iustitiae pax* – “peace as the fruit of justice” is substituted with *Opus solidaritatis pax* – “peace as the fruit of solidarity” (SRS §39). Njoku blames the shift on the influence of the proponents of a neo-liberal economy (Peter Berger, Richard Neuhaus, Michael Novak) who view “the welfare state as a burden on public finance” since it encourages laziness.²⁴ Indeed, the understanding of ‘peace as the fruit of solidarity’ leads to an interpretation of solidarity in a more caritative way. Njoku insists that the shift to the caritative dimension of solidarity remains insufficient in addressing the tension that is created by the intricate relationship between ethical values and the complex economic, political and cultural structures that vitiate these values.²⁵ For instance, for those who insist that “the paramount value of capitalism is freedom,” the implication is that “solidarity must take a back seat to it (capitalism) in a free-market economy.”²⁶ Additionally, this means that the principles of solidarity such as the care of the poor and the redistribution of wealth should only be seen as a form of charity and not the right of the poor. Consequently, the advancement of solidarity as a form of charity rather than a demand for justice (within the context of the neo-liberal economic ‘dogma’ of capitalism), is roundly perceived by critics as a means of maintaining the status quo.²⁷ For Njoku, there exists within this scheme “the danger of drawing a straight and simplistic line between individual acts and social realities” that invariably overlooks “the complex historical processes that have created some social problems, and mixing the private realm with the public sphere controlled

24. Uzochukwu Njoku, “Rethinking Solidarity as a Principle of Catholic Social Teaching: Going Beyond *Gaudium et Spes* and the Social Encyclicals of John Paul II,” *Political Theology* 9, no. 4 (2008): 525-544, at 534.

25. *Ibid.*, 540.

26. Gerald J. Beyer, “The Meaning of Solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching,” *Political Theology* 15, no.1 (2014): 7-25, at 22.

27. *Ibid.*, 22; Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, “Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the Eighties,” in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, ed. Susan Brook Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engle (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 31-40; Shawn M. Copeland, “Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity,” in *Women and Theology*, ed. Mary Ann Hinsdale and Phyllis H. Kaminski, Annual Publication of the College Theology Society (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 3-38.

by powerful institutions.”²⁸ He further argues that such an approach equally tends “to overlook how individual persons may be trapped within these structures.”²⁹ Historically, the evils of slavery and colonialism together with their contemporary manifestations have fundamentally altered the basis upon which nations can compete equally and favorably. This already irredeemably traps some individuals within such ‘structures of sin’. Attempts at restoring justice in the form of solidarity, therefore, should never be viewed as charity. While both the justice and caritative dimensions of solidarity remain important, one wonders if justice should not be considered as primary, and as such, prior to charity. And when translated into structures of governance, whether of the state or of the church, one is confronted with the question of how leadership at the global level could guarantee this form of justice given the political and historical complexities that are involved.

Interestingly, Benedict XVI’s encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (CIV), appears to be critical of any attempt to prioritize justice over charity, while at once maintaining the intrinsic relationship between charity and justice. For Benedict XVI, charity is “the synthesis of the entire Law (cf. Matt 22:34-40)” and as such, it is at the core of CST (CIV §2). Charity is the principle of both “micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or with small groups)” and “macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones)” (CIV §2). Charity in CIV is not to be reduced to any form of sentimentalism. Essentially, it is devoid of the double constraints of ‘emotionalism’ and ‘fideism’ because of its alignment with truth: “Through this close link with truth, charity can be recognized as an authentic expression of humanity and as an element of fundamental importance in human relations, including those of a public nature” (CIV §3). On the specific relationship between charity and justice, Benedict XVI argues in the encyclical:

Charity goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is “mine” to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is “his,” what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting.... If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way to charity.... Charity always manifests God’s love in human relationships as well, it gives theological and salvific value to all commitment for justice in the world. (CIV §6)

28. Njoku, “Rethinking Solidarity,” 538.

29. Ibid.

Reflecting on this relationship between justice and charity, American political theologian, William T. Cavanaugh, claims that this relationship radically dismantles the binary polarizations between the secular and the religious, which goes against the creational interdependence that grounds global solidarity. The destabilization of such polarizations is specified in Benedict XVI's critique of the hegemony of the 'market-plus-state' binary that has continued to define contemporary global political economy (CIV §41). According to Cavanaugh, Benedict XVI's argument has implications for the relationship between theology and the secular phenomena of politics and economy.

Theology does not face economics and politics across a wide divide: to the contrary, economics and politics are radically incomplete without theology. And theology does not complete them merely by adding on to the foundation they establish; the grace of God of which theology speaks transforms justice, transforms the economic and the political, into anticipations of the city of God.³⁰

Between the compelling theological relationship of charity and justice in CIV and Cavanaugh's elaboration on the relationship between theology and the secular praxes of politics and economics lies some sort of paternalism in which the secular is denied a fundamental access to the realm of grace. It is charity that is directly linked to God and not justice as such. It is theology that offers and speaks of grace *to* the secular. This observation is more problematic in Cavanaugh's argument which does not clearly provide a two-way form of relationship. In the claim that theology's 'grace' transforms the secular realms of justice, economics and politics, a corresponding co-transformation is lost since theology is construed as an instrument of the *extra-worldly* 'city of God'. This raises the question as to whether the binary of theology and the secular has indeed been destabilized. If indeed the destabilization *is* real, then there must equally be lessons *from* the 'secular' realms of politics and economics *for* theology. Such concerns lead to the following questions: In what ways can theology *learn* from the secular? Is theology *open* enough to learn from the secular practices of justice, politics and economics? Avoiding these questions has a way of excluding ecclesial institutions (that advance theology), with their inherent political and economic components, from the critical assessment of both theology and the secular as such. This is

30. William T. Cavanaugh, *Field Hospital: The Church's Engagement with a Wounded World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2016), 124. There is an obvious theological background of Augustinianism in both Benedict XVI's CIV and Cavanaugh's interpretation.

evident in the many crises faced by the Roman Catholic Church – the clergy sex abuse, the financial impropriety at the Vatican bank, the election of bishops in some parts of the world and the exclusion of women in ecclesial structures of governance. It is quite easy to observe how theology can act in a rather prescriptive, non-reflexive manner towards the secular with consequences on the internal organization, and even on the self-understanding, of the church.

Interestingly, CIV proposes, to use Cavanaugh's words, "the formation of alternative spaces"³¹ as a way of upturning the logic of market and state with its dire implications for global solidarity. With respect to the economy, the encyclical suggests a "cross-fertilization between different types of business activity, with shifting competencies from the 'non-profit' world to the 'profit' world and vice versa, from the public world to that of civil society, from advanced economies to developing countries" (CIV §41). Such an economic arrangement holds the promise of a fairer re-distribution of wealth within nations and among nations across the globe; a necessity that presents itself in the wake of the economic downturn occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic. On the political front, the encyclical argues for the promotion of "a dispersed political authority" that safeguards the state from undermining "the foundations of democracy" (CIV §41). In both instances, political and economic powers are re-arranged in such a way that would create the balance needed for the flourishing of all – persons, communities and nations. These valuable suggestions emerge from the principle of subsidiarity³² which has a long history in CST, and to which Benedict XVI remains indebted. Yet, inasmuch as these suggestions are made for the 'secular', they invariably create opportunities for some sort of ecclesial learning. If theology and the secular (politics and economics) should engage in mutual learning, then ecclesial leadership could as well profit from the lessons that it prescribes for the secular. In other words, if democracy could be safeguarded by the principle of 'dispersed authority' in which solidarity is balanced with the principle of subsidiarity (CIV §58), one wonders whether ecclesial leadership in serving the communion of

31. Cavanaugh, *Field Hospital*, 125.

32. Benedict XVI explains the principle of subsidiarity as follows: "Subsidiarity is first and foremost a form of assistance to the human person via the autonomy of intermediate bodies. Such assistance is offered when individuals or groups are unable to accomplish something on their own, and it is always designed to achieve their emancipation, because it fosters freedom and participation through assumption of responsibility. Subsidiarity respects personal dignity by recognizing in the person a subject who is always capable of giving something to others" (CIV §57).

the People of God (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* [LG] §12)³³ could not better be exercised through a deepening of the praxis of synodality. Marked by the principles of participation and co-responsibility in ecclesial decision-making, synodality emerges as an ecclesial equivocation of ‘dispersed authority’.

While merely juxtaposing the ecclesial and secular structures may suggest a bad logic (*non sequitur*), it however provokes the question of where exactly the differences lie. Granted that the church is not a democracy,³⁴ a certain democratic ethos undeniably constitutes important practices within the church. The plebiscite of the Conclave and the Constitutions of religious orders are some brief examples. On the strength of such democracy-related tenets in the church one wonders whether the logical implication of solidarity does not make a serious demand on the structures and processes of decision-making in the church.

4. Solidarity and the Quest to Deepen Synodality

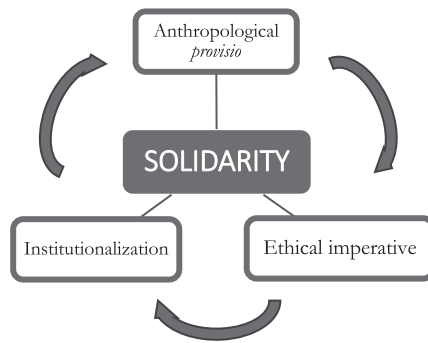
Synthesizing recent debates on solidarity in CST, professor of Christian Ethics at Villanova, Gerald Beyer, argues that contemporary CST emphasizes three dimensions of solidarity: a) solidarity is fundamentally an anthropological *provisio*, b) solidarity commands an ethical agency, and c) solidarity is sustained by institutionalization. I shall offer some elaboration. The first dimension of solidarity is the idea that solidarity is an anthropological ‘datum’. Beyer equally refers to this as “factual solidarity” that is based on shared humanity which is very fundamental to human interdependence. This ‘factual solidarity’ undergirds the call to human solidarity, common good and “mutual empathy among members of a community.”³⁵ Certainly, this is not a denial of differences or diversities but rather a recognition and acknowledgment of a common humanity that theologically rests on a common origin or what one might call the cosmic paternity of God (LG §16; EG §252). The second aspect of solidarity goes beyond the mere recognition and acknowledgment of human interdependency by insisting on the ethical imperatives imposed by an awareness of ‘factual solidarity’. An appropriate ethical responsiveness

33. See, Norman Tanner, *Vatican II: The Essential Texts* (New York: Image, 2012).

34. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter at the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), §45: http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte.html (accessed 17/06/2020).

35. Beyer, “The Meaning of Solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching,” 15.

would constitute the “initial response” to the challenges presented by “all human interactions in the economic, cultural, political, and religious spheres of social life.”³⁶ Clearly, the intervention required here is to be direct, expeditious and instantaneous. The third dimension on solidarity with its focus on institutionalization implies two basic dimensions, namely, a) the inclusive ‘participation’ of victims, and ‘continuity/perseverance’ of the institutional response to crisis.³⁷ Beyond the prompt, short-termism of the second dimension, there is need for institutions to embody solidarity through long-lasting policies and structural reforms. This is the only way to guarantee sustainable social transformations, and to ensure that the lessons learnt during unusual times are not lost on institutional leadership, ecclesial or secular.



Most likely, the second dimension would be represented in most leadership handbooks as a short-term mechanism to addressing challenges that require solidarity. Certainly, the error margins are often inevitable, yet leadership recognizes this possibility when it is construed in non-absolutist terms. Specifically, in unusual times such a hands-on approach to an already acknowledged calamity serves as a necessary immediate response which in most cases is time-constrained. Timing is very essential. Put in the context of ecclesial leadership and solidarity, the second moment of solidarity, building on the first moment, emerges as part of a collective discernment that is roundly emphasized by Pope Francis. American Catholic theologian, Amanda Osheim, envisions that ecclesial solidarity, realized through a process of communal discernment, remains a necessary factor in developing true synodality.³⁸ Discernment is not a

36. Beyer, “The Meaning of Solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching,” 15.

37. *Ibid.*, 16.

38. Amanda C. Osheim, “Stepping toward a Synodal Church,” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 2 (2019): 370-392, at 378, 385.

one-time, momentary activity. It is a journey, sometimes arduous, requiring patience, and thus becoming a 'tradition'. A *traditioned* discernment reflects the third moment of solidarity. Both the leader and the led perceive themselves as co-sojourners in the unusual time and at all times.³⁹ The element of co-experientiality emerges as an important aspect of ecclesial leadership on solidarity, leading to co-responsibility. Ecclesio-logically, synodality recaptures this idea of co-responsibility not just as a theologically expedient concept but as a model of ecclesial governance that has a lot of implications for the life and mission of the church in the world today.

Deeper theological reflections on synodality began to emerge following the 2018 *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* published as an outcome of a theological study on synodality that was kicked off in 2014 by the International Theological Commission.⁴⁰ Theologically, the document grounds synodality in a Trinitarian ecclesiology of communion with its manifest "anthropological, Christological, pneumatological and Eucharistic dimensions."⁴¹ In practical terms, the theology of synodality rests on Vatican II's theology of the 'People of God' and their participation in the Church – through the threefold offices: priestly, prophetic and teaching (LG, chapter two). The participation, sharing, reciprocity and co-responsibility of the People of God are safeguarded by the doctrine of *sensus fidei*,⁴² which essentially does not threaten the hierarchy of the Church but may perhaps re-conceive it in what Pope Francis referred to as an "inverted pyramid."⁴³ Given the *sensus fidei*, participation of the People of God remains deeply pneumatological since it "is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit."⁴⁴ In that sense,

39. Within the ecclesial "spiritualities and structures of discernment" all members, as co-sojourners, become both 'learners and teachers'. See, Osheim, "Stepping toward a Synodal Church," 374.

40. International Theological Commission (ITC), *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2 March 2018): http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_synodalita_en.html (accessed 21/02/2020).

41. Ibid., §48.

42. Ibid., §64. For detailed study on *Sensus fidei* (the sense of faith) see, Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church's Reception of Revelation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2009).

43. Pope Francis, Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html (accessed 21/02/2020).

44. ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, §67. Re-echoed in the above statement are the teachings of Vatican II. See also, *Lumen Gentium* §13, *Unitatis Redintegratio* §2, *Gaudium et Spes* §32.

authentic synodality means therefore “to move forward, in harmony [*walk together*] under the impulse of the Spirit.”⁴⁵

Addressing the members of the International Theological Commission on 29 November 2019, Pope Francis underscores that the ‘soul’ of synodality is the Holy Spirit. According to him, “without the Holy Spirit there is no synodality.”⁴⁶ He considers the task of the theologians as that of ‘listening to what the Spirit is saying to the Church’. Meanwhile, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the synod of bishops in 2015, the Pope had reminded his audience that,

A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening “is more than simply hearing.” It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:17), in order to know what he “says to the Churches” (Rev 2:7).

In listening to one another and to the Holy Spirit, synodality constitutes an intra-ecclesial learning that transforms the church from within with the assurance of the unity, communion, mission and the work of discernment in the church. Yet unity, communion and collective discernment express a solidarity that is modelled according to the Trinitarian life and animated by the Holy Spirit. Without synodality that is rooted in solidarity, the church ceases to exist. Solidarity safeguards synodality from the tendency towards mere structural reorganization that we find in corporate organizations. Solidarity is fundamentally spiritual because of its rootedness in original human interdependence, and in that sense, the praxis of synodality constitutes a specific manifestation of that spirituality in the form of a co-responsible and co-participatory commitment in the life and mission of the church.

Taking into consideration an integral functioning of the three dimensions of solidarity proposed by Beyer as well as a reconciliation of the tension between justice and charity, one might be concerned if the form of synodal praxis that emerges from a theological understanding of solidarity is really capable of closing the gap between theology and the secular, between the spiritual and the social aspects of the life and mission of the church.

45. Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), “Church’s Synodal Functions,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, 24 January 1996, 9-11, at 9.

46. Pope Francis, Address to Members of the International Theological Commission (29 November 2019): http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/november/documents/papa-francesco_20191129_commissione-teologica.html (accessed 21/02/2020).

5. Conclusion

While critics might dismiss any direct link between the solidarity provoked by the COVID-19 and synodality, the question that remains is whether this form of solidarity (always provoked by global crisis over centuries) does not demand a re-examination of Roman Catholic ecclesiology towards greater co-responsibility and inclusive participation. An additional concern might arise regarding the exact relationship between solidarity and synodality given that the developments of both concepts appear to emerge from different theological sub-disciplines, with solidarity coming from moral theology and CST in particular, and synodality from the area of ecclesiology (systematic theology). Nonetheless, if the task of theology is to constantly deepen the understanding of the divine revelation for the service of the life and mission of the church in the world, then it must embrace interdisciplinarity not only *ad extra* but *ad intra*. An external interdisciplinarity, according to which theology engages with other secular fields of learning, guarantees continued relevance of theology in the world as well as mutual enrichment among the disciplines. Whereas an internal interdisciplinarity, among the sub-disciplines of theology, reinforces internal coherence in theology, which today remains a critical remark on theology's lack of self-reflexivity.

Within the context of an intra-theological interdisciplinarity, this article has offered a critical examination of how solidarity leads to increasing synodality. Theologically, the emergent ecclesiology of synodality, among other things, requires the recognition of the following:

a) *That the self-understanding of the church must be reconcilable with other teachings.* Another way to put this is to say that the various theological positions of the church must be aligned with one another. The elements of solidarity that one finds in CST must resonate with the ecclesiology that undergirds ecclesial governance. Hence, the proposal of the 'dispersed authority' in CIV can equally function in some aspects of the church's life in a way that shapes and enriches ecclesiology.

b) *That the practice of synodality is an essential means of exercising solidarity.* Synodality is one of the ways of realizing the third moment of solidarity – institutionalization – and goes beyond the mere acknowledgment of 'factual solidarity' and the short-term responses to crisis. As Pope Francis rightly observes, "certain structures and the occasionally unwelcoming atmosphere of some of our parishes and communities" are responsible for why "part of our baptized people lack a sense of belonging to the Church" (EG §63). By maintaining a structure that fosters co-responsibility and co-participation in ecclesial decision-making processes, the sense of belonging of the faithful is safeguarded.

c) *That the absence of true synodality impinges on the effectiveness and efficacy of the mission of the church in the world.* Indeed, excessive clericalism that excludes the lay from decision-making in the church adversely affects “a real commitment to applying the Gospel to the transformation of society.” (EG §102). The logic is quite commonsensical. Just as in the case of solidarity, synodality is not a matter of ‘charity’, but an expression of a just and inclusive ecclesial structure of governance that powerfully *speaks* to an unjust world.

d) *That the church needs to break from a fortress ecclesiology that inadvertently limits the evangelizing mission of the church to a mere self-preservation.* The tradition of the church already points to the contest between such an ecclesial self-understanding and an *open* ecclesiology. The intention is not to fall into the dualistic trapping of an either/or model but to insist that the pre-Pentecost ‘upper room’ church (exclusivity) is no less a church than the post-Pentecost church (inclusivity). Synodality ensures that the church exercises its mission in an open and inclusive manner.

Additionally, an ecclesiology of a solidarity-oriented synodality, involves the praxis of discernment. As already hinted, the traditioned discernment emerges as co-responsibility of co-sojourners on the way to salvation. While constituting the spirituality of synodality in a way, discernment is grounded in a form of solidarity that is spirit-driven. Firstly, through the “resolute process of discernment, purification and reform” (EG §30), parishes and dioceses can become “environments of living communion and participation” (EG §28) not merely for “ecclesiastical organization but rather the missionary aspiration of reaching everyone” (EG §31). In fact, even the solidarity that is prescribed for the secular space involves a process of discernment as well (CIV §42). Secondly, the same level of synodality is required at the center, necessitating the call for the “conversion of the papacy” (EG §32).⁴⁷ True synodality at these three levels of ecclesial life goes against “excessive centralization” that “complicates the Church’s life

47. Pope John Paul II makes a similar appeal but within the context of ecumenical dialogue and relations. See, Pope John Paul II, Encyclical On Commitment to Ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint* (25 May 1995), §96: http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html (accessed 19/06/2020). See also, John R. Quinn, *The Reform of the Papacy: The Costly Call to Christian Unity* (New York: Crossroad, 1999); John A. Radano, “‘*Ut unum sint*’: The Ministry of Unity of the Bishop of Rome,” *Angelicum* 73, no. 3 (1996): 325-359. The question remains whether the engagement in ecumenical dialogue does not in many ways express synodality and solidarity. Yet, developing such processes within an intra-ecclesial context creates a more authentic disposition of living it out in ecumenical and secular contexts. Indeed, ecumenism constitutes a *locus* for *Catholic learning* on synodality and solidarity. See, Ikenna Paschal Okpaleke, “Ecumenical Catholic Learning: Synodality in the Anglican-Roman Catholic Church Dialogue,” *Asian Horizons* 14, no. 1 (2020): 209-224.

and her missionary outreach" (EG §32), particularly in unusual times. In a time of crisis, and indeed at all times, as Pope Francis observes, "the important thing is not to walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters" (EG §33). Thirdly, this process of discernment is fundamentally pneumatological. On the one hand, it is a synodal practice⁴⁸ of listening to, and hearing from the Holy Spirit (EG §171). And on the other hand, it is an act of solidarity because, as already shown, the gifts of the Holy Spirit that are received by all are for the service of all.⁴⁹ To conclude, Osheim beautifully captures, once again, the connection between synodality and solidarity linked by the praxis of discernment:

While the church's synodality is important for the mutual care and strengthening of its members, the people of God do not journey for themselves alone, and neither does synodality bear fruit only within the church. Rather than creating a church turned inward upon itself, through synodal practices and structures, the church discerns how to live faithfully in the midst of particular contexts, a necessary part not only of the church's unity, holiness, and catholicity, but also of learning how to live out its apostolic call to encounter others and share the gospel.⁵⁰

By unmasking the full implication of a true commitment to synodality, Osheim's position reinforces this article's insistence that the church's commitment to solidarity inevitably requires a deepening of an internal praxis of synodality.

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48. Osheim, "Stepping toward a Synodal Church," 374.

49. ITC, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, §67.

50. Osheim, "Stepping toward a Synodal Church," 392.