

Authority and Participation in the Mission of the Church in the 21st Century



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ABSTRACT: The dynamics of pastoral work, ministry and relationship hinges on the practical aspects of collaboration, leadership and service. The research uses the constructive and experiential method. By it, we shall explore the exercise of authority ranging from the Christian Holy Scriptures. We shall further espouse the position of the Magisterium of the Church, to locate how she exercises authority by service-love-effective leadership. Jesus Christ, in His human life exercised kenotic-servant-leadership with humility-love-power. Thus, from Him, the Church by Apostolic Mandate (cf. Matt. 28: 19ff) draws her power to exercise, live and execute authority leading people to salvation. In the Catholic Church, authority is exercise by the power of the Trinity, through the charism of sacramental ordination and the bestowal of baptismal character – a reform Pope Francis – affirms must be at the very root of ecclesial life in the 21st century. This must be the motivation by which all members of the Church need to exercise to evangelise with vigor and determination guided by love and service in order to participate fully in the life and mission of the Church to make disciples of all nations in the 21st century. The act or task of evangelization as ever before, must be the mission of the Church that ought to be propelled by Christocentric mandate.

KEY WORDS: Authority, Evangelisation, Leadership, Mission, Participation.

1) **OPENING REMARKS** – Authority is entrustment of responsibility to lead, direct, govern or rule over people, subjects, congregations or group of persons with common aspiration. “The word “authority” comes from the Latin *auctoritas* which belongs to a family of terms meaning, “to cause to grow, to produce.”¹ Human exercise of authority, can be cordial or by brutal force; while, the divine bestowal of authority, is service-love-salvation. In order that the genuine transmission of authority from divine mandate might lead to human authority; Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity became human (Jn 1:14). The act of the incarnation is illustrated in Christian theology to be kenosis. Shabayang teaches that, “explicit kenosis of Jesus in the incarnation, which set the process of reconciliation in motion, culminates first, with the unbloody sacrifice of the Last Supper. (c.f. Jn 13: 1-11).”² For by it, Jesus Christ, called upon humanity to a participatory role of leadership by a humble service-act of love – a service that exercises authority by love. This is best captured by Saint Paul in his famous text of Phi. 2: 5-11, which is the celebrated poem of the kenosis of Jesus’ authority over all creatures by establishing His supremacy and power by self-emptying; self-sacrificing, and self-sundering; which culminated in the Paschal Mystery. The Incarnation therefore, is the best organon by which God became human, to teach, mentor, train, form and direct human beings to learn, accept salvation and to transmit genuine exercise of authority to create peace and order in the 21st century.

In the current spirit of the *Synod on Synodality* – the Catholic Church embarks on an engagement of freedom to transmit the exercise of authority by dialogue and fraternity. St. Pope John Paul II had earlier stated that: “Authentic dialogue, therefore, is aimed above all at the rebirth of individuals through interior conversion and repentance, but always with profound respect for conscience and with patience and at the step-by-step pace indispensable for modern conditions.”³ In the quest to respond to the modern conditions, Pope Francis is calling for *aggiornamento*. By which the Church calls for greater spirit of the risen Christ to be identified in her members. That all baptize members possess the spirit of a greater participation in the Church to render quality service in practical love for effective evangelisation to take place in the 21st century. Earlier, St. Pope John Paul II had charged

¹Potyin, Thomas, R. “*Authority in the Church*,” in *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, eds. Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig, Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 1997, 64

²Shabayang, Barnabas Samaila, *African Catholic Priest as Elder, Reconciler and Mediator: A Reflection of Christ’s Kenosis in the teachings of St. Pope John Paul II and the African Bishops*, Kaduna: Benwood Graphix, 2017, 104

³John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 25 in *Acta Apostolic Sedis* (AAS) 77 (1995), 235-237; *ApExMiller*, 301; *ND*, 16,1674; *Origins*, 14:27 (1984), 446; *Pope Speaks* 30: 1(1985), 56

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Priests and Consecrated Persons to view mission and evangelisation as twin forces for effective work in the Church. Thus, he charged:

In my eyes, the mission post recalls in the first place the modesty of the beginnings: very often the modesty of missionary forces, the modesty of Christian communities, and the modesty of pedagogical and material means. In fact, the life of these evangelizers and of their first disciples is very close to the poverty of Gospel and the simplicity of the first Christian communities described in the Acts of the Apostles.⁴

From the foregoing, it is to be understood that, the passion in the Pontificate of Pope Francis is directed to the task of awakening the sleeping-church in the 21st century to a decisive missionary responsibility of evangelizing vulnerable persons in our human society: the sick, the poor, the weak and the neglected like Jesus Christ did. The full mission of the Church, if it most walk the path of Jesus Christ, is that it most identify the most vulnerable of the human race, help the weak, pay attention and care for the sick and the abused; to preach love, give practical gospel values. Reasons, Pope Francis charged Bishops and Priests, that “one must smell the sheep on their clothes,”⁵ In the same currency, Professor Stan Chu Ilo further charged the modern Church on the continuous mission of giving quality care and love to the poor and the vulnerable members of our human community as he wrote:

I am also referring to a church that is called through its external activities and mission to be actively involved in the eradication of negative material poverty. Part of this mission is to transform individuals and society to overcome the negative spiritual poverty that breeds injustice, greed, around the world. The church of the poor is one that mirrors the kingdom of God and anticipates its eschatological fulfilment in its concerted effort to orient its actions and inner life to the will of God revealed in Christ.⁶

From the foregoing, one sees clearly, that for us to live and function in the world and in the Church in the 21st century; we have and most exercise authority be service-kenotic love-humble leadership like Jesus Christ, the Apostles and the early Church did exercise it and won many souls for the kingdom of God. Thus, the *Synod on Synodality*, calls, that the attention of the Church be focus more on the spirit and charism of listening which can further be illuminated by the bright and shining presence of the Trinity that is a perfect example of radiant and splendid communion of persons as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Trinitarian Communion – is a drive towards locating the beauty, splendour and the ever – radiating presence of the Trinity in the life and mission of the Church in the 21st century. This quest is at the core and is the essence that guarantees the full participation of all the baptize for effective evangelisation. Stan Chu Ilo affirms: “The Trinitarian origin of illuminative ecclesiology is the source of the “*culture of encounter*,” participation, and friendship.”⁷ This explicit theological contribution is an added impetus to the heart and the core of doctrinal evolution expected to feature in the current *Synod on Synodality* – inviting all baptize Christians to a wholistic orientation on the life of equal and uncommon fraternity, solidarity, sharing, justice and showing practical love. The very essence and expression of trinitarian communion is liberation and justice.

2) AUTHORITY IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IS EXERCISE IN THE MISSION OF THE TRINITY- Through the interpretation of biblical literature and the orthodoxy of ecumenical councils, the Catholic Church has always upheld that the Trinity is at the very foundation, is the core and the centre of gravity bequeathing salvific and liberative exercise of authority. The exercise of this type of authority, is not physical nor political, it is not based on cultural apparatus, but it is wholistic in nature, as it is transmitted to baptize Christians by faith and character. These redeemed Christians – by the Paschal Mystery – are so transformed and renewed daily by sacramental participation in the life of the church; thus, are instruments of change, revival, positive growth and development added to enhance the quality of life in human society.

The Trinitarian Communion elicit life in the Christian Community. This core doctrinal truth as faith transmitted by the essence of sacramental participation of all baptize Christians is well illustrated in what Pope Benedict XVI taught, as this is well captured and is the essence, operation and the living giving faith that emanates from the Trinitarian Communion in this explicit language:

Charity is love received and given. It is “grace” (*charis*). Its source is the wellspring of the Father’s love for the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Love comes down to us from the Son. It is creative love, through which we have our being: it is redemptive love, through which we are re-created. Love is revealed and made present by Christ (c.f. Jn 13: 1) and “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5). As recipients of God’s love,

⁴John Paul II, “*Allocution to the Priests and Religious of St. Gabriel’s Mission*”, 6 May, 1980, in J. Bayer, John Paul speaks to Religious VI, 1989-1990, 50

⁵Pope Francis, *Spiritual Words of Exaltation during Wednesday Audience*, Vatican City, 2017

⁶Stan Chu Ilo, *A Poor and Merciful Church: The Illuminative Ecclesiology of Pope Francis*, New York: Orbis Books, 2018, 108

⁷Stan Chu Ilo, *A Poor and Merciful Church: The Illuminative Ecclesiology of Pope Francis*, 98

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men and women are subjects of charity, and thus they are called to make themselves instruments of grace, so as to pour forth God's charity and weave networks of charity.⁸

From the foregoing, it is clear that every baptize christian exercises physical, moral, intellectual, cultural and spiritual authority in the immediate environment one lives and operates. Stan Chu Ilo further reiterated this doctrinal and classic beauty as he wrote that "Trinitarian communion is the union of love, friendship, community, solidarity, and divinity in the three Divine Persons and the participation of humanity and the entire creation in this community of love."⁹ It is clearly on this solid point that *The Synod on Synodality* invites us to these richer, more splendid character of ecclesial life and more so, to build organic cells of mutual, deep experiential love not based on gender, class or creed but to move on in participatory evangelisation by the common purpose of building the kingdom of God on earth to His greater glory. This enriching splendour and moral integrity of the centrality of the Trinitarian life in the life of all baptize Christian is further illustrated in the teaching posit by Miroslav Volf who wrote beautifully:

When I speak about human imaging of the Trinity, I mean that human beings receive themselves as created in the image of the Trinity by the power of the Spirit. Their imaging of the Trinity is the gift of God's movement out of the circumstances of the Trinitarian life to create human beings and, after they have sinned, to restore them by dwelling within them and taking them into the perfect communion of love, which God is.... Because God has made us to reflect God's own triune being, our human tasks are not first of all to do as God does – and certainly not by God and to celebrate and proclaim what God has done, is doing and will do.¹⁰

The above text did not only situate, but capture the core, essence and the instrumentality of the Trinity as the driving force that guides human actions to become sacramental presence of love, healing, mercy, forgiveness and transformative. This divine transmission of power, authority and mission is sacral and a mandate bequeathed by Jesus Christ, to His Beloved Apostles for the purpose of spreading the good news – mission – and evoking the participation of all human and baptize persons to access salvation by the Paschal Mystery.

The origin of all divine authority is trinitarian in nature, context and reality of faith – lucidly explicated in the command of Jesus Christ – who said to his disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, ... just as the Father has sent, so, too have I sent you that you might go and preach the good news to all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (c.f. Matt. 28:19ff). The bestowal of Christocentric power therefore is freely given as a post-resurrection mantra to evangelize, win souls for God and establish the reign of God on earth. It further demonstrates that divine authority is for service, to listen and conquer the ignorant and to make disciples of all nation by active participation. Examining the flow of this divine command, reveals that human beings in the past as now, flaunt or disobey God's order, thus the need for reform each way of the Church in the past two millennia.

3) THE EFFICACY OF REFORMS – Authority – Power in the Catholic Church: History has proven that the bestowal of authority by Jesus Christ to the Apostles was well understood amongst many tasks and responsibilities bestowed upon them to be centred on service to the poor, the ignorant and the recovery of the lost sheep for the Kingdom of God. It underscores that the cause of discipleship for Jesus Christ, while on earth, is radical. Rademacher, wrote that: "The call of Jesus cuts through all the castes, "clean" and "unclean"; male and female; zealous and tax collectors. He called Mary Magdalene "from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna," a member of the official household of Herod Antipas. With Jesus discipleship is permanent, not transitory."¹¹ This is the focus of the *Synod on Synodality* in the present dispensation in the 21st century to make discipleship in the Christian pilgrimage a permanent engagement by being consciously active, willingly participatory, skilfully catechizing and bravely missioning in the Church.

In the Apostolic Tradition, as the Christian message progressed beyond Jerusalem, Palestine and moved up to Rome; the universality of the Church brought with it negative issues. These are well documented to have existed in the early Church in Jerusalem – the ugly situation of ethnicity, which the Hellenist women complained that they were being neglected in the sharing of food (Acts 4: 2-6). The Apostles promptly solved the problem, by instituting the Diaconate – service at table. Eventually, as Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, issues of wrong teachings emerged, heresies and counter-teaching to the New Testament and Apostolic pedagogy came up in defense of the orthodoxy of faith. Beginning with the convergence of the three Ecumenical Councils, Nicaea (A.D. 325); which used the Greek term, *Homoousios* – Jesus Christ is "of same substance"¹² as

⁸Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 5

⁹Stan Chu Ilo, *A Poor and Merciful Church: The Illuminative Ecclesiology of Pope Francis*, 98

¹⁰Miroslav Volf, "Being as God is: Trinity and Generosity," in *God's life in Trinity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006, 6-7.

¹¹Rademacher, William, J., *Lay Ministry: A Theological, Spiritual & Pastoral Handbook*, Middlegrade: United Kingdom, 1991, 22

¹²*Foundations of Theological Study: A Source Book*, eds. Richard Viladesau and Mark Massa, New York/Mahwah, N.J: Paulist Press, 1991, 206

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the Father; the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) had use of the term *consubstantiation* and the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 341) equally used the Greek term, *Theotokos* – signifying that the Blessed Virgin Mary, is the Mother of God. It was well observed that all these complex terms were not found or used in the New Testament.¹³ These came up due to doctrinal reforms; to validate and teach authoritatively on exposition of doctrine in the Catholic Church – creed – that must be done by systematic and deliberate catecheses.

The pragmatic use of authority in the Catholic Church over time, age and culture for the past two-thousand and twenty-two years, have been to examine and re-examine the content of faith, by teaching, asserting orthodoxy, clarifying essential truth by referencing on what Jesus Christ actually said and did in His public Ministry while on earth. The use of authority from Apostolic Tradition, the Fathers of the Church and in the Medieval Periods have always been on seeking the truth that leads to salvation, correcting errors (heresies), making conscious reforms. It is unfortunate that the Catholic Church in the past exercised a strong hold to power as if it is a divine right. Rademacher once again wrote:

When Pope Pius IX called the First Vatican Council in 1869, he was concerned about deism, atheism, rationalism, Gallicanism, nationalism, and indifferentism. He was also concerned about the threatened loss of his temporal power over the papal state. In his *syllabus of Errors* (1864) he had condemned most of the “isms.” He was still nervous, however, about Gallicanism, which posed a serious threat to his authority as pope.¹⁴

From the foregoing, the quest and exercise of authority seems to be focused more on temporal exercise of territorial power, rather than basing it on servant-leadership style of Jesus Christ. “Another effect of Vatican I was the gradual extension of papal infallibility to include more and more of the teaching of the pope and hierarchy” which means, Lay participation will be permitted only by delegation “from above.” This will produce much of the passivity still evident today among Catholic laity.¹⁵ Many ills and counter participatory avenues like above are the hot-issues on the altar of discussion expected to feature in the *Synod on Synodality* currently going on around the world. The expectation at the *Synod on Synodality*, is the quest for an inner purifying and transforming Church that is called and geared towards “*problem solving*” or oriented towards Christocentric mission based on orthodoxy and the sacramentality of the Church. Dulles had earlier stated this clear mission in these words: “The Church realizes itself most fully in its public ministry converge in powerful symbolic events. Scripture and liturgy, through their impact on the Christian imagination, are an unceasing source of vitality within the Church.”¹⁶ On these platforms, the Laity flourish, grow and express their authentic faith without interference.

The Church has always maintained an apologetic stance against errors, but sort ways of developing and renewing her doctrines. These conscious efforts are manifold, thus, **Thomas Guarino** referred to what Vincent of Lerins had insisted and used the concept of reforms, renewal and focus on the development of doctrine. He traced that what “led Vincent to think deeply about continuity and change, novelty and difference, about progress and adulteration, about antiquity and novelty. How is the precious deposit of faith preserved over time? How are illegitimate innovations identified?”¹⁷ This quest to clarify, make conscious reforms in order to assert the authority of the Catholic Church over and against adversaries, heretics and erroneous teaching led Vincent of Lerins to authoritatively insisted that in interpreting the rich contents of doctrine in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, from Apostolic epoch to the modern time (the 21st century) it must be consistent, believe in, as the true faith will be in consonant with the deposit of faith “always, everywhere, and by everyone” (*semper, ubique, et ab omnibus*).¹⁸ Howland asserted further that, since this assertive, clear and luminous classification of what the Church does in the development of her faith, that: “This became known as the “canon” or “rule” of Vincent of Lerins, and over the centuries it was widely cited in theological manuals and textbooks.”¹⁹ This becomes the position how Catholic Church in her life, doctrine and liturgy goes through reforms as she rose over each peculiar distortion of her faith to fight against heresies in time, culture or location to insist on orthodoxy of the content to assert her definitive authority and authenticity. However, Howland cautioned that: “If taken strictly or almost literally, the rule would seem historically naïve and practically useless. For how could we possibly know what was believed “always, everywhere, and by everyone””? The rule also seemed to presume a very static notion of tradition.”²⁰ Yes, this is the

¹³Sanks, T. Howland, *A Church That Can and Cannot Change: The Dynamics of Tradition*, in Theological Studies, Volume 76, No. 2, June 2015, 300

¹⁴Rademacher, William, J., *Lay Ministry: A Theological, Spiritual & Pastoral Handbook*, 76

¹⁵Rademacher, William, J., *Lay Ministry: A Theological, Spiritual & Pastoral Handbook*. 77

¹⁶Dulles, Avery, *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom*, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987, 32

¹⁷Thomas G. Guarino, *Vincent of Lerins and the Development of Doctrine*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013, xxviii

¹⁸Thomas G. Guarino, *Vincent of Lerins and the Development of Doctrine*, 2

¹⁹Sanks, T. Howland, *A Church That Can and Cannot Change: The Dynamics of Tradition*, in Theological Studies, 300

²⁰Sanks, T. Howland, *A Church That Can and Cannot Change: The Dynamics of Tradition*, in Theological Studies, 301

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obvious point, the Church needs a clear interactive dialogue, conversation on current issues facing her as Ordained and Baptized Members in the 21st century in the *Synod on Synodality*.

The essence of the *Synod on Synodality* calls for reforms of pastoral approaches, the development of new strategies in time, location and culture to re-invigorate the power of evangelisation, the growth of Christian faith and the acceptance and assimilation of the truth of Jesus' Gospel in time and space. This development is a conscious link and continuity with what has been, what is now and the eschatological expression of the future.

It is necessary, therefore, that understanding, knowledge, and wisdom should grow and advance vigorously in individuals as well as in the community... But the progress made must be according to its own type, that is, in accord with the same doctrine, the same meaning, and the same judgement.²¹

The focus and the transposition of the *Synod on Synodality* consciously calls for renewal, re-interpretation, novelty and the application of the Christian faith in time, location and culture; but still keeping the universal tempo, essence, core and maintain the unity of the Church on the composition of the Trinity.

Human Cultures evolves continuously in time, history and by association with others within or outside their circumference. This growth comes forth from the womb of dialogue or faith-engagement to account for the progress or challenges of responding to attitudinal human problems that might create preferences or divisions. These are within the structure of the Church, had surfaced then, and have seems to become part of the DNA in the Christian Assembly till date. The Catholic Church positively, in time and season has always continue to respond to the indices of growth and development in the world. The Church has always responded each time to the deposit of faith as it is questioned; she has always given pastoral presence, rose to the defense of faith and gave lucid authoritative interpretation of the Christian Message with love, honesty and truth. More need to be done in the 21st century, currently living in the midst of global financial crisis, arisen due to infliction of Covid-19 pandemic; the up-surge of moral decadence; the evil of terrorism; the exposure to the evil of excessive and exploitative culture of dead and consumerism; capitalism promoting externalities of sexual-and-amoral behaviours on the social and conventional media. The Catholic Church most seek new ways to re-interpret, renew and create new vistas of Gospel proclamation. Thus, the pastoral and doctrinal *aggiornamento* crave by the Church in the 21st century in the *Synod on Synodality* is to deal with issues Yves Congar had discussed earlier, but these have continuously reared their ugly heads in the lives of the community of believers in the world today. He had written previously that:

Certain forms of worship, the inappropriate use of excessively analytic and abstract formulas for catechesis, (as in the German absurd Synod), the bourgeois structure and weak community links of parish life (at least in the majority of France), the clerical attitude of the priests, and practices and expectations that belong to an idea of "Christendom" that is for practical purposes anachronistic make the assimilation of new members coming from a new and different world effectively impossible.²²

Though Yves Congar had reflected and was worried on the misnomers and the doctrinal corruptions that were setting into the Church in the 1950s-1960s, his authoritative teachings were informative, prophetic and quite relevant in our time and age. He had maintained that the Church always reformed itself and must continue to do so even today, as called by Pope Francis in the *Synod on Synodality*. He wrote: "The Church has to develop, then, and to make progress in the world along with the world... The Church is obliged to follow the ceaseless development and variety of the ever-growing innovation and new situation of humanity. The Church has to move forward on the human journey."²³

In the journey of faith, life and pastoral exigencies, the researcher locates the desired reforms once more to be identified with the quest to establish the authority of the Catholic Church in the decisive action to grow and spread the faith in the midst of counter-cultural terrorism.²⁴ The Church, in the *Synod on Synodality*, must seek by the method and spirit of pastoral participation, freedom, love, dialogue and fraternity to all; invoke in her leaders and baptize members to discuss, harness and survey flashpoints or on issues and challenges that are emerging that are disrupting the cohesive harmony of unity, faith, love and charity in the Church. These negative and counter-indices to the culture of doctrinal and pastoral growth in the Church are the manifest presence of racism, classism, greed, nepotism, sexual abuse, selective obedience, claims of superiority and the enthronement of the super-ego – these evils are evil in deed. The agenda of the synod of Synodality is vast.

²¹GUARINO, Thomas G., *Vincent of Lerins and the Development of Doctrine*, 15

²²YVES, Congar, *La tradition et les traditions*, 2 vols. (Paris: Artheme Fayard, 1960-1963; ET: *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and Theological Essay*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough, New York: Macmillan, 1966.

²³Yves Congar, *La tradition et les traditions*, 2 vols. (Paris: Artheme Fayard, 1960-1963; ET: *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and Theological Essay*, 148

²⁴Terrorism, has always been the evil that arise from the forceful take-over, physical violation and the criminal execution of personal ideology (Islamic agenda, White Supremacy or apartheid), c.f. Horgan, John, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, New York: Routledge, 2005, 1-22

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4) **SYNODALITY** – *Culture – Christian Faith in the 21st century*: The current reforms anticipated in “The Synod on Synodality (which) is a two-year process of listening, dialogue and discernment.”²⁵ The synod is called by the dynamic and indefatigable Pontiff, Francis, started with the opening Solemn mass in St. Peter’s Basilica, in Rome, on October 9 and 10, 2021 to conclude in 2023. If we need to ask an obvious question, “What do this word means – Synod? – A Synod is a Greek word – *Synodos* – meaning a meeting or assembly – thus, Synodality is the way the Synod makes decisions. The model includes, listening to a broad range of people, discussing issues to hear the Holy Spirit guiding the Church.”²⁶ The trinitarian character by which we have examined above the functionality and operation of the triad in the events of our salvation, and how their being elixir of life, how their operation is a model of unison for us in faith and character, further brings to reality the teaching of Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, who became human. By this and through this salvific mission, wrought through the Paschal Mystery, all baptize members of the Catholic Church as ordained and laity are called to the act, operation and the process of Synodality.

The Logos-Incarnate – Jesus Christ, by the Incarnation – established the best Synod on Synodality. It is precisely by the incarnation, that Jesus Christ, embraced human culture, tribe and nature though without sin (c.f. Jn 1: 1-3; 14). This proof that the scriptural evidence solidly validates the dynamic nature that the Christian faith actually grew right from the beginning in the mission of Jesus Christ; in His public ministry reaching its peak at the Paschal Mystery, confirming further how the Church was born on Pentecost Sunday. Thus, the flowering features perfect-harmony-perfect splendour-perfect and perfect love emerged from the crucibles of trinitarian synergy. Both the clergy and the baptize laity in the Catholic Church enjoy this trinitarian gift by sacramental participation, reasons the – the trinitarian role-played – displays then, till now, is mission to the whole world by evangelization, conquest, conversion, ministry and participation of all the baptize.

The *Synod on Synodality* seeks to restore, re-claim and re-invigorate the dynamism, the selfless character and the magnality of the Apostolic Church in the here and now, the 21st century. By apostolic experience, the spirit-filled epoch was governed by “*Servant-Leader*” mantra. This is visibly seen in the very beginning of the Church recorded in Acts of the Apostles onwards, God bequeaths through their charism, openness in faith, the passionate care of the vulnerable and weak members, the spirit of the ever presence of Holy Spirit was visibly acknowledged. In the 21st century, we want to see, feel, embrace and exercise the “*Servant Leadership*” qualities of Jesus Christ. At the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Church expressed then and continue to upheld her teaching as contained in *Lumen Gentium*:

Let sacred pastors recognize and promote the dignity as well as the responsibility of the layman in the Church. Let them willingly make use of his prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to him (or her) in the service of the church, allowing him (her) freedom and room for action. Further, let them encourage the laymen so he (her) may undertake tasks on his (her) own initiative.²⁷

This sound, prophetic voice and clear pastoral direction given by the 21st Ecumenical Council of the Second Vatican is quite explicit not only on reforms on issues of faith, but on the change of attitudinal character of the Ministers of the Church. This was obviously necessary then, as of even now, it is fresh, relevant and is in consonance with the spirit and charism of Jesus Christ. He is ever expressed in modern concepts as “the best *Servant-Leader*” that ever lived on this planet earth. Ebener is lucidly right when he wrote that:

Servant Leadership is a paradoxical concept that fits the teachings and example of Jesus. The integration of service and power into a model of leadership is typical of the paradox found in the gospel... *He came to serve, not to be served*. He came to die so others might live. Jesus lived a paradoxical life, dying on a cross so others could gain eternal salvation. His examples then leads his disciples now to pick up their own crosses and follow him by serving others.²⁸

From the proceeding text above, which seems to catch or agrees with Pope Francis’ charism, passion and orientation in his pontificate. The text seems to fit in perfectly with ideals, expectations and ministry of what an ordained priest ought to be; the fraternity the Consecrated Person ought to exhibit; the dynamic spirit the baptize lay person must demonstrate at home, in the office, school, business centres and daily life. The *Synod on Synodality*, is timely, contextual and a greenhouse for harvesting the fruits of spiritual union with God, that we receive on active participation in the Sacraments of the Church.

²⁵Barga, Timothy, “Synod: For a Synodal Church of Communion, Participation and Mission 2021-2022,” in *The Awakening Light*, an annual Magazine produced by St. Augustine’s Major Seminary, vol. 18, no. 4, ed. Okpannachi Elias Abraham, 2022 edition. 47

²⁶Barga, Timothy, “Synod: For a Synodal Church of Communion, Participation and Mission 2021-2022,” in *The Awakening Light*, 47

²⁷Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium, The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*, no. 37. Walter M. Abbot, New York: American Press, 1966,

²⁸Ebener, Dan. R., *Servant Leadership Models for Your Parish*, New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2010, 21

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The culture of faith, served by kenotic self-sacrifice, love and availability must be the hallmark of the Synod of Synodality. “Like Jesus, servant leaders serve their followers instead of the other way around. Instead of focussing on their own personal needs and interests, servant leaders are tuned into the needs and interest of both their followers and their organizations.”²⁹ Such are the expected behavioural fruits the Synod of Synodality is expected to produce in the clergy, consecrated persons and the laity in the 21st century.

The *Synod on Synodality* must bear fruits of celebrating the dignity, unity and freedom of all baptize members of the Church. These must be brought forth by the dynamism in which and on how they are called to use the different charism, power, authority, freedom flexibility in responding to pastoral issues that militate against the creedal formulae of faith. By being actively participatory at all levels of life and ministry in the Church, “they are willing to enter into the chaos of another person. Servant leaders guide the organization without dominating things and facilitate the growth of members of the organization without controlling them.”³⁰ These features, when visibly exercised, experienced and lived, it is then that one can say with big sense of joy, the Synod of Synodality is winning souls to the greater glory of God.

The present synod seeks ways to wake up to the challenges posed before us in the here and now, by social and conventional media, the promotion of the theory and culture of relativism. By this current *aggiornamento*, Pope Francis, and the whole clergy, religious and baptize members of the Catholic Church the world over, are willing by prayers, study, openness to the Holy Spirit and responding positively by listening to “what the Spirit is saying to the Churches” in various locations, cultures, and persons in the 21st century. The one purpose is to – help the Church – to walk and work her way to a successful future that is now the 21st century.

5) CONCLUSION – Way Forward – Listening Church: The time is now and is ripe for the Catholic Church to listen to what the (Holy) Spirit is saying to the Churches in Africa, especially in Nigeria. In Revelation 3: 22 – the Apostle and Evangelist John wrote: “If you have ears, then, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.” Which practically means:

- a. Listening during and after the Synod on Synodality, which requires positive witnessing by adopting to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the two Synods on Africa; through the recommendations contained in – *Ecclesial in Africa* (1995); and *Africae Munus* (2010).
- b. Listening includes reviewing the roles and engaging more of the laity to function and operate within the liturgical assemblies as catechists, sacristans, non-eucharistic ministers, lecturers in theological institutions, seminaries and serving in the tribunals as judges and advocates of the law as they open themselves to training.
- c. Listening requires that Bishops, Parish priests (pastors) Superior Generals of Congregations, Rectors of Seminaries and all Lay Organizations are ever ready to give an open account of their financial and moral leadership annually.
- d. Listening requires building cordial relationship between the leadership in the Catholic Church at all levels without at any point accommodating the air of superiority, ego-centric tendencies or pride.
- e. Listening requires adopting the “Servant-Leadership” style of Jesus Christ; who stated in John 10: 10 ff, “I came to serve and not to be served”. This act of selflessness is expected at all functions, activities and administrative avenues in the parishes, dioceses, congregations and societies in the Catholic Church in Nigeria as well as in the whole of Africa.
- f. Listening requires accepting and encouraging the vulnerable, suffering in the Church and Society to speak up: the orphans, the Special Needs Persons, the Widows, *et cetera*. As this will give them opportunity to express themselves.
- g. Listening requires that the Church give attention to others who are have marital problems to “speak out for help” and not leave the Church and abandon the Sacraments to go Pentecostal Churches feeling neglected or being suppressed.
- h. Listening requires an ennobling and more cordial associations of bishops to priests, priests to Consecrated Persons, the Ordained clergy versus the Laity. We are call to Servant-Leaders; not be that of “master – servant” relationship; but that of being considered that we are all children of God by our baptismal character.
- i. Listening requires that the modality of lay participation in the Church must be by faith-action-love; not by fame, financial inducement or by big status in society, male-dominated syndrome in leadership.
- j. Listening requires that children ministry be properly develop in character and faith. Children are call to mentor children, to teach and direct children by speaking their language in Sunday Masses. We are to begin special Children Catechesis and receiving instructions prior to the reception of First Holy Communion.
- k. Listening requires accommodating the act of giving TESTIMONIES within a liturgical act in the parish, at least once a month – to build up faith – and integrating the laity as important organ of the Church’s life.

Finally, Pope Francis, in a poignant and beautiful way offers the most expressive act of witnessing by listening. It carries in its womb the warm of pastoral accompaniment, care and love that brings transformation and love. It expresses:

²⁹Ebener, Dan. R., *Servant Leadership Models for Your Parish*, 21

³⁰Richard L. Daft, *Essentials of Organizational Theory and Design*, Cincinnati: Southern Thomson Learning, 2005, 7

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Today more than ever we need men and women who, on the basis of their experience of accompanying others, are familiar with processes which call for prudence, understanding, patience and docility to the Spirit, so that they can protect the sheep from wolves who would scatter the flock. We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart, which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur. Listening helps us to find the right gestures and word, which shows that we are more than simply bystanders. Only through such respectful and compassionate listening can we enter on the paths of true growth and awaken a yearning for the Christian ideal: the desire to respond fully to God's love and to bring to fruition what he has sown in our lives.³¹

From the foregoing, the teaching of Pope Francis clearly illustrated that listening is act of Love. He serves as authoritative voice giving a mandate in conscience to listen to each human voice in need of attention, care, seeking for love and mercy. If all Christians in the world over, do just these basic necessities, it will easily lead us to heavenly glories even while on earth. But we must know, that there is greater need to serve one another as this is the best model of pastoral care leading with genuine love for this act of “pastoral accompaniment” proposed by Stan Chu Ilo to serve as “a new way of Doing Pastoral Ministry.”³² The praxis of theology, therefore arises, in the conscious efforts made by lived faith-experience by human beings to do the will of God on earth.

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³¹Pope Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel, Apostolic Exhortation, 2013, n. 171,

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