

# Working Document

## Part Two



### *Adoratrici del Sangue di Cristo*



XXII Assemblea Generale  
Nel sangue di Cristo...  
«nuove tutte le cose». (Ap 21,5)  
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# Articles



EMBRACING  
VULNERABILITY  
ON THE SYNODAL  
JOURNEY



INTERNATIONAL UNION  
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## Embracing Our Vulnerability and Its Transformative Potential

**Dr. Ted Dunn**

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*This is what the LORD says:*

*“Stand at the crossroads and look;  
ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is,  
and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.”  
But you said, ‘We will **not** walk in it.’ Jeremiah 6:16*

This is a time of reckoning. It is in these times of trial that we are tested, tested to our very soul. Life as we have known it, including Religious Life, is over and there is no going back to the way things were. We stand at a crossroads now, and we have a choice. We can choose to steel our defenses, fend for ourselves and remain as comfortable as we can for as long as we can, or we can choose to embrace our vulnerability, look for the

ancient path and, together, give birth to a new way of being. The question remains: *What path will you choose?*

Outwardly there is chaos; inwardly there is a new world stirring. Listen to the heartbeat of the New. The change and tumult in our world are unprecedented. Add to this the complex and rapid changes facing you as leaders, and it easily becomes overwhelming. Trying to make sense of it all is like trying to drink from a firehose. It's hard to assimilate what to really think and feel about it all. It's hard to see the forest for the trees, stay grounded, and make wise choices. We can easily lose track of what matters most to us, as well as the people who matter most to us. The press of daily demands too often takes precedence over our care for one another, our common home, and our God-given purpose for living.

Fortunately, we've carved out some time to slow down and breathe, to listen to what is stirring. Let's take this opportunity, the time we have together, to let things sink in and get in touch with what life is trying to tell us. At these graced crossroads, amidst the whirlwind of change, what might be the *deeper invitation*? What is the soulwork we need to do to listen to the heartbeat of the New? What does it mean to embrace our vulnerability and its transformative potential? These are the kinds of questions I'll be inviting you to ponder and share with one another.

As we begin, let me first say, Congratulations! You have chosen a theme that is completely contrary to the prevailing paradigm of our world. *Embracing our vulnerability*, speaks to me of the essence of humanity and the very heart of transformation. Embracing our vulnerability requires that we embrace the fullness of our being: life's beauty and austerity, the full cycle of surrender, gestation, and birth, and all manner of anguish and love. With each new cycle of life, in order for us to grow, we must not only humbly recognize our vulnerability, we must also embrace it. In other words, embracing our vulnerability, is part and parcel of the inner and interpersonal work of transformation. It is not a question as to whether or not you like being vulnerable. The question is: Can you see the value in it and, therefore, will you choose to embrace this kind of heart-work for the transformative potential it holds?

Before I go too much further, let me pause and ask a simple question:

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***What is it you are truly seeking? What is your deepest desire or most urgent longing as you plan for the future of your community and your own personal future?***

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Using your handout, jot down a few words or phrases in response to my question. I'll give you moment of quiet.

## A Great Turning

We cannot travel to the future without honoring our past, our ancestors, and our traditions, but these cannot lead us there. We need to include and transcend the past, loosen our grip on time-honored traditions and ghost-structures of the past, in order to make room for the New. What leads us into the future is our *courage, creativity, and tenacity* to give life to our deepest longings called forth by the lure and love of God. Honoring the past cannot mean living in the past. Honoring our ancestors cannot mean living as they lived. If we truly honor those who have brought us to today, we must do for the next generation what our ancestors did for us: We must make room for the New. “For our lives to be meaningful,” said Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “we must succeed in continuing the creative work of evolution.”

Our entire globe is at the brink of a massive transition which we, as a species, are partially responsible for creating. The fate of the planet, humanity, and the nearly 10 million other species that inhabit our common home are all tied together. We will either evolve into a new way of being or devolve toward extinction. I believe we have a moral responsibility to reckon with the damage we’ve caused and do everything in our power to transform our lives. While there are no guarantees, I believe that we have the capacity to transform this crisis and aid in bringing forth the next evolutionally leap in the ongoing story of creation.

However, it won’t be our clever brains, alone, that will determine our fate. We seem to be much better at making tools than using them wisely. Our future rests on our ability to make wise choices. We need to recognize the collective vulnerability we are all facing and partner in this work of transformation. Our future rests on our willingness to come together through intergenerational, interdisciplinary, interfaith, and intercultural collaboration.

The “I alone can fix it” hubris, and “might makes right” mentality of our leaders, will be the death of us. Our patriarchal caste systems that subjugate women and marginalize minorities will be the death of us. The racism, sexism, and ageism, and all the ways we have destroyed the dignity of difference and richness of diversity, will be the death of us. We will, in other words, either all hang together, or we will hang separately.

During this time of transition, I trust that you spend a lot of time thinking about how to best care for your members, manage your finances, and obtain the highest and best use of your land and buildings. But what about the highest and best use of your members’ talents, time and energy? What about the sustainability of your charism and mission? How will you care for the soul of your community? Like it or not, communities are compelled to change during this time of transition, but might there also be a deeper invitation, the possibility of transformation and the emergence new life?

Before we explore that deeper invitation, let me describe the crises we are facing in our world more fully and invite your reflections.

There is a Great Turning taking place across our planetary home. Do you not perceive it? A mixture of natural and manmade circumstances has brought our planet to a tipping point: global warming, rising sea levels, species extinction, and rivers of migration. We can add the pernicious pandemic to the climate crisis, the festering wounds of racism and classism, misogyny and hegemony, human trafficking and slavery, economic injustice, LBGTQIA inequality, violence, war, and the toxic and polarizing politics that are bringing all of us to our collective knees. Eckart Tolle refers to these as the “Bells of Mindfulness,” all of which are tolling ominously, signaling the existential threat to our planetary home and humanity’s future.

Countless luminaries and scientists believe that we are teetering on the edge of a sixth great extinction of our planet. Greta Thunberg minced no words when she said: “We have raped and pillaged the planet and jeopardized our children’s future.” It is an existential, evolutionary crisis in which our species will either evolve into a new consciousness and a new way of being or devolve into an abyss of death and destruction. Hope lies in our willingness and determination to collaborate in taking the next evolutionary leap to a new level of consciousness. The question remains: *How relevant is this in your life and what is your response to this Great Turning?*

What impact are these planetary threats having in your own country? Are these merely the backdrop to your lives? Ilea Delio once said, “Creation is not a backdrop for human drama but the disclosure of God’s identity.” I couldn’t agree more. The world in which we live is not just the context for your life, or for Religious Life, it is the ground from which life springs and the object of all its endeavors. I believe you have a key role to play in both the transformation of our world, as well as the transformation of Religious Life.

Within this Great Turning are the tectonic shifts taking place across the religious landscape. You know these, as well. In the United States, for example, there is a rise in the hunger for spirituality amidst a decline in the membership of all mainline religions, especially Catholics. Those with no religious affiliation, Nones, are now the largest subgroup, outnumbering Catholics and trending larger.

I won’t present all of the demographic changes for Catholics across globe. You’ve seen them all before and are experiencing them firsthand. Suffice it to say that the demographic shifts represent only the tip of the iceberg, one small portion of the challenges facing religious communities. Nonetheless, the practical impact of these demographic changes is demanding enormous time, energy, and resources just to maintain life as it is today. Consequently, there is little left to shape a vision for tomorrow.

Adding to these challenges are a host of deeper issues that cascade down to the very soul of communities. For example, individualism, co-dependency, workaholicism and entitlement are undermining the foundations of community, namely, interdependence, co-responsibility, shared power, and mutual accountability. Consumerism, scandals of abuse, questions of relevancy, identity confusion, mission drift, and other vexing challenges strike at the very soul of communities.

The good news is that Religious Life is not dying. It is transforming, just as it has through many lifecycle changes since the time of Jesus. It is on the leading edge of an emerging consciousness in support of our planetary evolution. The good news is that you are a part of this Great Turning! You are, no doubt, working hard to make sense of your future and plan for it. The denial that persisted in recent decades is finally giving way to more proactive efforts to adapt and change.

The good news is that death, while it is a part of this transition, will not be the last word. This cyclical transformation is natural to all living systems. Death is never the last word; it is always a new beginning. This is *God's promise*: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26).

Religious Life will rise again. But there are hard choices ahead and no quick fixes or off-the-shelf solutions. All of the options you have will require hard work. There is no escaping it. Even if a community were to come to "completion," there would be tough decisions and complex plans to implement just to take care of business, say nothing of grieving the losses and negotiating the inevitable differences of opinion regarding all the decisions they must make. You know these complexities all too well. The only solace, perhaps, is that God is with you and will not abandon you. This is *God's covenant*.

Thomas Merton once said: "Humans have a responsibility to find themselves where they are, in their own proper time and place in the history to which they belong and to which they must inevitably contribute either their response or their evasions, either truth and act, or mere slogan and gesture." Take a moment to reflect upon these words and jot down a few thoughts in your response to this second question on your handout.

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*There is a Great Turning taking place across our planetary home as well as Religious Life. What in this Great Turning holds relevance for you and how are you responding?*

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When communities are introduced to the notion of transformation, without much thought, most will resonate with the idea of transformation. Sure, why not? After all, who would be against transformation? It's like saying you're against motherhood or world peace.

Unfortunately, despite their enthusiasm for the *idea* of transformation, most communities will not put forth the concrete resources, or exert the emotional grit and spiritual discipline, needed to make the hard choices to transform their lives. They will not calendar the time, commit their monies, or engage their members in the hard work it requires. They will choose, instead, the well-worn path of least resistance. The pressing needs to care for their members, plan for what to do with their land and buildings, and simply to maintain life as it is, fills their calendars and eclipses the deeper work.

Unwittingly, bit by bit, communities make choices driven more by fear than by courage, choices that all but guarantee their demise.

Some communities, a smaller percentage, will discover and dispose themselves to the fullness of grace at these crossroads. They will listen for a deeper invitation. They will seek to transform their lives and discern God's call to new life. They will plan, not only for the external changes that must be made (e.g., finances, healthcare and the bricks and mortar of their lives), they will also open their lives to an inward journey, into the forest, through the dark night of the soul.

There are many options for change available to communities. No matter what option you choose, you simply cannot continue to live and function as you have in the past. Absent the "inner work of transformation," these options will amount to little more than surface changes meant to ease the administrative burdens and make for a smoother path to "completion."

What got you today won't get you to tomorrow. Helen Keller said it this way: "A bend in the road is not an end in the road, unless you fail to make the turn." The vast majority of communities will fail to make the turn. Some will wait until it is too late and, by the time they wake up, they will have exhausted their resources and their will to change. Others will make only incremental changes, believing they are doing what's needed, only to discover their safe, small changes are not nearly enough. And some of the most resilient communities will successfully make this bend in the road and bring forth new life. They will have a hand in facilitating the emergence of a new Religious Life.

Adaptation is absolutely necessary, but how you adapt is key. According to Thomas Friedman, the amount of change we will experience in the next 100 years will exceed the change experienced in our entire human history.<sup>i</sup> Our capacity to adapt to this accelerating rate of change is being greatly challenged. The vast majority of communities will become extinct during this cycle of Religious Life because their efforts to adapt will be unsuccessful. Fortunately, we know why.

Here are seven of the most common misguided efforts. They will:

1. **Make new improved versions of the past.** Just like the new improved versions of toothpaste or soap, communities will make new and improved versions of themselves. They will attempt to do what they have always done, only a little bit better.
2. **Try harder, not differently.** They will try harder to tighten their belts, reduce expenses, postpone retirement, downsize, rightsize, and repurpose buildings, hoping for a different outcome, rather than try differently.
3. **Play it safe, rather than innovate.** They will play it safe, rather than innovate, out of a fear of making bad investments, losing their reputations, or of failing. As it turns out, playing it safe is the riskiest choice of all.



4. **Engage in incremental, rather than deep change.** They will favor small changes where the outcomes are predictable, conversations are manageable, and things are more controllable, rather than the chaos of deep change.
5. **Avoid something bad, rather than create something good.** They will worry more about making mistakes, rather than focusing their attention and resources on new possibilities.
6. **Download the same information, rather than create a new operating system.** They will download the same information using the same operating system, rather than create a new operating system, a shift in consciousness, that allows novel possibilities to emerge.
7. **Focus on external change, rather than the inner work.** They will focus on changing what's on the surface of their lives (land, buildings, finances, ministries, and the number of people in leadership), and largely ignore what's underneath, the personal and interpersonal work of transformation.

The common denominator here, if you haven't caught it, is *fear*. If communities are not to remain an analogue culture in a digital world, they will need a great deal of courage to adapt and change. Take a moment and jot some thoughts in response to this third question.

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*Is your community experiencing any of these misguided efforts? Which ones and how do you understand this?*

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While adaptation and changes are necessary, these efforts alone are not enough, *if* the desire is to transform. There is, still, a deeper invitation. To get to that deeper invitation, let me draw the distinction between change and transformation. Change is an external event, a new arrangement of things and, sometimes, an invitation to transform. However, as they say in Alcoholics Anonymous, "You can change where you live, but you take your patterns with you."

In other words, if we change only the surface things and ignore the deeper work, the old story will migrate to a new venue. We take it with us to our new relationships, new places of ministry, or new places of living. Over the years we become imprisoned by these old stories, old structures, old ways of thinking and patterned ways of living. This is what Freud called "repetition compulsion" or what Einstein called a "betrayal of the soul." In other words, you can make external changes, but that's not the same as a transformation.

Transformation, in contrast, is an internal process, a journey that shifts the meaning and purpose of our lives. It shifts the patterns and practices of our lives and the structures that support them. It shifts our identity and realigns our soul with its outward expression. It is what Carl Jung meant when he said: "The greatest problems in life can never be solved, only outgrown." Transformation is not problem solving. It is a maturational leap, a soul to surface realignment of life.

The most obvious example here would be your decision to enter Religious Life. This was more than a change. It was a transformation. You didn't just change what you wore, where you lived, or your title. You transformed your primary relationships and commitments, your rhythm, practices and daily routines, your values and worldview, your identity and life's meaning and purpose, and you transformed your relationship with God. It was a soul-shifting experience that opened up an entirely new narrative for your life. It is the Paschal Mystery, not as a cerebral knowing, but as a living faith and experiential knowing.

However, every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end. Crisis always precedes transformation, but does not insist upon it. A crisis, by definition, is a situation in which our capacity to cope is exceeded by the stressors we face. When in crisis, we have a choice to either change in an attempt to ease the pain or we transform the pain into a new beginning. More often than not, we try to *change* by either reducing the stressors or increasing our capacity to cope. Sometimes, however, we choose the road less traveled, a path of *transformation* that brings forth new life.

What happens at a graced crossroads? On the reverse side of your handout, you'll see a table with the words, "Graced Crossroads" and "Deeper Invitation." Let the left side represent your personal experience, and the right side represent your communal experience.

Now I'm asking you to reflect for a moment on two kinds of transitions. The first will be one of your own, personal, life-changing transitions, past or present. The second will be the transition your community is now facing. The purpose of this reflection is to draw upon your personal experience as a means for helping you to appreciate what your community is now facing.

We have all been here, where the ground beneath us shifts and we are brought to our knees, only to be transformed, not merely changed. Recall for a moment a crossroads in your own life, one from the past or a current one. This might be a serious illness, a job loss, the death of a family member or close friend, or a broken relationship or commitment you once vowed to preserve. On the left side of the paper, jot down a word, phrase or image that captures your personal crossroads experience. Recall, also, its deeper invitation and jot that down. I'll give you a moment to recall such an experience and its deeper invitation.

Now reflect upon the transition your community is now facing. How would you describe this crossroads? On the right side of the paper, give it a headline. Jot down a word, phrase or image that captures the crossroads your community is now facing and what might be its deeper invitation? I'll give you a moment. Now hold both your personal and communal experiences in your minds and heart as I describe some of things that happen at these graced crossroads and deeper invitation they might offer.

Alcoholics Anonymous call these experiences "hitting bottom," the point at which we are forced to admit that there is a grave problem and we need to reach out for help. It is not

a time to throw in the towel, but a recognition that, alone, we are not enough to bring about our own healing or open a new door to the future. People of a Christian faith might call this a “dark night of the soul.” For communities, as in our personal lives, this can be a “graced crossroads.”

A graced crossroads, while it is a painful place, can simultaneously be a profoundly freeing place to be, if we let it. It can be a place of refuge where we gladly “take the yoke” (Matthew 11:29). As painful as it is, at a graced crossroads there is a feeling of liberation and relief once we let go of denying our own suffering or fighting against it. It is liberating for us, for a community, once we let go of all the unnecessary suffering that comes from our exhausting and futile attempts to cling to what is no longer working, to control what is outside of our control, and to deny, blame and shame ourselves or others for our suffering.

When we hit bottom, we begin to know what’s really real, who’s there for us and who isn’t, who believes in us, and who doesn’t. When we hit bottom, and finally accept the hand we’ve been dealt, we begin to ask questions for which there are no immediate answers, but for which answers must be found. With our denial gone, we can begin to listen and search for these answers. We can begin to hear that still, small voice whispering a deeper invitation (1 Kings 19:11-13). The Celts call this a “thin” time, or a place where the veil between the two worlds of heaven and earth is thin. Christine Paintner, in *The soul’s slow ripening*, calls this a “threshold time,” when we are moving from one time and one awareness to another. It is a place where we can make “deeper connections with the divine.”<sup>ii</sup>

Grace flourishes in every nook and cranny of creation, but never are we more aware of its presence and amenable to its ways than when we are at such a crossroads. Grace comes bidden and unbidden, whether we are aware of it or not. When we arrive at a crossroads, individually or as a community, the pain we must endure hollows us out. We are emptied of all hubris and stripped of our defenses. It is here in the deep quiet of own soul’s searching that we come face to face with those parts of ourselves we have rejected, hidden from ourselves and from those we loved. It is here, at these crossroads, that grace works its way into every nook and cranny of our being.

A graced crossroads, for individuals and communities, is a place wherein God continually puts before us choices between life and death. God beckons, beseeches us to choose life, but these choices are always ours to make. Religious communities are now at a graced crossroads, a threshold between what was and what is yet to come. Here, at these graced crossroads, is a *deeper invitation: Choose life* so that your descendants might live. *Choose life* so that you might live more fully in whatever time you have left. *Choose life* so that you might have a hand in the transformation of Religious Life and our planetary home, bringing Christ into our world.

In every crisis, at every graced crossroads, there is a deeper invitation. Look again at what you noted as your graced crossroads and its deeper invitation. I’ll give you a moment to jot down any further reflections that might be emerging within you.

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*What is your experience of your graced crossroads and its deeper invitation?*

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The Divine Paschal Mystery of transformation is beyond our comprehension, but it surely does not happen without our active participation. Sitting in a prison cell, a young Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, “Human progress never rolls on the wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men (and women) willing to be co-workers with God.” You can either try to plan your future or create the conditions for grace to intercede. To do the former, you must presume to know what the future is. To do the latter, you need to learn how to cooperate with grace and do the inner work of transformation.

Not far from where my daughter, Kelly once lived is a place called Death Valley. Death Valley is the hottest, driest place in the United States. Nothing grows there because it doesn’t rain. Hence, its name. However, on rare occasions, against all odds, it does rain in Death Valley. And when it does, the entire floor of Death Valley becomes carpeted in flowers, a phenomenon called a “super bloom.” What this tells us is that Death Valley isn’t really dead. It’s dormant. Right beneath the barren surface are seeds of possibility waiting for the right conditions to come about. In other words, in organic systems, *if the conditions are right, life is inevitable. It happens all the time.*

When you think of shaping your future, it might help you to think of it as an approach based more on the principles of farming. Now, I’m not a farmer, but I know enough to recognize that farming, like human growth and transformation, is not a linear or mechanical process. It is an organic and emergent process. And you cannot predict or engineer the outcome of organic processes. All you can do, like farming, is create the conditions under which life can flourish; plant the seeds, and let God take care of the rest.

What is the inner work of transformation that helps create the conditions for grace to intercede and for life to flourish? In my work with religious women and men across different cultures, I have offered them an approach that relies on the principles and processes of transformation. It is a means for cooperating with grace that I’ve described in my book, *Graced Crossroads*.<sup>iii</sup> I can’t describe these in detail, but let me give you the shorthand version. You have a handout on these, as well.

These are the five dynamic elements that, when woven together, constitute the key processes for personal and communal transformation:

1. Shifts in consciousness: creating a new narrative
2. Reclaiming our inner voice: the seat and soul of everything that lives
3. Reconciliation and conversion: the womb of our becoming
4. Experimentation and learning: acting our way into a new way of being
5. Transformative visioning: listening to our deepest longings

These five dynamic elements comprise the inner work of transformation, ways of cooperating with grace and creating the conditions for new life to emerge. What these

processes come down to, and this inner work requires, is exactly the theme for this gathering: our willingness to let down our defenses and embrace our own vulnerability with radical dependence on the grace of God. It requires that we take off our masks and embrace the full measure of what means to be human, not just our joys and talents, but our foibles, frailties, and raw emotions.

This pathway to deep change and transformation, as I said, is not for the faint of heart. It takes courage to risk rejection when we open our hearts and share our true selves with others. It takes courage to surrender and let go of the people and places we once loved, a way of life we once cherished, to give way to the new life. It takes courage to reconcile, to offer and seek forgiveness, and to pursue our deepest longings in the face of resistance from our family and community. And for communities who choose to go down this path, to take this Exodus journey, they will need leaders who courageously embrace their vulnerability and help their members do the same.

Courage, of course, is not the absence of fear, but the willingness to act in the face of it. The root word for “courage” is heart; it means to have heart. We need to dispel the myth and masculine norms that being vulnerable is some kind of character flaw. Somehow, we have this myth that leaders are supposed to portray unwavering strength, to act professional, to barricade themselves in certainties, and to mask any emotions that could belie this portrayal. They are supposed to armor themselves against hurt or rejection and pretend that they are cool and calm when they’re not. They are supposed to speak from their intellect and hide their heart. It’s lunacy and death-dealing!

Cross-cultural studies on leadership make it abundantly clear that the most important qualities of a leader are to be grounded, honest, real, and relatable. A credible leader is someone courageous enough to risk the possibility of failure or of looking like a fool in pursuit of something more noble. Isn’t that what your founders and foundresses did? How can you be a credible leader if you are not grounded, honest, real and relatable, generously sharing your gifts and talents, as well as your foibles, frailties and feelings?

People need leaders who are compassionate, not just clever; empathic, not just smart; real and relatable, not lofty or aloof. We need leaders who inspire us because of their humanity, not in spite of it. Wasn’t this what Jesus did for us? He didn’t armor-plate his heart and grow a “thicker skin,” as so many leaders are advised to do. He didn’t hide from others or preach from the pulpit. He was right in there with us, entirely vulnerable, risking it all, utterly divine in his humanity. Isn’t this why we are inspired by the lives of Nelson Mandela, Mother Theresa, Mahatma Gandhi, Teresa of Ávila, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, and Oscar Romero? Isn’t that what moves us when we hear the Dalai Lama, Greta Thunberg, Desmond Tutu, Amanda Gorman, Thich Nhat Hanh, Malala Yousafzai, and anyone who gifts us with their utter passion and presence, their humility and humanity?

Embracing our vulnerability is a paradox, like so many biblical teachings. The literal interpretation sounds foolish. Its wisdom, for those who listen, lies beneath the surface. “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:11). “The last shall be first, and

the first last” (Matthew 20:16). “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it” (Matthew 16:25).

Embracing our vulnerability, living in the fullness of our humanity with hearts wide open, is what transforms us. The only people who don’t experience being vulnerable are those without empathy or compassion. Those who embrace it know its beauty, its creative potential; they know that being vulnerable is what makes us human and has the power to heal and transform hearts. They have come to know that we can’t selectively numb out our fear, shame, or guilt without also extinguishing our joy, love, and compassion. Those who embrace it in themselves can embrace it in others. I’ll give you a moment to note your reflections to this question.

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*Embracing your vulnerability is key to the inner work of transformation. In what ways are you and your community embracing your vulnerability and engaging in the inner work of transformation?*

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## Summary

There is a Great Turning taking place across our planetary home. The old stories are crumbling as new ones are emerging. There is no going back to the way things were. We stand at a graced crossroads now and we have a choice. We can react out of fear and take the well-trodden path of least resistance or we can wake up and respond with courage in search for the ancient path.

It is easy to lose hope during times like these when the challenges are so massive, complex and rapidly changing. During one of the darkest moments of my personal crossroads, I confessed to my wife, Beth that I could no longer permit myself to hope because I couldn’t stand the pain of disappointment. Beth put her arms around me and said, “I’ll carry the hope for you.” Never have I felt so loved. Hope for new life does not rest on your ability to recruit new members or extend your longevity. It rests in the hearts of existing members or there is no hope at all.

Carry the hope for each other, for members who no longer hope and for our world where hope is in short supply.

The world needs not only your hope, but your active participation as agents of transformation. What could be more needed now than *incarnating wisdom* in a world increasingly unmoored from truth, mesmerized by the media, and manipulated by self-serving politicians. We need your *compassionate presence* in our wounded world so prone to shaming, blaming, and scapegoating. We need models of *living community* in our world wherein we seem more interested in building walls than bridges. What could be more needed now than for you to *incarnate the Gospel values* of love, kindness, inclusivity, mutuality, forgiveness, restorative justice, and mercy in a world so polarized and prone to violence?



Thomas Merton tells us that grace is granted to us in proportion to how well we “dispose ourselves to receive it.”<sup>iv</sup> We have only to create the conditions for grace to intercede and dispose ourselves to receive it. For a community to do this, it will need to engage not only in organizational change but choose to embrace the *personal* and *interpersonal* soulwork of transformation. Admittedly, the personal and interpersonal work is far more messy, intimate and painful than organizational change, and that is exactly why most groups avoid it. Yet, members, and the communities they create, are the heart and soul, the glue that holds it all together. If there is no concentrated focus upon personal and communal transformation, *what will you have, and who will you be, at the end of all of your organizational change?*

Transformation is not a boardgame and does not come in a box with a set of instructions. It doesn't take place as a result of a great speech or one-and-done assemblies. It does not fit neatly into artificial timelines, such as leadership terms or Chapter cycles. It is not a strategic plan. In this sense, it is more a pilgrimage than a plan, more about the sort of people you are becoming, than an effort to create some kind of grand vision. If you want a strategic plan, discern what will make God smile, and then implement it. There's your strategic plan.

Transformation is an ongoing process of conversion that takes place over time as a result of our courage, creativity and tenacity. Doing this kind of soulwork requires that we embrace our vulnerability, admit that we are human, blessed and broken, and stop the lunacy of speaking only out of our heads. We have to pull together and rebuff this madness of individualism. No one is a soloist. The ancient African language of *Ubuntu* tells us: a person is a person through other persons, that my humanity is caught up, bound up, inextricably, with yours. We need to remember that we belong to one another, that we are made for each other. Mother Theresa once said, “If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten one another.”

Now is a time of reckoning, and it in these times of trial that we are tested, tested to our very soul. Now we will learn how large or small is our heart, how merciful, how caring, how faithful, how responsible we have yet to be. I pray that all of us have the strength to remember that life is fragile. We are all vulnerable. We will all, at some point in our lives, stumble and fall. We must carry this in our hearts: What we have been given is very special; it can be taken from us and, when it is taken from us, we will be tested to our very souls. It is in these times, and in this kind of pain, that we are invited to look deep inside ourselves, follow the ancient path and count on our Love to pull us through.

During times of transition, when all hope seems to vanish, the veil between ordinary life and the Divine Presence becomes thin, and grace does more abound. Here, at a graced crossroads, there is a *deeper invitation*. Listen to the lure and love God calling you to choose life, not only for ourselves, but for all those to whom we profess our love, our descendants, and future generations. The world needs you now as leaven, as salt, as the remnant God can use to transform the world. No matter your age, your ministry, or circumstances, you can be a presence that transforms.

Let me ask again: What are you seeking? A journey of transformation is for those who are courageous enough to listen and respond to a deeper invitation. It is for those who, by embracing their vulnerability and doing their inner work can learn to cooperate with grace and participate in this Divine Mystery of transformation. Those who participate in these ways will have the opportunity not only to transform themselves, but they will help facilitate the emergence of a new Religious Life, a new world stirring. They will put their mark on this Great Turning and add a page to the ongoing story of creation.

Thank you for the privilege of your presence.

*“Stand at the crossroads and look.”  
What are you seeking and what is the path you are walking?*

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<sup>i</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat : A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, 1st further updated and expanded hardcover ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

<sup>ii</sup> Christine Valters Paintner, *The Soul's Slow Ripening : 12 Celtic Practices for Seeking the Sacred*, (Notre Dame: Sorin Books,, 2018). p.1.

<sup>iii</sup> Ted Dunn, *Graced Crossroads: Pathways to Deep Change and Transformation* (St. Charles, MO: CCS Publications, 2020).

<sup>iv</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Ascent to Truth*, A Harvest/Hbj Book (New York ; London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), p.5.





## Spirituality of Synodality

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She studied theology at the Pontifical University of Salamanca and obtained a degree in Dogmatic Theology at the University of Deusto (Bilbao). She did her doctorate in dogmatic theology at the Gregorian University in Rome with the theme the Glory of God in Ignatius of Loyola - *Gloria de Dios en Ignacio de Loyola* (Madrid, 2005).

In 2002, she began teaching at the Faculty of Theology of the Comillas Pontifical University, in the Department of Dogmatic and Fundamental Theology, where she her work in teaching and research. She has been collaborating with the Ignatian Research Group GEI since 2005 and teaches courses in the Ignatian Spirituality Master: *Ignatiana*, and in the School of Directors of Spiritual Exercises.

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### 1. What Do We Mean When We Say Spirituality?

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- Spirituality: a quality related to the spirit (etymology)

According to its etymological origin<sup>1</sup>, *Spirituality* is a quality related to the spirit. The condition and nature of what is spiritual.

- Spirituality as a source of life

Dictionaries translate “spirit” as “vital breath.” As the air that envelops us and which we breathe is fundamental to every person’s life; it is the source of life that

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<sup>1</sup> The noun “spiritus”, which can be translated as “soul”, but also as breath, life, force, drive, spirit. The particle “-alis” is used to express “relative to” and the suffix “-ty” means “quality.”

makes us exist. Hence, we can say that spirituality is present as a life-giving principle for any human being and as a way of relating from the deepest part of oneself with that “source of life,” or with an otherness that transcends us. For us, that source is obviously God (his Spirit).

- Spirituality as a social skill

Spirituality makes us deeply aware that living is “co-existing,” that life is “communion.” It not only connects us with our “source of life,” but also with others. Therefore, the relational aspect is vital in every spirituality.

Hence, spirituality has been defined as the social ability to care for relationships at all levels and, so, to promote a full and meaningful life.

- Spirituality as motivation

A person’s spirituality is the deepest part of his or her being; it concerns his or her motivations, ideals, and passion. “*Spirituality is the motivation that permeates life projects and commitments*” (Segundo Galilea). Consequently, it is something that has to do with the root that moves one’s personal life and its fundamental relationships, its intentionality and activity. We could say that spirituality defines a person’s way of life.

- Spirituality as a frame of mind, an inspiration for the activity of a person or community

Yet, since it is also a communitarian reality, it can be defined as the conscience and motivation<sup>2</sup> of a group, of a people.<sup>3</sup>

The spirituality of a subject, group, or people is its way of being and relating to the totality of reality, to its transcendent and historical dimension.

Asking ourselves about their “spiritual life,” of course, means reflecting on the cultivation of silence, prayer, contemplation, but also on social and civic life, on socio-political commitment, on the use of money and time, on the seriousness and honesty at work, about their ways of seeking happiness and facing pain, on how they live their daily life, etc.

Spirituality must be framed in all these intertwined perspectives. Each dimension is co-determining and is co-determined by others.

- The Spirit leads us to take charge of reality. The need for discernment

Christian spirituality is a way of living the Gospel by the power of the Spirit; yet, it is, therefore, at the same time, a way of apprehending reality and, hence, of

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<sup>2</sup> The spirituality of a person, of a community, and of a people constitutes their motivation in life, their mood, the inspiration of their activity, their utopia, their causes: P. CASALDALIGA - J. M<sup>a</sup> VIGIL, *Espiritualidad de la Liberación*, Editorial Envío, Managua, 1992, 23. In this same line, “Spirituality is the motivation that permeates the life projects and commitments, the motivation and mystique that permeates and inspires the commitment.” S. GALILEA, *El camino de la espiritualidad*, Paulinas, Bogota, 1985, 26.

<sup>3</sup> It is the “macro-ecumenical” spirituality spoken about by CASALDALIGA-VIGIL, *op. cit.*, 23–25, or “the fundamental theological dimension of spirituality” as J. SOBRINO calls it in “Espiritualidad y seguimiento de Jesús,” in: *Misterium Liberationis. Conceptos fundamentales de la Teología de la Liberación*, Trotta, 1990. T.II, 476.

dealing with it. Therefore, it is the very action of the Spirit that impels us, with a specific disposition, to take charge of reality.

In consequence, if we understand “spirituality as the frame of mind with which we face reality, WITH WHICH WE TAKE CHARGE OF REALITY, of the history in which we live with all its complexity, we can ask ourselves *which spirit/disposition is adequate, and which is not, at each moment of history.*”<sup>4</sup> Hence, the importance of *discernment* as an “instrument or mediation.”

In our case, spirituality will then be the spirit with which we take charge of the reality in which we live and to which we are sent, that is, of the *Missio Dei*. And discernment will be the tool that allows us to harmonize this spirit or disposition with the “Spirit of God” who guides us in this enterprise.

In reality, the various spiritualities that have emerged in the life of the Church and been concretized in the different forms of life and religious families, have been exactly that: letting oneself be guided by the Spirit guide towards one or another way of “taking charge of reality,” in response to its needs throughout history.

On the basis of this conception, asking ourselves what spirituality we have, means asking ourselves what spirit moves us in our daily life, with what spirit we face reality here and now, with what spirit we face the *Missio Dei*.

Now, this is going to be a central question for us, and for getting progressively a sense of what it means to talk about a synodal spirituality. Furthermore, it will make us increasingly aware of what this way of understanding “spirituality” demands of us in our lives as we “take charge”—and, so, “bear and take charge”<sup>5</sup> of history, of reality, of social, political, economic, religious problems, etc., of our concrete multicultural situation, in the “here and now” of synodality.

Thus, spirituality reveals itself as a path of life, a path of experience, a path of pursuit, a human-divine path that embraces all that is human (body, senses, culture, society...), taking upon itself and becoming responsible for orienting it towards its destiny in God.

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## 2. Synodality: A Plural Term

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The International Theological Commission (ITC) describes synodality as a three-fold constitutive dimension of the Church,<sup>6</sup> which goes from the most external

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<sup>4</sup> J. SOBRINO, *op. cit.*, 449–76.

<sup>5</sup> Ignacio ELLACURÍA, “Hacia una fundamentación filosófica del método teológico latinoamericano,” *Estudios Centroamericanos*, 322–23 (1975) 411–25, here 419: Ellacuría understood the formal structure of intelligence as the “apprehension of reality and facing it,” which unfolds into three dimensions: “*assuming the charge of reality*” or the intellectual dimension; “*bearing reality*” or the ethical dimension; and “*taking charge of reality*” or the dimension of praxis. However, when looking at Ellacuría’s life and work, according to Jon Sobrino, a fourth dimension needs to be added: “*letting oneself borne by reality*” or the dimension of gratuitousness. Cf. José LAGUNA, “Hacerse cargo, cargar y encargarse de la realidad,” *Cuadernos CyJ* 172 (January 2011).

<sup>6</sup> See INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, n° 70: [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_sinodalita\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html) (orig. Spanish in COMISIÓN TEOLÓGICA INTERNACIONAL, *La sinodalidad en la vida y en la misión de la Iglesia: Texto y comentario del*

and concrete level to the most essential one. Firstly, synodality designates certain occasional events that we call synods, convoked by the competent authority. Secondly, the word indicates the *ecclesial structures and processes* that are at the service of discernment. Finally, the term's most essential meaning denotes to a particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the Church. This is the sense in which we are going to use it in this presentation.<sup>7</sup>

We can immediately perceive the connection between the ways of understanding “spirituality”—a way of taking charge of reality—and “synodality”—a particular style that characterizes the life and mission of the Church.

Synodality denotes a way of living and acting that defines the ecclesial community in its relationships *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Moreover, the etymological meaning of the word synod<sup>8</sup> allows us to understand it as “walking together.”

Therefore, we are tracking a particular way of walking together as the Church (synodality), in order to be able to, more and better, “take charge” of the world (spirituality). This is the essence of synodal spirituality: taking charge of reality, of the world, of the *Missio Dei*, walking together.

How do we “take charge” of our world’s situation, so that this taking charge is synodal, i.e., so that it is done with that particular style which influences our ecclesial life and our mission and that implies “walking together”?

I will try to identify some features that seem particularly important to me, at this time that we are living as a Church, that would characterize this synodal spirituality.

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### 3. Five Features of a Synodal Spirituality that Embraces Vulnerability

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#### *a) A Spirituality of Listening*

Synodal spirituality must be a spirituality of listening because the first thing we need to do in order to “take charge of the world” is “listen to it” and “listen to ourselves.” We can always listen! There is always someone who needs to be listened to!

Listening is “Decisive”, because it is one of the greatest needs that human beings experience: “*the unlimited desire to be listened to*”(Francis); and it is demanding because not just any kind of listening is enough—we must listen well, with attention to those we listen to, to what we listen to, and to how we listen.

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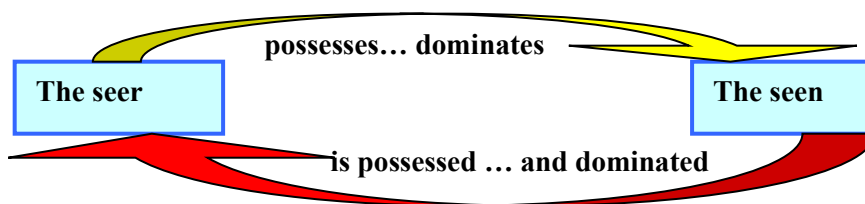
*documento de la Comisión Teológica Internacional, Estudios y ensayos 244 [Santiago Madrigal Terrazas, Autor, Redactor], BAC, Madrid 2019).*

<sup>7</sup> Not only is it the broadest, but it is the cornerstone of the other two.

<sup>8</sup> The word synod comes from the Latin *sinodus*, a word derived from the Greek σύνοδος (encounter, meeting, assembly), composed of the Greek prefix συν- (meeting, joint action) and the root ὁδος (route, road, walk).

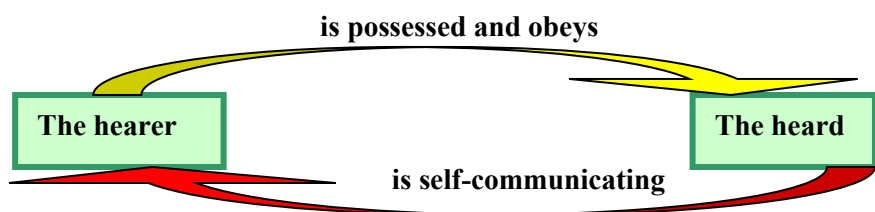
The Bible constantly reminds us that listening is more than auditory perception and that it is linked to the dialogical relationship between God and humanity. The entire Torah rests on a previous disposition: “Listen Israel” (the Shema) (Deut 6:4). The initiative is always that of God who speaks to us; and we respond, first, by listening. Yet, this listening is ultimately made possible by His Word, coming from His grace.

This is so true that St. Paul affirms: “Faith comes from listening” (Rom 10:17). Ultimately, believing means seeing what is born of listening. Hence, for the Bible, hearing—listening—is more important than seeing. Why?



The act of seeing is more imposing. The eye is the organ with which the world is possessed and dominated. Through the eye, the world becomes “*our world*” and is subordinated to us. We define and label reality. The seer is tempted to impose himself on the object he contemplates, to possess it on the basis of the pre-understanding he has of it, to judge it by its appearance alone. The relation established between the seer and the seen is an objectual relation.

Hearing makes it possible to relate to reality in a totally different way. First of all, because we cannot hear objects, we can only hear what they communicate, their development, their realization, their being-in-act... Moreover, “*we can neither determine nor control*” what we are going to hear.



The sound, the voice... “*the call*” comes, arrives, assaults us, surprises us... somehow we are defenseless before its arrival. What comes to the ear imposes itself on the listener; it startles him unexpectedly, and he can hardly do anything to avoid it.

Only by “*not wanting to listen,*” by “*turning a deaf ear*” would it be possible to avoid “*listening.*” Yet, only when we see what is born of listening, can we see with an interior gaze and believe.

God reveals Himself by communicating freely, and He also reveals Himself through reality, through events, and through others who speak. We are simply asked to “listen” so that we can put “our spirit/our disposition” in harmony with His Spirit.

This listening—as I said—is demanding. It calls for a disposition that begins with an “emptiness,” by making of space, by the abandonment of “my own love, desire, and interest” [SE 189], and the readiness to receive. For what purpose? So that I may welcome what the other person says without listening to myself, without distorting what he or she tells me, without interpreting before it touches me inside, without pretending that I possess, I control, I believe that I already know, thus remaining impervious to any novelty or astonishment. Emptying myself of my prejudices, of my polarizations, ready to make a free space that imposes nothing and is full of expectation.

There is no true listening without hope, without expecting something from the other to whom I am listening... without “holding back my expectations, desires, quests...” Without giving absolute priority to the one from whom the word comes. This is why listening also generates hope “in the others,” who feel listened to, who perceive that someone expects something from them, who believes in them, and so dignifies them. Listening is the recognition of others and, therefore, implies their dignity.

This is perhaps one of the most important aspects in the synodal life of the Church, and in all our Assemblies, where the most important thing is, and should be, listening. There, almost everything depends on the quality of this listening. For, without listening there is no discernment. Listening to the Spirit who speaks within us, listening to the Spirit who also speaks in each of our sisters and brothers. In all of them, not only in those who seem more interesting to me, who have more important positions, more power, more influence, or whose thinking is more like mine. Each and every one must be listened to, and in order to listen to each one, it is necessary to create that inner space that allows me to welcome “the other and her word” and, along with it, her experience, her reality, her perception of things, and the Spirit that dwells in her and wants to come out from her to meet me.

Emptying myself so that listening does not become merely the confirmation of my prejudices, an echo of my own voice.

HOW COULD WE TAKE CHARGE OF THE WORLD WITHOUT LISTENING TO IT, WITHOUT LETTING ITS CRY AND ITS NEEDS REACH US?

Listening, says the Pope,<sup>9</sup> corresponds to God’s humble style. This attitude of humility, it seems to me, is increasingly important if we intend to live a spirituality of listening.

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<sup>9</sup> FRANCIS, *Message for the 56<sup>th</sup> World Day of Social Communications: Listening with the ears of the heart.*

God must be the paradigm of our listening. The Bible shows us a God who listens. He listens to the cry of His people, He hears their complaint, their word... and in doing so He recognizes them as His interlocutor, as His *partner*. God “inclines his ear” to listen to man and allows Himself to be affected by this listening. The omnipotent, impassive God becomes passive when He listens to the voice of His people, of His child.

Jesus also reveals to us this humble attitude of God letting Himself be affected, letting Himself be changed, letting Himself be transformed by listening. The text of the Canaanite woman<sup>10</sup> is a unique example of this “certainly vulnerable” listening, which affects and transforms. A poor woman who engages in dialogue with Jesus who, at first, “sees” her from her prejudices: she is a *Syrian-Phoenician*, a pagan, she does not belong to those to whom he has been sent. Yet, when she speaks, then what Jesus sees, “is born from listening,” and Jesus listens humbly. Therefore, the woman’s word also becomes, for him, the presence of the Spirit of the Father who guides him and makes him reconsider his position and his intention.

We will not be able to “EMBRACE VULNERABILITY ON THE SYNODAL JOURNEY” without introducing “vulnerable” listening into our way of dealing with reality. Yet, only humble listening can really affect and change us.

Without humility, there is no listening. Without listening, there is no synodal journey.

We cannot listen in just any way. The disposition of “authentic listening” necessarily places us:

- 1) “*from below*,” in this sense. With the humility of the one who recognizes in the other, someone from whom she can learn, worthy of being listened to in depth... Someone who can change you. With the humility of the God who descends in order to listen... the God who “inclines his ear.”
- 2) From “*near*.” Listening asks for proximity, risking distance, letting myself be touched by the other person’s reality. Listening is “*that capacity of the heart that makes proximity possible*.”
- 3) Therefore, listening must also be “*from within*.” The true seat of listening is the heart. St. Augustine used to say: “*Do not have your heart in your ears, but your ears in your heart*.” This speaks to us of the necessary depth that all listening must have. It is a matter of accepting the other’s truth with the heart, with what is essential... free of garb and superficial questions... Listening and letting ourselves to be “affected and moved” so that not only ideas reach us but also the experience, the life, the feeling of the person to whom we are listening. Without this “from within” our listening can never be merciful.

Consequently, authentic listening must always be preceded by “silence.” This silence allows us to get in touch with ourselves and with the source of life of our existence, to get into our guts, into our hearts, and to empty ourselves of

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<sup>10</sup> P. ALONSO, *The Woman who Changed Jesus: Crossing Boundaries in Mk 7:24-30*, Peeters, Leuven, 2011.



everything that prevents us, not so much from listening, but from making ourselves “available to listen.”

Listening is part of our mission. “The service of listening has been entrusted to us by the One who is the listener par excellence,” the Pope said. The first service we can render to communion is precisely “listening”. Bonhoeffer said that “*someone does not know how to listen to his brother shall soon be unable to listen to God.*”<sup>11</sup> Now, this is something that we can always do, whether old or young, agile or moving with difficulty; it is always possible to listen, to spend our time listening to the other, to take charge of reality by “listening to it.”

Listening as God listens to us, listening as Jesus invites us to listen: a kind of “*listening that gives the other the faculty to speak*” (*hearing to speech*), and that in mutual listening is transforming.<sup>12</sup>

A spirituality of listening is born from this source: the perspective of a God who listens, and listens to all, and listens especially to the “voiceless,” to the most vulnerable, to those who have been left without words, and does so by awakening in them the faculty to speak, because His listening is always liberating.<sup>13</sup>

For this reason “being listened to”, being WELL heard,<sup>14</sup> is always a healing experience. Simple listening heals many wounds. It enables the one who is listened to reverse and recreate his own narratives as one who is wounded, and to find ways of healing from there, to get out of the process of victimization, to regain her identity and dignity—not thanks to our advice but because of the quality of our listening, for it offers that humble but intimate space where it is possible to experience oneself as remade, healed, repaired.

Only by being committed to a spirituality of listening can we take steps towards the change for which the Church is yearning, and take charge of reality by opening ourselves to dialogue and discernment since listening is the condition of possibility for both.

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<sup>11</sup> *Vida en comunidad*, Sigueme, Salamanca, 2003, 92.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Nelle MORTON, *The Journey is Home*, Boston, 1985.

<sup>13</sup> In such a way that with STEPHANIE KLEIN we could say that the talk of God and the evangelizing proclamation itself can be understood as a listening, a renewed style of accompaniment. She even ventures to affirm that “theological knowledge – practical, inductive or empirical – does not arise from the word of God, but from the listening of God to the theologian and from the listening of this, in turn, of other women”: Virginia R. AZCUY, “El método cualitativo en la teología feminista. La experiencia de las mujeres y un diálogo con Stephanie Klein sobre la escucha”: *Perspectiva Teológica* 53/3 (2021) 671-700, here, 692. “A proclamation understood as a way of listening and receiving the other person as a way of encouraging one’s own language” in coherence with a sinodality that implies listening as a fundamental practice of the Church’s life and mission. *Ibid*, 693.

<sup>14</sup> The Pope in his Message for the 56<sup>th</sup> World Day of Social Communications: *Listening with the ears of the heart*, finely notes some uses of the ear that are not true listening: Listening secretly and spying. That knowing everything when we are not summoned to listen. Store information, saving its use for self-interest. Listening to ourselves when others speak. Distorting what others say, interpreting on the basis of my own points of view, leaving no room for others to speak to each other, or making them say what they did not say or did not want to say. Selective listening that erases what does not interest me and only leaves room for what fits my way of seeing. Instrumental listening, used as a springboard to make my response shine.



## *b) A Spirituality of Dialogue*

A synodal spirituality must be a spirituality of dialogue. For if synodality speaks to us of “walking together”, the word “dialogue” (from the Greek *diálogos*: *diá/logos*), on the basis of its etymology,<sup>15</sup> expresses the idea of “thinking/talking together” or more concretely: “two speaking/thinking.”

If the aim is to “take charge” of reality by walking together (synodal), this can only happen “in the mutual speaking/thinking of those who are walking together” (dialogal).

Despite the importance of listening, more is needed before we can talk about dialogue. We need a subject who can speak. This is how we have been created: as listeners of the word, capable of responding to what we hear.

Dialogue is based on the power and the mystery of the word. We have the power to express reality, to say to ourselves who we are. The word is one of the most powerful instruments we have to express ourselves, to open a way to externalize our interiority, and obviously to communicate and dialogue.

Yet, in order to do so, the word has to spring from the interiority and be the bearer of the truth that inhabits us. That is why the word is always accompanied by gestures, looks, a tone of voice, that reflect the emotions it conveys, the experiences throbbing beneath the sounds and the objective meanings that are transmitted, which are thus nuanced and enriched.

However, if the word is to be the true mediator of dialogue, it must also be “born from listening” and not primarily from one’s own vision. The word is always a second moment.

So, we must once again turn to humility. Only a humble word is capable of entering into the construction of a dialogue. A word which, after the listening, sets out on the path of a quest that, starting from its own truth, tries to co-construct with the heard word a new word, a greater word.

The word that dialogues does not fly out like an arrow sure of reaching its goal, but it lets itself be shaped by what is heard; it stops and waits for the right moment; knowing that it is incomplete, groping and trembling, it tries to stammer out what—in the conjunction of the word heard, of the lived experience, and of the experienced shock—emerges as an answer; now that word, in some way, no longer belongs to me because it sprouts as a consequence of an encounter and a joint creation.

Dialogue is always the co-creation of a narrative that is different from the narratives of the subjects who meet. A word attentive to life, to others, and to everything that happens through it is the one that can get involved in this construction and create a true dialogue that tries to generate “something new,” in a joint and open narrative, which passes through the possible polarities—where we always tend to settle—, without dwelling on them, and to reach common meanings that turn words into referents on which we can rely because, after this encounter, they have acquired a new meaning in which we find ourselves more deeply. They allow us to look at reality together, to express it, saying the same thing, and so

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<sup>15</sup> *diá* is a preposition meaning “by means of,” “between,” “through,” and by similarity to *dyo*, also “two” and *Logos* comes from *legein*, “to speak” but also “to think.”

also to “take charge of it.” In this sense, the spirituality of dialogue is essential for us on this synodal journey.

However, in order to enter into this spirituality, we must take *the risk of dialogue*: the “*risk of being together.*”

This means taking the risk of “*letting ourselves be affected,*” which has already begun in listening but does not end there, since it is not enough to let ourselves be moved, to welcome the diversity of others and their ideas, motivations, arguments, feelings, and experiences... “*Letting ourselves be affected*” must transform us, “move the floor under our feet,” shaking our securities and our convictions—not because they unavoidably have to be converted or changed, but because it is necessary to be open to the possibility that there is some truth in what I do not share, do not see, or do not understand. It is a matter of allowing the perspectives and experiences of others to enter me, to open my horizon of understanding, to help me understand other ways of reading reality—that reality we want to take charge of. These “*other ways*” must not necessarily be better, but not worse either. In any case, if I can let them in, they will enrich my horizon and my perspectives, and make me capable of dialogue.

Letting myself be affected means that I am able to feel and sympathize with others, take charge of their situation, their vision and their feelings.

Letting myself be affected softens my positions and my arguments because I feel that the other’s perspective interests me and concerns me, and I want to understand it, even if I do not share it or may be moved to share it, in whole or in part.

Letting oneself be affected supposes admitting that allowing others and their world to meet mine and to enter into dialogue requires opening oneself to the possibility of *transformation*.

We will not be able to engage in dialogue unless we take this “*risk of letting ourselves be affected,*” and without embracing this spirit of dialogue, we will never be able to move towards a synodal way of life.

### **AN ICON: Emmaus. A Dialogue on the Way**

*“And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them.” (Lk 24:15)*

Dialogue appears here as a “theological place”. The Risen One becomes present “in the space of the shared word,” in the search for unfound answers that remain open questions, in the deep communication connecting two wounds, in the “despair” that provokes the flight which, through dialogue, becomes an “exit” that, in turn, through the “repairing encounter” leads “back” to the community, to communion, and makes them “witnesses of hope.”

Dialogue is shown here as a proper space for “the appearance of the Risen One.” Yet, this is possible because the dialogue was open enough to welcome and include the stranger, the other, the unknown, and humble enough to listen, not only to the stranger who comes to meet them and apparently “knows nothing about

what is happening,” that is, someone “without knowledge and experience of their experience, of the ‘object,’ of the subject of their conversation.”

They have been “listened to” with empathy and attention, by the one who has interrupted their conversation. Now, they open themselves to listening: without prejudices, without criticism, without arrogance—What can this guy tell us, since he knows nothing about what everybody else knows, nothing about what we have personally experienced and that has ruined our lives, our future projects, our love, and our hope...

They listen with such humility that they make it possible for the truth to emerge and to come through as a novelty that is made possible when personal perspectives and readings of reality are offered and delivered.

Deep listening. That of the stranger who speaks from his open side—from his wound. And the listening of those travelers of Emmaus, who speak from that other wound that ousts them from Jerusalem, from the community, from the project dreamed of and cherished with Jesus, desolate and without hope.

This dialogue “from the wounds” is healing because it allows the truth to emerge, because it sheds light on the past, gives hope for the future, and creates communion in the present.

This dialogue is a profound acceptance of the other, to the point of asking him to “stay,” to “*remain*.” It is an empathetic and attentive dialogue—“*it makes the heart burn*”—, and also creates bonds that in turn seek to recover other bonds.

In the Emmaus scene, we see how a conversation becomes a dialogue, and as it does:

1. it becomes a theological place
2. it reminds us that every dialogue calls for an outward movement and, at the same time, for openness that is ready to include the “stranger,” the “other,” and to situate oneself with “humility,” from below and from nearby, so that it can be finally done from “within.”
3. Dialogue requires recognizing the other as “other,” as a person: her dignity and her ability to bring me something.
4. A real dialogue calls for a deep relationship, which from self-knowledge and from the depths of oneself, enters into the other’s interior. A dialogue is always a heart-to-heart relationship. It will be all the more authentic when the communication is established from common vulnerability. The pilgrim connects his wound (already resurrected but wounded) with the wounded heart of the pilgrims of Emmaus. The encounter from our vulnerabilities makes a deeper, more authentic dialogue possible that is more able to generate “newness.”
5. A dialogue creates a new space, where it is possible to recreate the meanings not only of words but also of experiences, emotions, situations, and points of view... This space is a “among” that is called to move towards a “we” and to make this “we” ever greater. In this “among,” it is possible to “think together,” and so generate a common worldview and a common project.
6. Finally, this kind of dialogue is essentially healing: it restores lost identity, transforms the sadness of failure into joy, the hopeless flight into return and proclamation; shame and fear into witness. The dialogue

changes their outlook and reality; a new light shines on them, and everything becomes new.

### ***c) A Spirituality of Discernment***

Synodal spirituality invites us to take charge of the world by listening and dialoguing. That is why we have spoken of a spirituality of listening and dialogue which demands, in turn, the attention and gaze of the heart that all discernment requires, so that we may together truly take charge of reality.

#### **Why Should Synodal Spirituality Be a Spirituality of Discernment?**

The reason is very simple. We cannot take charge of the world, together, on the road to universal communion—which is the goal of this process of synodal change—simply through agreements, soundings what the majority thinks, groping for points of alignment... If we are willing to live a spirituality of listening and dialogue, in the demanding terms of which I have spoken, this listening and dialogue are to be open to the Spirit and allow Him to permeate the newness born of the dialogical “among”, so that the dialogue consciously and explicitly becomes a theological place that includes the Other—written with a capital O—, welcoming and hosting the Spirit who descends on that “among,” while emerging from that “among,” thus permitting a true spiritual discernment in the search for concrete ways of “taking charge” of the world.

The Spirit guiding the synodal journey is the Spirit of the Father who, like Jesus, guides him by being “above him.” Yet, the same is the Spirit of Jesus, who dwells in him and moves him “from within.” This Spirit has been given to us as a body, as a Church, and also as the Baptized. Hence, in this journey, we believers have to become aware of the presence that guides and illuminates us from above (inclines its ear and descends) and of the presence dwelling in us as a Body and alive in each one of us, and that through discernment—as the arrival point of a process begun in listening and dialogue—now allows himself to be finally found in that “among” jointly created among all... opening us to a light and a newness that confirms and expands, sustains and strengthens, enlightens and consoles, and makes the Next Possible Step in this Synodal journey feasible.

*Synodal spirituality is a spirituality of community discernment*, in which each and every one of us is invited to enter, precisely through listening and dialogue with others and with the Other who dwells in us and visits us through the Spirit, who is always the Spirit of Communion in Love, because that is the task of the Spirit in the divine life.

Living a spirituality of discernment implies knowing that we have to do our utmost to make it possible, and at the same time convinced that we will not be denied the light that will allow us “sufficient clarity” to advance by taking “the next possible step” with the joy of knowing that we are searching together and together receiving something that is not in our hands but in our willingness to allow ourselves to be visited simultaneously by the Spirit who cries out—so often with ineffable groans—from within each one of us, from within history and events, and also from within creation! and who speaks to us in a special and decisive way, descending into that “among” which is the fruit of our dispossession and surrender.

Discernment should be our guide in this synodal journey, so that we do not fail to take the “next possible step”, which, although small, laborious, and difficult, gives us fullness, identity, and consolation: that of walking together, building communion, and strengthening bonds while “searching for the ways” of this call to take charge of reality.

Yet, this reality is also inhabited by many who do not share our faith or any faith at all, but who walk with us through life and also live in this reality, who should also be included in this “among” and can be mediators of the Spirit for us.

The more we dare to walk new paths, the more rooted we need to be in our own tradition, and at the same time more open to others and their traditions. This does not mean denying our own tradition, but enriching and nourishing it, while confronting it with critical entities that may lead to further deepening or invite us to new conversions.

Now, “all” should do this, by embracing difference and escaping from the generalizing indifference that pretends to generalize and universalize what is not, while hiding the existence of what is different and making it inaccessible. This prevents so many people—and especially so many women—from recognizing themselves in their own identity or experiences... losing, in these generalizations, the specificity that they could contribute as if it were something non-existent.<sup>16</sup>

Hence, the call for a true discernment of the presence of limited and contextual theories, which evolve from listening into concrete experiences, of “powerless” ways of accessing reality that could in fact be very fertile... and yet are usually suffocated, reduced, and hidden by the “supposedly universalistic” bias of a masculine, western, theoretical, rich, and powerful universe.<sup>17</sup>

All this demands of discernment a “great openness” of spirit, also of the Spirit present in the diversity of the “little stories” of minorities, of those who are different...

This means discerning together with the God who speaks, but who also listens, and prompts a living word that transmits through the “most vulnerable and abused” lives (the poorest, marginalized, discarded and, of course, women) stimulating the emergence of a new, more inclusive, more differentiated, more nuanced, “more dangerous” language.

Only when “the difference” is incorporated in the conception of the universal is justice done to those who are different; only then can we say that we are really walking together towards that communion which can only be conceived in the image of the life of the triune God, one in the difference of persons.

If synodal spirituality demands that we walk together and think together, in order to discern together, this will require incorporating the differences and embracing not just the dominant stories but also the small stories of minorities.

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<sup>16</sup> Stephanie KLEIN, *Theologie und empirische Biographieforschung. Methodische Zugänge zur Lebens- und Glaubensgeschichte und ihre Bedeutung für eine erfahrungsbezogene Theologie* (Praktische Theologie 19), Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 1994, 64: “the origin of knowledge shaped to suit androcentrism disappears behind the generalizations.”

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

#### ***d) A Spirituality of Care: Tenderness, Care, and Reparation***

The next characteristic of synodal spirituality to which I am going to refer has to do more directly with the invitation to embrace vulnerability that the Assembly's motto addresses to us. We now need to become especially aware of the fact that the reality of which we must take charge is vulnerable and, in fact, violated in practically all its areas. The awareness that we are creatures, fragile, fallible... I am writing these pages at a time when Ukraine is being bombed and invaded, when thousands of men and women have become newly displaced, forced to abandon their homes (or the rubble to which they have been reduced), their land, and their hopes in order to flee towards a very uncertain future. I am typing these pages as attempts at dialogue fail again and again, and words seem to be worthless because they contradict each other and further inflame fear and mistrust. At a time when all our interests are confronted with the desire for help that never materializes. In this context of war and violence, of wounds, rupture, and death, this call to "take charge" and "bear" by trying to alleviate the burdens of others becomes clearer; the call to "take charge" of so many men and women who are suffering in our world today. And to do so knowing that we too are vulnerable, we too are wounded, and we too are capable of hurting.

We are, likewise, in an ecclesial moment, on the one hand, so full of hope that we are really able to get involved in this process and challenge that synodality poses to us and, on the other hand, so wounded by the issue of "abuses."

In this situation, two words become especially meaningful to me in this task of spirituality—"taking charge"—and in the intention to include "synodality" in our way of being in the world and in the Church: proximity<sup>18</sup> and care<sup>19</sup>.

"Proximity" is a good antidote to *indifference*, and "care" is the reverse of "*abuse*" in its multiple forms, as well as one of the most beautiful ways to take charge of others, of reality, of nature, and of ourselves.

Care that distances itself from both "paternalism" and "clericalism" because, far from entering into contact with the other as a passive subject, it is a stimulus, a provocation of word and decision, a source of trust, the facilitates autonomy.

Care is related to the idea of sustainability, understood in the substantive sense. It not only refers to issues regarding ecological, energetic, and natural sources. The idea of sustainability reminds us that when speaking about caring we are not referring to a precise act but rather to something that must be sustained over time and requires a change in the relationship with the nature-system, the life-system, and the Earth system.

Care also takes on greater importance because of its relationship to love. It is, in fact, our capacity to love that is questionable when we are uncaring because we care for whatever we love; and that is why caring is the fruit of love: "We care for what we love."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> J. M. ESQUIROL, *La resistencia íntima. Ensayo de una filosofía de la proximidad*, El Acantilado, Barcelona, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> F. TORRALBA, *Antropología del cuidar* (1998) and *Ética del cuidar* (2002).

<sup>20</sup> "If 'being spiritual means awakening to the deepest dimension that exists in us, which makes us sensitive to solidarity, to justice for all, to cooperation, to universal fraternity, to veneration and unconditional love; and control its opposites,' then it is spirituality that connects and re-connects us with all things, that opens



Hence, it is important for synodal spirituality to activate a spirituality of sustainable care that helps us to reinvent a new way of being in the world with others, with nature, with the Earth, and with the Ultimate Reality, with God.<sup>21</sup>

More concretely, what can this perspective of “care” contribute to synodality?

Every day I am increasingly convinced that a synodal way of being the Church, of relating to one another in the Church, and of living the *Missio Dei*, starting from the Church, is based on a firm commitment to make “care” our specific way of “taking charge of reality.”

It is, as I have said, a category destined to become a new paradigm for a world that is showing signs of exhaustion and extenuation, consumed by the violent and degrading consequences into which the paradigm of “success-power” has plunged us.

It is a polyhedral concept, capable of connecting with practically all orders of reality.

- 1) *Care for ourselves*, our interiority, our “spirit,” our wounds and fractures, so that we may be free and ready to care for others.
- 2) *Care for our relationship with God*. Caring for our connection with the source of life, with the One who takes care of us, rooting our trust and our hopes in Him, abandoning to Him our worries, in order to be able to “take charge” of the mission that He leaves in our hands.
- 3) *Care for the bonds with others*, but also care for the social fabric. Care not only has to do with interpersonal relationships, but it is also a concept with a deep political dimension. In fact, people are already talking about “caregiving.” The pandemic has exposed not only our vulnerability but also the importance of the care networks that sustain our social life. The commitment to “care” should also affect our intra-ecclesial relationships, and it implies, in any case, deconstructing the paradigm of self-sufficiency and self-defensive care contracts, seen as a political demand.<sup>22</sup>
- 4) *Care for the earth*. The common home that we are also called to take care of.

Here I will dwell on three terms that point to three existential dispositions that could become fundamental axes for introducing the spirituality of care<sup>23</sup> into the synodal spirituality: tenderness, guardianship, reparation-reconciliation.

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up the experience of belonging to the great All and that makes us grow in the hope that meaning is stronger than absurdity.” Cf. L. BOFF, *El cuidado necesario*, Trotta, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> A new way of taking charge of reality that starts by learning to be more with less and to satisfy our needs with a sense of solidarity with the millions of people who go hungry and with the future of future generations.

<sup>22</sup> Pepe LAGUNA, “‘Cuidadania’ los cuidados que sostienen la vida,” *Padres y Maestros* 386 (2021) 12-17. “The transition from the paradigm of citizenship to that of citizenship requires at least three essential displacements: an anthropological one, from self-sufficiency to vulnerability; another ethic from formal morals to responsive ethics and, finally, a socio-political displacement of care as a benevolent virtue to care as a political requirement.”

<sup>23</sup> Whatever the way of caring that we must always activate may be, it is always an art and has its demands: The scrupulous respect for the autonomy of the other. Knowledge and understanding of the circumstance

**Tenderness:** as a care relationship that generates trust (an unavoidable basis that sustains all bonds and without which it would be impossible to pursue any synodal project) and even more necessary because of our condition as vulnerable beings.

Tenderness is an experience that every human being encounters at the beginning of his or her life through so-called tutelary or diatrophic tenderness, i.e., the primordial relationship of love that flows between the guardian figure and the newborn in the first months of life. It is so named because the language of tenderness is the only means by which a mother can transmit the loving and tutelary impulse that inclines her towards her child. Tenderness is thus constituted in a relationship established between the giver and the receiver, built on the basis of an experience of unconditional acceptance that makes a response of absolute trust and “total abandonment” possible.

A. Spitz defines it as “an enhanced capacity to notice and perceive the anaclitic needs of the child both consciously and unconsciously and, at the same time, to perceive an impulse (*Drang*) to be of help in this neediness.”

Much of the strength of this category lies in its grounding in the biological process of origin. Through this tenderness, the “basic trust”—to use Erikson’s terminology—, which is essential for the development of a healthy self, is forged in the person. Basic trust is formed when the baby learns to trust that guardian figure who, through tenderness, gives him security and is attentive to his needs. Yet, above all, it enables the child to feel loved and, therefore, worthy of love,<sup>24</sup> and so contributes to the development of a strong self and healthy self-esteem. Moreover, it is created as a relational pattern, so that the security acquired in this first relationship enables the child to approach other relationships positively and to look towards the world with openness and trust.

The importance of tenderness persists throughout life, as our daily exchanges of tenderness serve as continuous renewal of basic trust, since people cannot nourish themselves all throughout their lives on the confidence established in their early childhood.

Basic trust provides ontological security that allows people to bracket their worries with regard to social environment’s unpredictability and to cope in situations of uncertainty. The tenderness given and received throughout our lives will maintain that level of trust so essential in our existence, and it will also be needed to balance aggressiveness, to activate our capacity for integration, for

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of the subject cared for. The analysis of your needs. The ability to anticipate. Respect and promotion of the identity of the subject cared for. Self-care as a guarantee of correct care. The empathic link with the vulnerability of the other. Cf. F. TORRALBA, Torralba, *Ética del cuidar. Fundamentos, contextos y problemas*, Institut Borja de Bioètica/ Mapfre Medicina, Barcelona, 2006. ID., *Esencia del cuidar. Siete tesis*. Sal Terrae, Santander-Bilbao, 2005, 885-894.

<sup>24</sup> Winnicott was a pioneer in pointing out the importance of this loving primary care with the term “sufficient maternal care;” D.W. WINNICOTT, *El hogar, nuestro punto de partida. Ensayos de un psicoanalista*, Paidós, Barcelona 1996, 145. The particular dynamic of tenderness within the family influences the forms of trust instilled in the child. A mother who tenderly attends to the needs of her baby creates a favorable environment that produces “in the child a high degree of trust in his mother” *Ibid.*, 36. On this foundational trust established in the home, relationships with the extended family, neighbors, colleagues and society in general are built.: John BOWLBY, “Psychoanalysis as art and science”, *Higher Education Quarterly* 35/4 (September 1981) 465-482, aquí 414.



incorporation into society, while enabling healthy relationships and even exercising healing functions.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, *we give care as we have been cared for*. Hence the importance of tenderness in the family nucleus at the origin of life, but no less that of our experience of having been loved with tenderness by God. In short, the first relationship that unites us with Him is this: a relationship of tenderness, that of the One who gives us being towards us his creatures, in His way of caring for us, the experience that He is our support, our rock and our refuge... This relationship with a God of tenderness who cares for us, welcomes us, and sustains us like a loving mother, gives us the fundamental experience of being cared for with tenderness and the possibility of reproducing it in our relationships.

In this sense, tenderness as a form of care can become an essential element for living in the key of synodality, since all relational fabric is based on trust. It will be essential to strengthen the bonds of trust in order to enter into the synodal proposal that the Church is offering to us. We will need to trust one another; and tenderness—note that we are not talking about pseudo-tenderness full of ambiguity or cheap sweetness—proves to be a both powerful and time-demanding instrument that helps us to grow in trust. True tenderness:

- demands us to be attentive to the others, to their needs and possibilities, with exquisite care to avoid going beyond what they want and need... for, if tenderness... —like a caress, one of its most common mediations—, grabs or tries to possess, it becomes a fist and an aggression...
- activates in us simultaneously the impulse of care, the “diatrophic or tutelary impulse” which is the tendency to cover the weak, to help or protect, postponing our own needs while attending to the needs of others...
- gives security and protection but does so in such a way that it is able to promote, with shelter, openness, freedom, and risking.
- demands proximity and, at the same time, the reverent distance that the other needs in order not to feel enclosed but rather boosted.
- confirms us in our individuality and at the same time creates bonds of belonging.
- Visits more spontaneously those who need it the most, the most fragile, the diminished, the lonely, the marginalized, the isolated.

Activating tenderness in us, as a relational style in the way of “taking charge of reality,” of taking care of others... can be one of the contributions that the spirituality of care can make to synodality.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Nurya MARTÍNEZ-GAYOL, *Un espacio para la ternura miradas desde la teología* (Biblioteca Teología Comillas), Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> “I especially ask Christians in communities throughout the world to offer a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion. Let everyone admire how you care for one another, and how you encourage and accompany one another: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35)” (EG 99).

**Guardianship:** The term “*custodiar*”<sup>27</sup>/to guard refers to the task that the Creator gives to human beings, inviting them to care for the earth and to protect it.<sup>28</sup> As LS points out, we are called to praise the Creator and, together with Him, care for and guard His creation.<sup>29</sup> However “guarding” also means “to keep something or someone with care and vigilance” (RAE). It speaks to us of giving protection, security..., but also of recognizing that which must be guarded as valuable, as worthy of attention. It expresses the relationship with the land, with the common home, which should be a welcoming and hospitable environment for all; a source of life, but also a *source of identity*, because the land in which we live, the land where we were born, its geography, its climate..., all this shapes us and gives us our identity. And we all have the right to it.

Taking care of the earth means caring for it so that every place, every space can be a common home for all. And preventing the looting that destroys natural areas and, along with them, the possibilities of life for many men and women, of particular identities.

Guardianship also implies mutually caring for one another, for every “other” is also entrusted to the care of the human being, and it is a responsibility that affects us all. We must be each other’s guardians and also the guardians of all creation (cf. LS 236).

**Reparation:** Care must be characterized by effectiveness, as rescuing dignity, and being reconciling.<sup>30</sup> For synodality, understood as the ecclesial way of being and acting, dignifying every human being, it will be necessary to live it from the point of view of care, and in caring a special way for what, in fact, is already violated (persons, situations, relationships). Hence, in the face of the wounded, the broken, the fragmented, care becomes... a call to heal,<sup>31</sup> to repair. The spirituality of care especially invites us to exercise a particularly loving care for the oppressed, the damaged, the wounded, the hopeless; to build and rebuild the relational bridges that have been broken and, indeed, to do so effectively.

Yet, more concretely, the call that we are living in this historical moment to convert to synodality is made in a highly pluralistic Church, where there are greatly differing sensibilities—more or less in affinity with this project—, and which has,

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<sup>27</sup> It is derived from the Latin word “custodia”: guard, safeguard, quality or action of guarding and protecting. This word derives from *custos*, *custodis*- (guardian, the one who is put as protection or cover of something).

<sup>28</sup> Creation is not a human patrimony; it is a sacred reality that makes the mystery of God visible. God speaks through each of the creatures, and in each of them, there is a trace of God’s eternity.

<sup>29</sup> Pope Francis said “The vocation of being a ‘protector’ [...] is not just something involving us Christians alone; it also has a prior dimension which is simply human, involving everyone. It means protecting all creation, the beauty of the created world, as the Book of Genesis tells us and as Saint Francis of Assisi showed us. It means respecting each of God’s creatures and respecting the environment in which we live” (*Homily at the beginning of his pontificat*, 19 March 2013).

<sup>30</sup> This is how it is proposed in, Alberto CANO ARENAS – Álvaro LOBO ARRANZ, *Más que salud. Cinco claves de espiritualidad ignaciana para ayudar en la enfermedad*, Sal Terrae, Maliaño, 2019, 100-106.

<sup>31</sup> Caring and healing are two etymologically close terms. In fact, “cure” derives from the Latin “*curāre*,” which means: “to care, to worry.” On the other hand, caring has the meaning of “paying attention to something or someone” and comes from the latin *cogitare*.

“Caring” would be the broader concept that somehow embraces “healing” which, in turn, encompasses the idea of healing, healing, and salvation... but that refers more directly to a previous situation of harm, damage, rupture, disease that cries out to be restored.

behind her, a history of failed attempts, of misunderstandings, and of multiple wounds....

If we intend to take charge of reality, of the *Missio Dei*, as a Church with a synodal way of being and acting, we cannot but “include everyone” and take into account the wounds. If we want to embrace our vulnerability, then we cannot forget that it is a vulnerability that is abused, and that we tend to protect the wounds with closed-mindedness, violence, and aggressiveness. Hence, the need to redouble our care, a care full of tenderness, but also restorative care. Care that approaches the other in order to “take on his situation,” by taking the risk of forgiveness, approaching the pain that it will have to calm, seeking to build bridges in situations of rupture, reunification of the dispersed, healing of wounds to restore a fabric of trust so often broken, and without which it will be impossible to enter into the adventure of synodality.

Embracing from below, from within, from humility, so that this embrace can be healing and restore the broken or damaged relationships that we carry in our history. Embracing the risk of forgiveness, in order to make reconciliation possible.<sup>32</sup>

#### ***e) Spirituality of patient endurance or resilient patience***

Synodal spirituality can only be a spirituality full of *hypomoné*. This is a biblical term that gives a name to patience, resistance, endurance, permanence, and perseverance as dimensions proper to hope, to the point that the NT replaces the Greek term *elpis*—the usual term for hope since the LXX—with *hypomoné*, when referring to hope lived in the here and now, in difficult situations.

I have chosen to emphasize this dimension, instead of speaking of hope in general, because I believe that it reflects *a highly necessary disposition in our ecclesial moment*, and because the synodal journey will demand, of us who wish to go on this path, a great deal of *hypomoné*.

The synodal journey is a path of conversion, change, abandonment of ways and structures that gave us security but that have become, on some occasions, fruitless and, on others, constitute obstacles if we intend to advance in synodality, together in a search for more participative and inclusive forms that allow us to walk “with everyone,” and to take charge of reality “with all.”

Walking together as “distinctive”, different, with diverse life experiences, in the encounter of a great plurality of cultures, sensitivities, perspectives, and visions...

Walking together, attentive to the needs of others, taking care of them at the same time as we take care of reality, taking the next possible step without letting the rush of urgencies, the brakes of doubts, nor the hindrances of difficulties disperse or break those who walk together, in synodality.

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<sup>32</sup> “The culture of care thus calls for a common, supportive and inclusive commitment to protecting and promoting the dignity and good of all, a willingness to show care and compassion, to work for reconciliation and healing, and to advance mutual respect and acceptance. As such, it represents a privileged path to peace” (FRANCIS, *Message for the celebration of the 54<sup>th</sup> World Day of Peace*, 1 Jan. 2021).

The synodal spirituality, consequently, needs to be a spirituality of enduring patience, or of patient endurance, full of persistence and perseverance, sustained as a passion, as a burning fire that persists despite the winds that try to blow it out.

*Hypomoné* is, therefore, situated at the antipodes of resignation.... “*It is that patience in suffering... which gives us hope in Jesus Christ our Lord,*” as Paul reminds us in 1 Thess 1:3.

It is not something passive; it is always active, but with an action that is endurance, fortitude, active and persevering resistance, and that supposes “standing up” to adversity. For, it is precisely there, in adversity and in trial, that it is exercised.

- This call to “*patience*” is a challenge to our “impatience”, to those who are tempted to think that they have waited long enough, that this does not change, that the steps we are taking towards synodality are not rapid and decisive enough, that it will not succeed... to those who do not have patience with themselves, and pretend to be converted in one go, and do not struggle with their own limits and frailties... to the former and the latter... “*hypomoné.*”
- - It is called for those who do not understand God’s *hypomoné*, His infinite patience with us, for those who miss a radical divine intervention that would put each and everyone in her place. For those who want to separate too quickly the wheat from the tares by judging who is or is not called to the synodal process.
- However, it is also a call to those who have “given up,” to the tired, the disappointed, the disillusioned. To those who are tempted to give up because of the futility of their efforts, because of the scarcity of their success, because the synodal walk will not bring about any change... to these too “*hypomoné.*”

Synodality calls for specialists in “patience”. It calls us to be women full of *hypomoné*, capable of remaining, enduring the dark times, the misunderstandings of many, the short steps of others, the lack of light, and the setbacks... In many aspects, within the Church, religious life has already made a certain synodal journey “*ad intra and ad extra*” - still incipient, with still a long way to go—; but there are advances. A path of greater participation and listening, of leaving the responsibility of many of our works to the laity, integrating them in the decision-making processes... and also among ourselves (more listening, more co-responsibility, more circularity in our ways of proceeding, more joint searching...). I have the impression that this path, at the level of the clergy, is—with some honored exceptions—newer, more difficult, and therefore slower. We need patient endurance to get ourselves into harmony with the rhythm of its dense and slow times.

In recent decades, philosophy has been rediscovering the idea of “resistance,”<sup>33</sup> and it translates well the content of the biblical *hypomoné*.

The synodal spirituality needs women full of *hypomoné*, resistant women with the joy of hope on their lips.

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<sup>33</sup> Josep Maria ESQUIROL. *La resistencia íntima*, Acantilado, Barcelona, 2015.

- Resistance to the difficulties and conflicts that this process of synodal conversion will undoubtedly entail.
- Resistance to the precariousness and the limits of our own human condition.
- Resistance to the obstacles that our synodal aspirations will encounter.
- Resistance as “endurance,” but above all “resistance as strength,” as fortitude in the face of the processes of hopelessness, disintegration, and corrosion that come, at times from the environment, sometimes from ourselves....
- Resistance in the face of frustration, broken projects, unachieved goals... in the face of failed attempts to move forward, to change... both on a personal level, as well as on a community, institutional or ecclesial level...
- Resistance to the attempts of immobility, of leaving everything as it was... that try to convince us of the uselessness of our efforts and aspirations; but resistance also to the laziness and negligence that can knock at our doors, insidiously trying to convince us that we are wasting our time, that we have already fought enough, and that now others should fight...
- Resistance to the cultural waves that tempt us with more individualistic proposals, in search of self-realization and personal fulfillment, as a substitute for the existence that supposedly gives happiness, understood as individual fulfillment, achievement and success.
- Resistance also as a pause, a halt and depth that gives us space to discern and remain... even when it seems that nothing and no one takes steps towards what is discerned.
- Resistance as a place, as a space where it is possible to welcome and give hospitality to those who can't take it anymore, to the disenchanting, to those who no longer have the strength to fight...
- Resistance to the polarization that surrounds us, trying to maximize the distance between our positions, suffocating patience, and turning it into violent radicalization in face of the opposite. Resistance to thinking without nuances and without tonality, for whom things are black and white. Resistance to the temptation to elaborate hasty syntheses that superficially appear easy but in substance do not satisfy anyone because they are born of an artifice, lacking in listening, dialogue, and discernment. It is necessary to resist in paradox, in the difficulty of uniting opposites, in the dissonance that seeks to embrace sounds in a new harmonization, which is sustained in the perplexity of seemingly contrary thoughts which are in fact called to enrich the vision of reality and call us to live in that unstable equilibrium that does not rest on any pole, in order to avoid eliminating the opposite... until we find the path of inclusion.
- This type of resistance is an invitation to live “tuning the senses,” “attentive” to reality, to what is happening. Resisting means “becoming aware”, living “vigilantly”—watch and pray, says the “quintessential resistant” in Gethsemane, in an hour that was certainly calamitous for Jesus.
- Enduring patience is what allows us to “remain” whatever happens, knowing that our dream of synodal communion is not absurd, that are our efforts

sterile, although we do not know, nor see how and when it will bear fruit, or where and when it will germinate.

This permanence will make this spirit of synodality sustainable. It will not allow this attempt to remain merely a beautiful two-year effort, after which everything will return to its place; but it wagers on small steps that remain and patiently await the next step.

That is why there is no enduring patience without humility and generosity. Pre-sumption and selfishness undermine endurance. The resisters know that they resist not only for themselves, nor only for the group of resisters; they resist for the generations to come, for the future Church, for the world to come... They contribute their grain of sand to a project that is much greater and that escapes their gaze.

This spirituality of resistance invites us to take charge of the world in the manner of the “resistant” who remains firm in his intention and trusts in the fruitfulness of his action, even if its fruits are not immediate because, in the end, he knows that the fruits are given by the OTHER.

Synodal spirituality thus reveals itself as a spirituality that—*through listening, dialogue, and discernment*—takes charge of reality, *cares for it, and resists* in this endeavor, without ceasing to walk with others, with those who are different, advancing patiently, with effort, step by step, in *sustained resistance*, building together a communion that is vulnerable, but that resists because it is embraced by all men and women.