



Joint Conference 2024

Synodality

Brisbane Leadership and Education Centre
Level 3 Cathedral House, 229 Elizabeth St, Brisbane

July 4-6, 2024

"The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of [the Church's] mission. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium."

Pope Francis, "Letter of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to the People of God," Oct 25, 2023

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Conference Schedule

THURSDAY JULY 4	
Room 1	
15:00 – 16:00	Registration ACBA & ACTA <i>Afternoon Tea from 15:30</i>
16:00 – 16:30	Joint Opening Session: ACBA and ACTA Conferences Opening Prayer (ACTA)
16:30 – 18:30	<i>Experiences from the Synod:</i> <i>Highlights, questions, challenges and next steps</i> Ormond Rush Sandie Cornish Christina Kheng
18:30 – 19:00	<i>Pre-dinner reception</i>
19:00	<i>Dinner at ACU Leadership Centre</i>

FRIDAY JULY 5			
8:45 – 9:00	Morning Prayer (ACBA)		
Room	Room 1 (ACTA)	Room 3 (ACTA)	Boardroom (ACBA)
9.00 – 11.00 120 min	ACBA/ACTA/CMTAANZ Joint Session <i>Spiritual-theological conversations on themes arising from the Synod</i> Facilitated by Sandie Cornish and Christina Kheng, with input from Margaret Beirne, Robert Gascoigne, and Kevin Lenehan		
11.00 – 11.25	Morning Tea		
11:25 – 12:10 45 min	James McEvoy <i>Historical Explanation, Signs of the Times, and the Social Equality of Women and Men</i>		Mark O'Brien <i>How might the Old Testament Contribute to the Notion of Synodality?</i>
12:15 – 13:00 45 min	Christina Kheng <i>Synodality, Sensus Fidei, and Theological Method: Learning Points from the Global Synod Process</i>		Sarah Hart <i>The Bible and Science-Commonalities</i>
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch		
14:00 – 14:45 45 min	Julie Trinidad <i>Women's Leadership in a Participative and Collaborative Ecclesial Structure in the Archdiocese of Adelaide: A Story of Relational Renewal and Structural Change</i>	Terrence Kennedy <i>Yves Congar on Reform and Historical Theology</i>	Rosemary Canavan <i>Live/Walk by the Spirit" Gal 5:16: Peripatetic Synodality</i>
14:50 – 15:35 45 min	Sandie Cornish <i>Practising What We Preach: Catholic Social Teaching in a Synodal Church</i>	Gerard Moore <i>A liturgical contribution to the hermeneutic of synodality</i>	Ian Elmer <i>Exploring Synodality in the Pauline Mission: A Game-Theoretic Approach</i>

15:40 – 16:10 30 min	Joel Hodge <i>Orienting Synodality to its Purpose: Serving the Mission of the Church in the Spirit</i>	Jenny Close <i>The Glory of God is a Synodal Church</i>	Pre-A.G.M. ACBA Discussion: Website
16:10 – 16:35	Afternoon Tea		
16:35 – 17:20 45 min	Cristina Lledo-Gomez <i>Believing in the Spirits is not 'woo woo': Filipin@ Christian and Anitist Belief</i>	Gerard Kelly <i>The Petrine Ministry in a Synodal Church: Ecumenical Learnings</i>	James Harrison <i>The Divine Fruitfulness of Two Types of Community: The Demeter Association versus the Body of Christ</i>
17:25 – 17:55 30 min	Jason Obst (HDR) <i>A Synodal Reception? The Reception of Vatican II in the Australian Diocese of Toowoomba</i>	BJ Perrett (MTS) <i>“In a death like his”: Cultural Death-denial and Joseph Ratzinger's Theology of Death</i>	Pre-A.G.M. ACBA Discussion: 1. <i>Process toward the Choice of Translation for the New Lectionary: M. Beirne</i> 2. <i>Looking to the Future: M. Connolly</i>
18:00 – 18:30 30 min	Antonia Pizzey <i>Synodality and Eschatology: Walking Towards the Kingdom?</i>		
18:30	Free evening for own dinner plans		

SATURDAY JULY 6			
8:45 – 9:00	Morning Prayer (ACTA)		
Room	Room 1 (ACTA)	Room 3 (ACTA)	Boardroom (ACBA)
9:00 – 9:45 45 min	Geralyn McCarthy (HDR) <i>Rediscovering the Charismic Dynamic of the Catholic Church in Australia</i>		Michael Trainor <i>Mark's Gospel in an Era of loneliness</i>
9:50 – 10:20 30 min	Helen Bachmann (HDR) <i>Trinity as Relationality, Country as Relationality</i>		Michele Connolly <i>Traumatized Witness to Death and Resurrection in Mark: Implications for the (συν)ὁδος</i>
10:20 – 10:50	Morning Tea		
10:50 – 11:35 45 min	Maeve Louise Heaney <i>Breaking the Fourth Wall: Exploring Priesthood in Contemporary Drama and Film</i>	Patrick McCardle <i>Synodal implications for revisions of the Code of Canon Law</i>	Mary Coloe <i>An "Impossible" Dialogue. Jesus and Nicodemus. John 3</i>
11:40 – 12:10 45 min	John Collins <i>The creation of the Working Document for the Synod - Diocese of Parramatta, October 13-15 2023: An Exercise in Theological Method</i>		Kath Rushton <i>"Prunes to make it bear more fruit" (John 15:2): Abiding and the Synodal Process</i>
12:15 – 12:45 30 min	Gerard Hall <i>Synodality: Learning from Raimon Panikkar's Cosmotheandric Vision</i>		Margaret Beirne <i>The Synod process applied to Luke 24:13-35</i>
12:45 – 13:45	Lunch Gender Justice Networking Lunch		

13:45 – 14:30 45 min	Raymond Canning <i>How can Christians respond with hope and purpose to human-induced climate change? Attending to the divine act of creation</i>	Max Vodola <i>For a Synodal Church: Hearing the Voices at the Centre or Discerning from the Peripheries?</i>	Kevin Waldie <i>How might the “Gospel according to Luke” and the movie “Cabrini” teach us valuable lessons with respect to Synodality?</i>
14:35 – 15:05 30 min	David Kirchhoffer <i>Intra-church Ecumenism, Home and a Hermeneutic of Synodality: Reflection on recent work on moral disagreement by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches</i>	David Schütz (HDR) <i>The 1968 correspondence between Balthasar, Ratzinger and Rahner: A missed opportunity for theological collegiality</i>	Debra Snoddy <i>Anti-Judaism and the Gospel of John: Prologomema to a Paper</i>
15:05 – 15:30	Afternoon Tea		
15:30 – 16:00 30 min	Kevin Lenehan <i>A Plenary Council, A Global Synod. What Next for Catholics in Australia?</i>	Neil Ormerod <i>Divinely Instituted or Fit for Purpose? The provisionality of church structures</i>	ACBA AGM
16:05 – 17:35 90 min	Room 1 ACTA AGM (for members only)		
18:00-19:00	Eucharist (St Steven’s Cathedral)		
19:30	Conference Dinner at The Gardens Club, Botanic Gardens		



ACTA Conference Abstracts

Abstracts are listed in alphabetical order by presenter surname.

Bachmann, Helen (HDR)

Trinity as Relationality, Country as Relationality

To First Nations Australians connection to Country is a whole-body experience, it involves the intellect and the imagination and guides us through the everyday life. Some describe connection to Country as a world-view, others as spirituality. No matter how it is described, it is a way of life in which the spiritual aspect of life is in no way disconnected from the practical. All that is Country is sacred, and connection to Country is experienced in a relational way by First Nations people.

In this paper, I invite you to explore your understanding of relationality, in respect to Trinity and Country, through an invitational engagement of the sacramental imagination. The current understanding of Trinity is that of relationality, a relationality between the three persons of the Trinity into which the human person is freely invited, and when the sacramental imagination is allowed room to 'play', this invitation into the trinitarian flow becomes more accessible. This understanding of Trinity as relationality is then applied to an understanding of Country as relationality. Again, the sacramental imagination is engaged in an invitational way. You will be invited to free your sacramental imagination and use your understanding of Trinity as relationality to gain an understanding of Country as relationality, as First Nations people experience it.

Canning, Raymond

How can Christians respond with hope and purpose to human-induced climate change? Attending to the divine act of creation

Joëlle Gergis, a lead author of the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, writes in her *Humanity's Moment: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope*: "The cruel irony is that the people who have contributed the least to global warming are the ones who will suffer the most. At its core, climate change is a humanitarian issue. (These people's) [b]egging the developed nations of the world to allow their cultures to survive is an indignity that no one should be forced to endure. Ignoring their pleas would be the ultimate betrayal, an unforgivable moral failure."

Nobel prize-winner in physiology/medicine, Peter Doherty, writes: "[A]s a biomedical scientist with some public profile, commenting on climate change is not only within my area of expertise, it's an obligation."

How might Christian theologians meet their obligation to think and speak of climate change in relation to God's creation? How do we face Clive Hamilton's challenge? "The

anthropology of the Bible never imagined Man with this [enormous] kind of power; the power to alter the course of the earth always rested with God. If our conception of Man must change in the new geological epoch, then we have to work out a new theological anthropology.”

Is the late Denis Edwards’ approach sufficiently new and adaptable to adequately meet this challenge? He says, for example, that “God freely creates in a way that respects the limits and integrity of creaturely processes. This means that we can think of God in waiting upon the proper evolutionary unfolding of these finite processes.” Is the crisis of climate change, however, not something other, and greater, than a “proper evolutionary unfolding of ... finite processes”? Where else might a theologian look for appropriate resources?

Marilynne Robinson in her 2024 Reading Genesis says of this “singular history of a chosen people,” that it is “one not primarily meant to offer examples of virtue or heroism ... but meant instead to trace God’s loyalty to humankind through disgrace and failure and even crime. [Its authors] practice a generous rigor in not having obscured this essential meaning by eliding or editing They have preserved the world’s best hope.” But is humankind in 2024 still capable of understanding God’s loyalty as “its own best hope”?

Close, Jenny

The Glory of God is a synodal church

Irenaeus famously claimed that ‘the glory of God is a human being fully alive’. I intend to expand this statement to the People of God and claim that the Glory of God is the church fully alive and that means a synodal church.

This paper is part of my larger project exploring various aspects of a theology of God. That project is underpinned by an approach to theological aesthetics which is critical of traditional understandings of beauty. The notion of ‘glory’ is part of the framework of traditional concepts which I call beauty theology.

In this paper two interconnecting ideas will be explored: first, the nature of church in terms of synodality and second the nature of God in terms of ‘glory’. For the first idea the place to start is the pool of ideas being discussed by the current Synod of Bishops and for the second our liturgical use of the ancient hymn Gloria in excelsis Deo. In order to draw these two streams of thought together, I will make use of scriptural and liturgical sources, the theology of Irenaeus and the contemporary thinking of Australian theologians such as Dorothy Lee and Anthony Kelly.

Collins, John

The creation of the *Working Document* for the Synod -Diocese of Parramatta, October 13-15 2023: An Exercise in Theological Method

In preparing for a Synod from May to July 2023 the Diocese of Parramatta was engaged in a series of listening and dialogue sessions. These sessions involved over 5000 people

and resulted in 1020 written submissions – 503 of the submissions were generated by groups and 517 submissions came from individuals.

The submissions formed the basis for the development of the *Working Document* for the Synod. This *Working Document* was created by four members of a Writing Group, assisted by two pastoral-theological consultants. *The Working Document* was written for the Bishop of Parramatta to form the program for the Diocesan Synod held in October 2023.

Informed by the theological method offered by Bernard Lonergan, with specific reference to his eight functional specialties; research, interpretation, history, dialectic, foundations, doctrine, systematics and communication, this paper is a methodological reflection on the process of creating the *Working Document* by one member of the Writing Group.

It is hoped that the fruit of this paper may be of assistance to those in other Dioceses throughout Australia who are planning to conduct their own synodal processes.

Cornish, Sandie

Practising What We Preach: Catholic Social Teaching in a Synodal Church

What lessons can be learnt from the processes of the Synod on Synodality, and from the key documents that it has generated so far, for the methodology and content of Catholic Social Teaching and its application within the Church?

Consultations with local churches in the first stage of the Synod process and the syntheses of these by the Bishops Conferences, the Document for the Continental Stage and the responses to it in the second stage of the Synod process, together with the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the First Assembly and the Synthesis Report from the First Assembly, all point to a desire for clearer witness on the part of the Church at various levels to the equal dignity of all members of the Church. Among the groups that the key Synod documents identify as feeling denigrated, neglected, misunderstood or excluded within the church are women, young people, LGBTQI+ people, people with disabilities, First Nations people, the poor, and migrants and refugees. Furthermore, several proposals from the First Assembly currently under discussion require discernment of the implications of the principle of subsidiarity for processes within the Church and of the future of Church structures and institutions at various levels.

Hall, Gerard

Synodality: Learning from Raimon Panikkar's Cosmotheandric Vision

Interreligious and Intercultural Scholar Raimon Panikkar does not mention the word synodality. Yet, I propose, his commitment to and understanding of dialogue across religions and cultures is also applicable to the called-forth synodal approach expressed in the words of Pope Francis and the *Synthesis Report* emanating from the first session of the Synod in October 2023.

In particular, the Report's reference to the intimate connection between 'conversation' and 'conversion' is precisely expressed in Panikkar's notions of inter- and intra-religious

dialogue. The Report's image of "taking off one's shoes to cross the threshold towards encounter with the other" in a spirit of respect and humility expresses Panikkar's own sensibility for mutual encounter and genuine dialogue both within and beyond one's own foundational tradition.

Further, in line with Panikkar's explicit commitment to interreligious and intercultural dialogue, the Report challenges Christian communities "to enter into solidarity with those of other religions, convictions and cultures". Panikkar provides insightful commentary on how we can recognise the voice of the Spirit in the previously unknown – perhaps dismissed or even despised – other.

Moreover, the Report's focus on the Trinitarian mystery at the heart of synodality is reflected in Panikkar's challenge to rediscover the mystery of the Christian Trinity especially in the writings of the Eastern-Patristic classical tradition. He also provides his own cosmic vision of the trinitarian, cosmotheandric mystery at the heart of the universe. Both the Report and Panikkar are committed to overturning the dualistic thinking that avoids or represses the mystical apprehension of reality.

As well, the Report calls for an "integral theology" focussing on care for the environment as "our common home". This is also integral to Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision and is explicitly conveyed through his notion of 'ecosophy' – learning to listen to the wisdom of the earth – and his retrieval of the too long neglected notion of *Anima Mundi*. In order to (re-)experience the sacredness of nature and the cosmos, Panikkar acknowledges our need to learn from Indigenous peoples who also have much to teach about the process of conversation, discernment and, in our context, synodality.

Heaney, Maeve Louise

Breaking the Fourth Wall: Exploring Priesthood in Contemporary Drama and Film

How might theology be undertaken in light of the "way of proceeding" of the Synod? Is there a "hermeneutic of synodality" that might inform our theological endeavours? This paper is part of and drawn from ongoing work on Theologies of Priesthood, in which a group of local and international theologians and pastors seek to explore the theme of priesthood, in all its breadth and complexity. The methodology of the project – described as a hermeneutics of empathy and generosity – seeks to "attend to the complicated realities of priesthood without diminishing critical reflection or shrinking from problems." The paper will present for conversation some of its insights from year 1, which focuses on Revelation, Pneumatology, and Trinity, by asking the question of where is God revealing Godself in the world today within and beyond Catholic ecclesial communities? The underpinning theological conviction is double: that a "synodal hermeneutic" implies listening to and for the Spirit through the *sensus fidelium* sourced not only from those who attempt to live a committed Catholic life, but also the "lapsed", "inactive", and "disaffected" (cf. Orm Rush *The Eyes of Faith*, 2009), as well as cultural sources and ways in which people make sense of life and faith, such as music, art and film. The paper will trace some common traits found in these dramas in relation to how the

priesthood is imagined and symbolised in contemporary culture, identifying challenges and insights for this area of theological investigation.

Hodge, Joel

Orienting Synodality to its Purpose: Serving the Mission of the Church in the Spirit

In 2018, the International Theological Commission stated: “Synodality is lived out in the Church in the service of mission.”¹ The ITC presented a theology of synodality as essential to living out “the communion of love” that is the Church and to enable cooperation in the Church’s mission of love. In my paper at last year’s ACTA conference, I spoke of challenges to synodality in terms of fragmentation, rivalry and polarisation. This year, my paper is focused on the positive purpose of synodality: to deepen the Church’s commitment to and living out of its mission, as a gift of grace. The aim is to address apparent confusion and/or misunderstanding (in certain circles) about the nature and purpose of synodality. I wish to address two challenges in particular: the lack of theological acceptance of synodality within a hierarchical ecclesiology by large segments of the laity and clergy; and, the lack of necessary skills and knowledge to engage in synodality fruitfully, which is a problem of formation.

My paper outlines how Pope Francis’ emphasis on synodality needs to be theologically integrated with the mission of the Church, and as such, present a vision of synodality for the wider Church to accept. On this basis, synodality can serve mission by enabling the Church to discern its mission in its time/context and order itself for this mission, through dialogue and according to its hierarchical structure, with God’s love as its source and principle. To this end, this paper identifies how spiritual and theological formation are essential for a sapientially-informed synodality that respects both tradition and the contemporary call of the Spirit.²

Kelly, Gerard

The Petrine Ministry in a Synodal Church: Ecumenical Learnings

The Synthesis document from the 2023 Synod noted that “there can be no synodality without an ecumenical dimension” (7b). It further noted that a “theme to be explored concerns the link between synodality and primacy at the various levels (local, regional, universal) in their mutual interdependence” (7h). Much work in this area has been done in ecumenical dialogues, including the Australian Catholic–Lutheran Dialogue. That dialogue has produced two documents relevant to this theme: *The Ministry of Oversight: The Office of Bishop and President in the Church* and *The Petrine Ministry in a New Situation*. This paper will examine the findings of those dialogues and explore lines of enquiry opened up by them. In this way it hopes to offer some insights to a further request in the Synthesis document: “there is a need for more insight into how a renewed

¹ International Theological Commission, “[Synodality in the life and mission of the Church](#),” (2 March 2018), n. 53.

² Francis, “[To the Delegation of the International Societies for Catholic Theology \(INSeCT\)](#),” (10 May 2024).

understanding of the Episcopate within a synodal church affects the ministry of the Bishop of Rome ..." (13d).

Kennedy, Terrence

Yves Congar on Reform and Historical Theology

Yves Congar held that synodality is the normal way of church governance. His publications, particularly *True and False Reform in the Church* (1950, emended edition 1968) examined the necessity of reform. Since Trent the word "reform" has been problematic and so was avoided till recently.

Congar's starting point was the post-World War II situation in France. Focusing on pastoral issues, he was challenge by a change in epoch: in the presentation of doctrine in preaching and catechesis; how to personalise diocesan and parish structures to make them relevant: the language for the liturgy, particularly in mission countries: the cry to reform the apostolate to gain access to the working classes and in particular the involvement of the laity and the worker priests. The French church moved in unison, with bishops, priests and laity acting together. The above considerations led to the question: was reform not only needed but was it indeed necessary? Is it an essential feature of the Church's life? He demonstrated its necessary from Scripture and the witness of Tradition, citing many examples of failed reforms, e.g., Peter Waldo, conciliarism, Jansenism and modernism, and the connection between sanctity and reform in Saints Francis, Dominic, Ignatius and Newman. The church defines her identity in relation to the world in which she exists.

Lastly, he set out four conditions for authentic reform: 1. Priority of charity and the pastoral. 2. Remain in communion with the whole church. 3. Patience with delays. 4. Return to the principle of tradition. These conditions were programmatic for Vatican II and have to be verified in a synodal church.

Congar moved the away from doing theology by analysing the Church's essential structures to examining the church's life as actually lived in history, that is, as historical theology.

Kheng, Christina

Synodality, Sensus Fidei, and Theological Method: Learning Points from the Global Synod Process

I have been involved in the synod on synodality since 2021 as a member of the Methodology Commission established by the Synod Secretariat. This Commission was responsible for drafting the Vademecum and guiding the synod process particularly during the first phase. It was a novel experience of designing the methodology and animating local, regional and transnational processes for a consultation exercise that would have the whole People of God "all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit" (Pope Francis, Oct 2015). Subsequently, I was involved in the global synthesis of the consultation reports as well as in the facilitation of the Asian continental assembly

and the global assembly. In this presentation, I discuss the learning points which have emerged from the process thus far, focusing on the issue of theological method. The effort in this synod to engage the *sensus fidei* in such a participative and global way is unprecedented in the Catholic Church. Though much has been written about the *sensus fidei* in theory, there was no exact precedence on how to translate this into concrete practice especially on such a global scale. Consequently, there was much learning by doing, and it was said frequently that we were building the ship even as we set sail! Based on the successes, failures, conflicts, and adjustments experienced over these three years, it is possible to identify some key factors that have been essential for a fruitful process. These factors illuminate a method of doing theology that is synodal, discerning, and holistic. It is my hope that the learning points would contribute towards a way of theologizing that enables the People of God to be true to the faith tradition while walking forward confidently towards the future together.

Kirchhoffer, David

Intra-church Ecumenism, Home and a Hermeneutic of Synodality: Reflection on recent work on moral disagreement by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches

Arguably, 'synodality' is being put forward as an answer to the question: How do we deal with disagreements in the Roman Catholic Church that lead to division and separation and still be one church and one worshipping community? When the Synod *Instrumentum Laboris* asks, alluding to *Lumen Gentium* 1: "How can we be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all humanity?", it is asking a question that is very similar to that which drives the ecumenical movement: how to be a sign of the visible unity of the Church in the world. It may be useful, then, to consider recent ecumenical work on moral disagreement to see how this could be applied in the Roman Catholic synodal context. This paper, therefore, proposes a model of synodality that could be characterised as 'intra-church ecumenism'. In the work of the Study Group on Moral Discernment of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, it is clear that moral disagreements between churches, divisive though they are, seem to be a less immediate problem for many Christians than moral disagreements within their churches. In other words, intra-church division on moral issues is a common challenge. What the ecumenical 'tool for facilitating dialogue to build *koinonia*' developed by the study group reveals is that these moral disagreements (when authentically 'Christian' and not merely politically or personally expedient) are driven by systematic theological differences, for example about the nature of salvation and the role of the Church therein. This means that dialogue about moral disagreements should proceed in good faith about the sincerity of the dialogue partners as wanting to see 'God's will done' in the world. This provides the foundation for a dialogue in which the theological 'validity' of another person or group's position can be recognised without conceding the necessary 'rightness' of that position. This approach can support a vision of synodality as 'home-building'. Synodality as Intra-church Ecumenism, therefore, could be described, using the words of Timothy Radcliffe OP, as "recognising that behind each theological vision there is the

longing for a home in which we can belong. ... We cannot overcome polarisation unless we recognise the home that each party is longing to build.”

Lenehan, Kevin

A Plenary Council, A Global Synod. What Next for Catholics in Australia?

Following the most extensive consultation of Australian Catholics ever conducted and the two assemblies of the Fifth Plenary Council in Australia 2021-2022, and further consultation in the world-wide preparation process for the 16th General Synod of Bishops On Synodality 2021-2024, Catholics in Australia have had expectations raised that their contribution will be noted and considered in the ongoing discernment of mission priorities for the Church, locally and internationally. Recognising the difference in status and style between a Plenary Council and the Synod of Bishops, this paper overviews the major themes of the Plenary Council Final Recommendations and the Synod Working Documents, asking to what degree they reflect the fruits of the consultation. Applying F. von Hügel's model of institutional, intellectual and mystical/experiential elements to church life, the paper identifies some key challenges for multi-dimensional ecclesial renewal arising from the voiced expectations of Australian Catholics.

Lledo-Gomez, Cristina

Believing in the Spirits is not 'woo woo': Filipin@ Christian and Anitist Belief

In light of Pope Francis' call to synodality and to practice a theology grounded in the realities of people, this paper takes seriously the Philippine Indigenous belief in the spirits or anitos, anitism, and argues that this belief continues to exist alongside Christian Filipin@ faith, because it is part of the Filipin@ transpersonal worldview. Filipin@s carry this dual belief into their countries of migration and pose as a pastoral issue because Philippine anitism mostly exists in the Filipin@ Christian mind as a world to fear, to guard against, and to seek healing from. The paper challenges the colonially imposed demonization or pathologization of experiences of spirits or extraordinary phenomena, while promoting a revaluation of this long held Indigenous belief which survived various colonisations.

Overall, this paper argues that Philippine Indigenous anitism is not antithetical to the Christian faith. Rather, it can support and extend our understanding of the Christian faith journey. Conversely, through the theological reinterpretation of this Philippine indigenous belief, it can affirm and help Filipin@s reembrace their Filipin@ transpersonal worldview and identity, which was and continues to be degraded and demonized through colonization.

One of the sources for this paper is my on-site three-week experience of Philippine indigenous healers, *babaylans*, in the Negros region of the Philippines (in October 2023), where many of the *babaylans* continue to exist and practice both a Christian and anitist faith.

McArdle, Patrick

Synodal implications for revisions of the Code of Canon Law

The 5th Plenary Council of Australia was one of a handful conducted under the 1983 Code of Canon Law; it was the first of the third Christian millennium; it was first in the papacy of Pope Francis. It also commenced the first practical exploration of the possibilities of Synodality as a tool in discernment.

The provisions of the current Code dealing with Plenary Councils (cc439 – 446) applied during the 5th Plenary Council of Australia. However, significant derogations from the provisions of the Code were approved by the Curia – these largely concerned ‘those who may be called to the Council’ but also were applied in other aspects. The current Synod on Synodality has stretched the generally applied canonical norms about how a Synod (of Bishops) should operate – following similar lines to those permitted in Australia and further developing novel aspects. Each of these are reflective of the emerging understanding of Synodality as articulated by Pope Francis on 17 October 2015.

This paper highlights some of the derogations that have been applied at the Plenary Council and the Synod; then proposing some further avenues for the revision of the Code that may assist with forming a more synodal Church.

It is argued that, at the heart of this shift in emphasis, proposed by Pope Francis in 2015, is from a model where governance is tied to Orders to one where Baptism is the foundation for participation in discernment. The alteration also asks us to shift our understanding of governance from decisions to discernment and from authority to stewardship.

McCarthy, Geralyn (HDR)

Rediscovering the Charismic³ Dynamic of the Catholic Church in Australia

Against a backdrop of fraying traditions and social and ecclesial dislocation, this paper explores how the Catholic Church in Australia might begin to rediscover its place in a culture that risks losing touch with the Christian story. I suggest that a restored attention to the charismic dynamic of the Church, can serve as a catalyst for internal revitalisation. The charismic gifts respond to the signs of the times, giving witness to the life of the Spirit in every age. For historical and theological reasons, a theology of charisms is yet to find its proper place. I will argue that ecclesial reform that embraces the charismic nature of the Church and which establishes a clear nexus between the Church’s charismic and hierarchical elements offers hope for the Australian Church at this time because it fosters a more dialogical approach which will allow the Church to remain faithful to its rich

³ The word ‘charismic’ has been borrowed from Michael Green, *Now With Enthusiasm: Charism, God's Mission and Catholic Schools Today*, BBI - the Australian Institute of Theological Education Mission and Education Series, (Mulgrave, VIC: Vaughan Publishing, 2018).

tradition whilst being open to, and creative in, addressing the new truths and pressing theological questions of our day.

McEvoy, James

Historical Explanation, *Signs of the Times*, and the Social Equality of Women and Men

In considering what it means to read the signs of the times in the light of the gospel, this paper reflects on the interpretation of historical transitions. It argues that Charles Taylor's interpretive approach can provide insight into what is entailed in reading the signs of the times. The paper begins by setting out Taylor's approach, then examines Marie-Dominique Chenu's and Vatican II's concepts of the signs of the times, drawing out the connections with the Taylorean approach. Finally, the paper takes up the social equality of women and men as a sign of the times. The interpretive approach brings into focus the relationship between social goods motivating historical transitions and the meaning of the gospel.

Moore, Gerard

A liturgical contribution to the hermeneutic of synodality

How might theology be undertaken in light of the "way of proceeding" of the Synod? Is there a "hermeneutic of synodality" that might inform our theological endeavours? How does the theology that emerges from ACTA and its members contribute to a church marked by synodality? What themes emerging from the synod are drawing your attention, and why?

This paper will bring the perspectives of liturgical theology and liturgical practice to the theological reflections on the synod and its future possibilities. The plenary and synodal discussions have not focused overly on liturgy, though it was the subject of the first Constitution that emerged from the Council. This current reorienting of preferences has some merit, with an integrated liturgical and ecclesial hermeneutic a preferable direction.

This paper will unpack crunch points in the theology of baptism, of orders and of the origins of the church. It will open up the relationship of power and authority to orders, and the resultant effects upon the celebration of and piety towards the eucharist and reconciliation in particular. This has direct implications for the perception of women in the church.

The liturgical world has some experience of a synodal approach and its treatment in the history of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), and perhaps also in the Statement of Conclusions (14 Dec 1998). The paper will conclude with touchstones for a theological matrix to uphold a church marked by synodality.

Obst, Jason (HDR)

A Synodal Reception? The reception of Vatican II in the Australian Diocese of Toowoomba

The Synod on Synodality asks us as a Church to “journey together,” from the local level through to the universal, proclaiming the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to the Church. But is a synodal journey together possible in a diocese already resistant to change?

The reception of Vatican II in the life of the Church is one of the most pressing tasks of our time. Important research is being undertaken into the council’s ongoing reception in particular dioceses, research that also will prove crucial in assisting the Church to move forward on its synodal journey. What factors might be involved in the reception, or non-reception, of Vatican II? How important is the role of the bishop in receiving the council? How does a diocese, already resistant to change, move forward on a synodal journey? In this paper, I will investigate the challenges to the reception of Vatican II experienced in one Australian diocese, the Diocese of Toowoomba. These challenges include, but are not limited to, a deep divide between conservative clergy and parishioners, and those church members more disposed to reform and modernisation of the faith. Arguably, examining the factors involved in cases of non-reception can better help to understand contemporary divisions within the Church, ultimately aiding the Church on its synodal journey.

Ormerod, Neil

Divinely Instituted or Fit for Purpose? The provisionality of church structures

It is not uncommon to refer to the three-fold order of ministry (bishop, presbyter, deacon) as divinely instituted. Yet we rarely ask what this might mean and does it stand scrutiny in an historically conscious age. What indeed constitutes the intelligibility of a “divine institution” of a social structure? Would God demand a structure that was not “fit for purpose”? On the other hand, there are other ecclesial structures (cardinals, dicasteries, religious orders) that are clearly historically contingent and provisional. Where does synodality then lie? What is the problem it is seeking to solve and is it fit for purpose for that problem?

Perrett, BJ Leonard (MTS)

“In a death like his”: Cultural Death-denial and Joseph Ratzinger's Theology of Death

The recent societal acceptance and legislation of euthanasia/VAD in Australian society (and in Western culture more broadly) brings to the fore the pertinent question of whether or not our contemporary culture can be said to be death-denying. The Church’s engagement with society and with individuals on this issue has, I believe, been more or less concerned with the moral aspect of euthanasia/VAD. And this is certainly appropriate and necessary. But perhaps a different perspective would help the Church

and her ministers engage with this contemporary phenomenon in a deeper and possibly more fruitful way. I believe the theology, especially the eschatological theology, of the late Joseph Ratzinger can provide ways to address this challenge and provide a renewed perspective.

As such I ask the following question: How can Joseph Ratzinger's eschatological theology answer the challenge posed by a culture that is death-denying, as exemplified in the practice of euthanasia/VAD? Answering this question will involve ascertaining i) what exactly Ratzinger's specific eschatological formulation and insight is; ii) that our culture is indeed death-denying, and what this term means; iii) how death-denying is a term that can properly be applied to euthanasia/VAD, and; iv) how an eschatological perspective informed by Ratzinger's theology counters death denial in culture.

Pizzey, Antonia

Synodality and Eschatology: Walking Towards the Kingdom?

Synodality is often described as a process of listening and walking together. There have been key questions focused on how the Church can better listen to the Spirit, along with a call to reflect on mission and ecclesial structures. However, if we are walking together in the Spirit, where are we walking to? Synodality is frequently linked with the concept of the church as "pilgrim." In 2018 the International Theological Commission stated: "Synodality manifests the 'pilgrim' character of the Church." The connection between synodality and pilgrim church is consistently emphasised by Pope Francis. In a 2021 speech, he even advocated for the development of a "pilgrim hermeneutic." Yet, what does this mean? In the documents on synodality, is pilgrim church understood in an eschatological light? In this paper, I will analyse documents on synodality to consider what emphasis is placed on the eschatological nature of the Church.

Schütz, David (HDR)

The 1968 correspondence between Balthasar, Ratzinger and Rahner: A missed opportunity for theological collegiality

In the International Theological Commission's 2018 document on Synodality, the ITC described the synodal ministry of theologians in the Church as "communal and collegial" as well as "personal". Nevertheless, since the end of the Second Vatican Council a lack of communal and collegial harmony between Catholic theologians has hindered such a synodal ministry. A common binary characterisation of these divisions is the Concilium versus Communio paradigm in which theologians associated with the Communio journal (such as Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac, and Joseph Ratzinger) are seen as the rivals of theologians associated with the Concilium journal (such as Hans Küng, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Karl Rahner).

But could it have been otherwise? One of the contributing factors at the time was the personal rift between Balthasar and Rahner following Balthasar's harsh critique of his friend's theology in the 1966 book *Cordula oder der Ernstfall*. However, in 1968, Balthasar

reached out to Rahner with an invitation to join him, Ratzinger and Lubac in a publishing initiative intended to address the emerging confusion and disunity in Catholic theology. Although the Klarstellungen project eventually came to nothing, the group involved in it eventually went on to create the *Communio* journal.

Manfred Lochbrunner published Balthasar's letter of invitation in 2009, and although he had evidence that Rahner never attended the meeting to which he was invited, he did not know whether Rahner ever replied to Balthasar. We are now in a position to answer that question. In my own personal research at the Karl Rahner Archive in Munich, I discovered two additional pieces of correspondence which belong to this set: an invitation from Ratzinger to Rahner written at the same time to attend the same meeting, and Rahner's lengthy reply to Ratzinger.

Taken together, the three letters provide a privileged glimpse into how these three "eminent" theologians regarded the state of Catholic theology before the Concilium vs *Communio* rivalry arose. They stand as a testimony to the virtues of trust, honesty, and courage in building synodality and communion among Catholic theologians. As Balthasar later wrote in the first edition of *Communio*: "People begin to commune with one another when they are not afraid of one another and are not ashamed of opening their hearts to one another." (*"Communio – Ein Programm"*, 1972). Tragically they also show the consequences for theological collegiality when the virtues of synodality are lacking.

Trinidad, Julie

Women's Leadership in a Participative and Collaborative Ecclesial Structure in the Archdiocese of Adelaide: A Story of Relational Renewal and Structural Change

This paper takes up a research project involving recording, interpreting and understanding the experiences and roles of 11 women who have served as members of the Adelaide Catholic Archdiocesan Leadership team or have held the role of Chancellor in the Adelaide Archdiocese between 1986 and 2021. This structure (membership of women in the Archdiocesan Leadership Team or appointments of women as Archdiocesan Chancellors) was pioneered in Australia by the Catholic Church in Adelaide. The focus of today's presentation is on the stories of the 5 women who exercised the role named 'Chancellor' between 2001 and 2021 under the leadership of Archbishop Philip Wilson. Themes that emerge from these interviews include: What encourages and inspires women to participate in creating a synodal church? What sustains and nourishes women's capacities and openness to taking on ecclesial leadership? What threatens it? What is the significance of an ecclesial 'title' for enhancing women's participation in governance and mission? What new methods of theological reflection are needed on the significance of gender for participation and leadership of the mission of the Church for a synodal church? Tentative conclusions and recommendations from this research project will be outlined.

Vodola, Max

For a Synodal Church: Hearing the Voices at the Centre or Discerning from the Peripheries?

As the first 'post-conciliar' pontiff, the emphasis of Pope Francis on a synodal model of Church is both the recovery of ancient practices and the continual application and reception of the legacy of the Second Vatican Council. When Pope Francis speaks of the 'peripheries', it reflects his pastoral experience in Buenos Aires and his emphasis in *Evangelii Gaudium* (no.73) of the need to discern the changing pastoral and cultural contours of our time and what this means for the mission of the Church.

The Church in most western countries continues to struggle with declining rates of religious vocations, partnerships and amalgamation of parishes and diminished connection to parish life through Sunday Eucharist. In the wake of the Australian Plenary Council and in the context of the current Synod, how prepared is the Church to face this radical pastoral transformation and to listen with new ears to the voices of the peripheries? Are we genuinely fostering a theology of communion, mission and participation, listening, walking and discerning together or are these simply slogans as we continue to manage institutional decline?



ACBA Conference Abstracts

Abstracts are listed in alphabetical order by presenter surname.

Beirne, Margaret

The Synod process applied to Luke 24:13-35

The process for engaging in dialogue and discernment at the 2021-2024 Synod on Synodality is 'Conversations in the Spirit'. Having listened to a Scripture reading, participants share briefly, without interruption or comment, their individual reflection on the topic; each one responds with something they have heard that has made their "hearts burn within" them; the group gathers into a concise summary the key points for further reflection and possible decision, prior to sharing their experience with the wider community. Between each step, there is a short period of silent prayer and reflection. This paper will explore how this process is illustrated in Luke 24:13-35.

Canavan, Rosemary

"Live/Walk by the Spirit" Gal 5:16: Peripatetic Synodality

Beginning with the imperative of Paul to "Live by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16) I wish to unfold the peripatetic nature of our life in Christ in the Letters of Paul and beyond. Indeed we are asked to live a life worthy of God (1 Thess 2:12, Col 1:10), live in love (Eph 5:2) and live as children of God (Eph 5:8). Living is the translation given for περιπατέω to walk. In exploring the multiple ways to understand our life in Christ I aim to draw out the potential of peripatetic synodality, our walking and living together in our life of faith in all its dimensions.

Coloe, Mary

An "Impossible" Dialogue. Jesus and Nicodemus. John 3

In John 3 there is quite an extended dialogue between two people who recognise each other as "Rabbis"/teachers. The dialogue quickly moves into obscurity with the misunderstanding of important concepts, presumed to be understood. The word "impossible" becomes a feature – or should I say – not possible.

Connolly, Michele

Traumatized Witness to Death and Resurrection in Mark: Implications for the (συν)ὁδος

The *Instrumentum Laboris* for the First Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of The Synod of Bishops states that "To authentically include everyone, it is necessary to enter into the mystery of Christ allowing oneself to be formed and transformed by the

way he lived the relationship between love and truth.” (#27) The Gospel of Mark provides a paradigm for entering into the mystery of Christ by offering the opportunity to walk with Jesus the path of suffering every person encounters as they, like Jesus, attempt to live with integrity, the relationship between love and truth.

The Markan telling of the death and resurrection of Jesus invites its audience into an encounter with the suffering, indeed trauma, of this death and resurrection. Not only the suffering of Jesus but also that of his followers teaches us something. If we read the telling of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus from the perspective of the women of Mark 15:40-41 and 16:1-8 as traumatized witnesses of these events, what does that tell us about the way Mark’s narrative works to draw its hearers into discipleship and of the “mystery” offered by Mark’s Jesus (Mk 4:11)?

Elmer, Ian

Exploring Synodality in the Pauline Mission: A Game-Theoretic Approach

This paper investigates the concept of synodality within the context of the Pauline mission, employing game theory as an analytical tool. Synodality, as understood within the Pauline framework, refers to the collaborative decision-making process and shared which underpinned Paul’s ecclesiological vision. Drawing on texts from Paul’s letters, historical analysis, and game-theoretic models, this paper examines key aspects of synodality in the Pauline mission, including the role of leadership, mechanisms for conflict resolution, and the balance between autonomy and unity within the networked communities of the Pauline church. By applying game theory to the study of synodality in Paul, this research offers unique insights into the dynamics of early Christian communities, which provide a framework for understanding cooperative decision-making processes in religious contexts. This paper underscores the enduring relevance of the Pauline model for collaborative decision-making and collective discernment, which is central to the contemporary vision of a church marked by synodality.

Harrison, Jim

The Divine Fruitfulness of Two Types of Community: The Demeter Association versus the Body of Christ

Regarding divine fruitfulness, Pope Francis observed: “Faithfulness, perseverance, and fruitfulness are the three pillars of Christ’s love for His bride, the Church – three characteristics that are also at the heart of Christian marriage.” (Mass in Casa Santa Marta with Fifteen Married Couples, June 11, 2014). Fruitfulness, too, was at the centre of the Demeter association in antiquity, the goddess bearing the epithets Karpophoros (“Fruit Bringer”) and Thesmophoros (“Law Bringer”) in an Ephesian inscription (IEph 2.213 ll. 4-5, 88-89 AD). After a close analysis of the implications of “fruitfulness” in IEph 2.213 and in several other Ephesian inscriptions employing Karpophoros, the intense rivalries between the gods/goddesses and their members in the self-aggrandising local associations are briefly canvassed.

Against this backdrop, the language of “fruitfulness” in the New Testament (karpophoros, karpophoreo, karpos, akarpos) is examined. The fruitfulness of the believer’s life is a novelty when considered against the backdrop of the widespread karpophoros terminology of the Demeter cult. Nothing really approximates the comprehensive divine transformation offered in the Christ associations, overcoming for their members the legacy of an enslaving past, empowering vulnerable and faltering believers in the present, honouring the weak and marginalised over against the contemporary competition for precedence among the associations, and securing the eschatological destiny of the faithful in the future.

Hart, Sarah

Bible and Science - Commonalities

“The Bible and Science-Commonalities” is one of a series of six presentations given by lecturers at Te Kupenga-Catholic Theological College, New Zealand, 2024, on zoom. The brief for the series is “to debate the complementarity of science and religion.”

The paper begins with examples of human observation of the universe from biblical and scientific perspectives. The importance of methodology expected by an educated audience since the Enlightenment is addressed before looking at a further science example from the life and work of Canadian forester, Suzanne Simard, and biblical examples such as the dating of Hebrew texts and the importance of archaeological evidence for biblical studies.

O’Brien, Mark

How might the Old Testament Contribute to the Notion of Synodality?

This paper will explore some key features of the Old Testament’s understanding of the relationship between God and Israel, between God and the nations, and between Israel and the nations, and how these relationships may or may not be applied to the church’s understanding of synodality. According to Deut 7:6 and 14:2 God’s choice of Israel sets it apart from all other nations. But in Gen 12:3 God promises that Abraham will be the ancestor of a great nation in which ‘all the families of the earth shall be blessed’. How does the Old Testament relate or integrate what one might call an ‘exclusion’ theology and a ‘synodal’ theology? Is the former the starting point and the latter the goal of God’s creative and saving purpose? Moreover, do other peoples play any active role in this synodal goal or are they merely passive recipients of a synodality mediated by the chosen people? The paper will discuss several instances in the Old Testament where nations are portrayed as agents and Israel as the recipient.

Ruston, Kathleen

“Prunes to make it bear more fruit” (John 15:2): Abiding and the Synodal Process

My paper is influenced by my experience of being one of three members of the Synod Process Coordinating Group in my diocese. The Synod Process is primarily about

relationships – a process of listening, walking and discerning together in communion, mission and participation. John's Gospel is primarily a web of relationships. These relationships are expressed in many ways including "abiding" which I shall explore in the image of the vine and the branches (John 15:1-17). This image is tied to the seasons and deeply rooted in processes of the natural world and agriculture. The unsettling image of pruning and its associated practice of trellising will be explored alongside the four conditions which are habits of mind and action of the true reformer as found in Yves Congar's book, *True and False Reform in the Church*. These four conditions are timely and helpful as it is essential to distinguish between true reform and false reform as the Church journeys together as missionary synodal Church.

Snoddy, Debra

Anti-Judaism and the Gospel of John: Prologomema to a Paper

Not so much a paper as a discussion harnessing the collective wisdom of the group for a paper which will form a keynote at conference in Rome in 2025. With so much happening in the Middle East what does John say, condone, condemn about the Judaisms of his time? What are the repercussions of this throughout the ages and for our contemporary situation in the Academy?

Trainor, Michael

Mark's Gospel in an Era of Loneliness

At a time when we are experiencing unprecedented personal, local, national and global turmoil and sadness, Mark offers us with a portrait of a struggling and misunderstood Jesus who dies abandoned and unrecognised. In a surprising twist in the Gospel's final chapter the encounter with the Risen Jesus occurs only through contemplating the experience of loneliness and absence.

Waldie, Kevin

How might the "Gospel according to Luke" and the movie "Cabrini" teach us valuable lessons with respect to Synodality?

I would suggest that the recently released movie "Cabrini" is an unusual and perhaps unexpected example of a cinematic experience. Production-wise it is visually and emotionally packed with deeply expressive narrative moments that reveal much about the film's major protagonist and the mission she assiduously pursues. Her vision and spirit are presented to us in a manner that is astonishing and affecting. We cannot help but be captivated by the way her story pans out. When we look to Luke's Gospel with a discerning eye we also encounter another protagonist, a Jesus who is on a mission which is extraordinarily revelatory and didactic. The Lukan Jesus is constantly crossing paths with the poor in great variety, graciously meeting with them and ministering to their manifest physical and spiritual needs. How he is therefore depicted and characteristically shows himself to us as readers becomes a cause for a multi-dimensional process of

mission-centred reflection. It is in the specific light of these two singularly charismatic and selfless personalities that this paper therefore proposes to examine how the Good News both biblically and ecclesially lays bare in story form a synodal style of roadmap.

Notes



Conference Attendees



Helen Bachmann

Frances Baker

Matthew Beckmann

Teresa Brown

James Calder

Michael Callinan

Raymond Canning

Sandra Carroll

Paul Chandler

Jennifer Close

John Collins

Sandie Cornish

Shane Dwyer

Robert Gascoigne

Beatrice Green

Gerard Hall

Maeve Louise Heaney

John Herd

Joel Hodge

Tony Ireland

Gerard Kelly

Terrence Kennedy

Christina Kheng

David Kirchhoffer

Robin Koning

Kevin Lenehan

Natalie Lindner

Cristina Lledo Gomez

Danielle Lynch

Patrick McArdle

Geralyn McCarthy

James McEvoy

Anthony Mellor

Gerard Moore

Gregory Moses

Neil Muir

Ann-Maree O'Beirne

Jason Obst

Neil Ormerod

David Pascoe

BJ Leonard Perrett

Antonia Pizzey

Ormond Rush

David Schütz

Julie Trinidad

Nguyen Van Vien

Max Vodola

John Zhao



Margaret Beirne

Rosemary Canavan

Mary Coloe

Michele Connolly

Ian Elmer

James Harrison

Sarah Hart

Donna Leander

Mark O'Brien

Kathleen Rushton

Debra Snoddy

Michael Trainor

Kevin Waldie