

Ecumenical Synodality

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At a time in which it might appear that ecumenism has lost its initial momentum, the synthesis report of the recent Synodal Assembly of bishops had the courage to speak of an ecumenical *Kairos* (7a), that is, of a favourable moment to reaffirm that *“There can be no synodality without an ecumenical dimension”* (7b).

Listening to other Christians has been very much part of the worldwide synodal process of the Catholic Church from the very beginning. Pope Francis has missed no opportunity to stress its importance: *“I would like to emphasize that today, for a Christian, it is not possible or feasible to go about alone with one’s own denomination.”* *“Never alone. We cannot do it.”* (May 6, 2022; see more in the article in this issue: Pope Francis – Never Alone).

As is well known, at the suggestion of the Prior of the Taizé Community, the Synod Assembly was preceded for the first time by an Ecumenical Vigil attended by a good number of church leaders and their respective faithful. Twelve ‘fraternal’ delegates then participated in the Assembly itself: a presence that was greater than in the past and, according to the synthesis report, should also increase in number in the future. This would fulfil the desire to *“continue to involve Christians of other denominations in Catholic synodal processes at all levels”* (7m). The proposal to *“convene an ecumenical synod on common mission in the contemporary world”* was also put forward (7n).

These are not side issues. The Good News of reconciliation, fraternity and hope rooted in the resurrection of Jesus will resound in the world in an entirely different way if we understand how to overcome the contrasts and indifference among ourselves. The People of God, then, will be able to be much more of an instrument of unity with God and amongst humanity which is called to be – as foreseen by the Second Vatican Council and the New Testament before it – if the Churches walk together.

The reality is that a lot has happened in the past one hundred years. Apart from a few painful exceptions, the advance of the ecumenical movement has seen a rediscovery of fraternity among Christians. Among many churches there is now a

mutual recognition of baptism. Various theological dialogues have brought about points of convergence and contributed to the healing of past hurts. In some instances, genuine agreements have been reached, as happened in the 1970s with the various Eastern Orthodox Churches regarding Christological matters. 1999 also saw and Lutherans and Catholics reach an agreement on the doctrine of justification which three other communions – the Reformed Churches, the Methodists and Anglican Churches – put their name to so much so that, based on the 2013 Catholic-Lutheran document *From Conflict to Communion*, the fifth centenary of the Protestant Reformation could be commemorated together in 2017 in an atmosphere of renewed fraternity.

Now it is a matter of going a step further and giving birth to true ecumenical synodality. If the worldwide process of the Catholic Church aiming to ensure that the synodal style is recognized and practiced as "*the specific modus vivendi et operandi of the Church, the People of God*," the same needs to be done in the ecumenical sphere: to ensure that sharing and cooperation cease to be sporadic and casual, intensifying only in particular moments such as the Week of Prayer for Unity, and become instead a fundamental dimension of being Church.

Witnessing that this is not only possible but is already the reality in a wide variety of places is the purpose of this issue of *Ekklesia* and which we were able to draw on the expertise and generous cooperation of *Centro Uno*, the Focolare Movement's Ecumenical Secretariat. In the process of putting this issue together we identified prophetic figures to highlight such as Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I and Iginio Giordani; did an interview with the President of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Christian Unity, Card. Kurt Koch and reflected with Callan Slipper on one of the new frontiers: receptive ecumenism. Above all, we tried to include several experiences which demonstrate an ecumenism of life in action.

Of course, a lot depends on how we look at things. If we look at them from an earthly perspective, we see the gulfs that have been created historically, the wounds and differences, the struggle to agree...; but if we look at them from above, from the heart of God, we see that the values of the Gospel everywhere have been spread everywhere; that by common baptism we belong to each other and that we can correct and complete each other; that we can learn from each other and that an exchange of gifts is possible that leads not to uniformity but to the miracle and fascination of plural unity.