

# Beyond Vatican II: Imagining the Catholic Church of Nairobi I<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction: Be Bold and Creative

The editor of this volume, Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, Jim Keane, the Acquiring Editor of Orbis Books, and I met to discuss a book that could evolve out of TCCRSA.<sup>2</sup> In brainstorming about a possible title and cover we tried to think outside the conventional box. We drew a line through the words “Vatican III, Rome” on the cover and wrote “Nairobi I.” We could have as easily written “Kinshasa I” or “Lagos I.” Going further afield we could have written “Manila I” or “Sao Paulo I.” The idea was to challenge the natural assumption that the next ecumenical council<sup>3</sup> has to take place in Rome. If the center of gravity of the Catholic Church<sup>4</sup> is moving from the West to the Global South,<sup>5</sup> why not have the successor to Vatican II meet in one of the great cities of the Southern Hemisphere.

I like the words “boldness” and “bold.” Listen to the German Jesuit theologian Father Karl Rahner, SJ’s challenge of inculturation and contextualization in 1979 that still rings true today:

The [Catholic] Church must be inculturated throughout the world if it is to be a World Church....This, then, is the issue: either the church sees and recognizes these essential differences of other cultures for which she should become a World Church and with a Pauline boldness draws the necessary consequences from this recognition, or she remains a Western Church and so in the final analysis betrays the meaning of Vatican II.<sup>6</sup>

Listen to Pope Francis’ invitation in 2013 in No. 33 of *Evangelii Gaudium*:

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way.” I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, styles and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory. I encourage everyone to apply the guidelines found in this document generously and courageously, without inhibitions or fear. The important thing is to not walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters, and especially under the leadership of the bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment.<sup>7</sup>

This is an experience of pastoral accompaniment and walking together (the very meaning of “synod”). In this journey the Catholic Church in Africa has a great deal to contribute to the World Church or Universal Church.

## **Rethinking the Structures and Styles of Governing and Decision-making in the Catholic Church**

How can we respond to Pope Francis' invitation to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the structures and styles of governing and decision-making in the Catholic Church? Hungarian Jesuit Canon Lawyer Father Ladislav Orsy and others say there can be no real reform of the Roman Curia without decentralization of the church's governing structures and its decision-making apparatus. Orsy stresses that the doctrinal role of local and regional bishops' conferences should be developed as should collegiality and synodality.<sup>8</sup>

Let us look at five institutions in the Catholic Church that have the best chance of being given greater authority and carrying out a sound and healthy decentralization with some practical examples:

**Nine-member Council of Cardinals.** Part of the originality of this advisory council is its international composition with representatives of all continents including Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo, the Archbishop of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). It has already established a new Congregation for Laity, Family, and Life, the Secretariat for the Economy and the Secretariat for Communications. Presently this council is creating a new dicastery -- the Congregation for Charity, Justice, and Peace.

**Synod of Bishops.** Here is the perfect place for the doctrine of episcopal collegiality based on synodality and subsidiarity to be put into action. Many think that the two synods (the Third Extraordinary General Assembly on "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization," in Rome from 5-19 October, 2014, and the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the "The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary<sup>9</sup> World" in Rome from 4-25 October, 2015) were a breakthrough and brought back the dynamic Vatican II process.

A new and fresh language is evolving including these expressions/ideas and the theology and pastoral practice behind them (alphabetically):

- Catholic Church should not just hold synods but become synodal.
- Connected to the base, to the grassroots.
- Directly incorporating collegiality.
- Effective collegiality.
- Fully synodal church.
- Healthy decentralization.
- Listening at every level of the Catholic Church.
- Make the "synodical model" a permanent feature/the normal way the Catholic Church regularly and routinely decides issues of theology and practice.
- More authority to the Post-Synod Council.
- More lay people especially women should participate and vote.
- Pastoral window open to new approaches.
- Permanent structures for consultation, discernment, and decision-making at all levels
- Permanent synodality.
- Process of each synod must begin with listening to the faithful.

- Reciprocal listening in which each one has something to learn.
- Starting point can be a deliberate, not just consultative, vote on important issues.
- Synod is a journey.
- Synodal church is a listening church, aware that listening is more than hearing.
- Synodality of the whole Catholic Church.
- Synodal spirit must be at work in parishes and dioceses as well as in the Universal Church.
- Way of the Catholic Church in the Third Millennium.
- Way of synodality.

The *Final Report (Relatio Synodi) of the Synod of Bishops to the Holy Father, Pope Francis*<sup>10</sup> was published on 24 October, 2015, and is 40 pages in length. All 94 paragraphs of the document were adopted by the assembly with the required two-thirds vote. Catholics now await Pope Francis' final document on the family and marriage that will probably be an *Apostolic Exhortation* that will come out during the Jubilee Year of Mercy that runs until November 2016.

Part of this synodal process is a more active role for the ongoing 14th Ordinary Council of the Synod of Bishops made up of 15 bishops (three bishops elected from each continent and three appointed by the pope. Also known as the Post-Synod Council or the Synod Ordinary Council, it will coordinate the follow-up to the synod on the family and marriage and prepare the topic of the next synod, traditionally held after three years. From the viewpoint of Africa there are special concerns. Of the three elected African members -- Cardinal Wilfrid Napier from South Africa, Cardinal Peter Turkson from Ghana, and Cardinal Robert Sarah from Guinea -- the last two are based in Rome and serving in the Curia. Cardinals in Rome are better known, some even with a celebrity status, and have a better chance of being elected than bishops serving in dioceses in Africa. But how much are they in touch with life in the trenches in Africa. How much of the Catholic Church on the ground in Africa will be represented?

**Decentralized Roman Curia.** I say "decentralized" because Vatican "business as usual" is fatal for real reform to take place. As a start why do all the Vatican offices have to be based in Rome? An alternative creative idea could mean having the Office (or Council or Commission) for Environment/Ecology based in Nairobi, Kenya;<sup>11</sup> the Office (or Council or Commission) for Interreligious Dialogue based in a city in Asia; and the Office (or Council or Commission) for Justice and Peace based in a city in Latin America. Also there should be more women in leadership positions.

**Continental, Regional and National Bishops' Conferences.** In *Evangelii Gaudium* which he calls a sort of blueprint for his pontificate, Pope Francis says clearly, "I am conscious of the need to promote a sound 'decentralization'." This means giving greater authority to our bishops' conferences. A dramatic case in point is how the Vatican has usurped authority over liturgical matters such as the Mass and the translation of the Bible into local languages. While being respectful of the Vatican, the Gikuyu-speaking Catholic Bishops in Kenya found it absurd that their professional translation of the Bible into the Gikuyu language had to be approved by the Sacred Congregation of the Liturgy in Rome (whose officials do not know Gikuyu) even to the point of a Gikuyu-speaking Kenyan seminarian studying in Rome vetting the text on behalf of the congregation.

After the universal Synod of Bishops on “Family and Marriage,” meetings (and even local synods) continue on the continental, regional, and national levels. Some initial discussions focused on the role of the Local and Universal Church and the part that episcopal conferences might share. In these debates the focus was on what pastoral issues are best handled at what levels. Here is the perfect place for the doctrine of episcopal collegiality based on synodality and subsidiarity. In this ongoing synodal process and journey the Catholic Church in Africa can share its growing voice and important pastoral experiences of family and marriage and other issues with the Catholic Church worldwide.

In Rome Cardinal Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel, CM, Archbishop of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Chairman of AMECEA, said:

Pope Francis emphasizes decentralizing, that is, putting into practice the process that had been started in Vatican II, by establishing national conferences, while respecting the autonomy of each diocese. Then that will give cooperation, national cooperation in the conference, and discuss common issues for forming solutions together and also regional cooperation. So that is putting into place the Second Vatican Council’s decision on ecclesial structures, on church structures. So what Pope Francis is saying is more work on the local level because the church is so different in so many parts of the world. So he was reflecting what was being emphasized during the synod. So give more responsibility to the local bishop and to the local bishops’ conference to do more.<sup>12</sup>

**Office of Metropolitan Archbishops.** Orsy emphasizes that the office of metropolitan archbishops could be reformed with the aim of decentralizing decision-making away from Rome. He explains that since the Council of Trent (1545-1563), juridical authority that once was constituent of the metropolitans has all but disappeared, leaving them with the strange woolen band draped over their shoulders and precedence in liturgical processions as the only things that differentiate them from other bishops.

An example of following Pope Francis’ rethinking of the structures of evangelization is seen in Eastern Africa: In 2013-2015 AMECEA<sup>13</sup> facilitated Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Workshops in the nine countries of Eastern Africa. After national workshops in Zambia (December, 2013), Malawi (December, 2013), Ethiopia (March, 2014), Kenya (May, 2015 and South Sudan (October, 2015), the SCCs Eastern Africa Training Team shifted to the more appropriate local-level Metropolitan Workshops in Tanzania (dioceses in the Ecclesiastical Province of Mwanza in May, 2014) and Uganda (dioceses in the Ecclesiastical Province of Tororo in May, 2015).

### **From the Perspective of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa**

In January, 1986 I participated in the South African Missiological Conference in Pretoria, South Africa. The keynote speaker of the congress was Swiss Theologian Father Hans Kung. I gave a lecture on "Basic Christian Communities: Church-Centered or World-Centered?" mainly from the pastoral experience of SCCs in

Eastern Africa. After my talk I received a hand-written message that Hans Kung wanted to see me at the next coffee break. Kung explained that in his latest research he had been studying different paradigms of the church: House Churches in the First Century, monasteries in medieval times, and the parish in recent centuries. He wondered if the parish model was no longer appropriate in different places in the world, and if the model or paradigm of the future is the Small Christian Communities (SCCs)?<sup>14</sup>

I have often wondered if this was prophetic. Although the term SCCs is not mentioned specifically in the documents of Vatican II, some of the great theologians of the council emphasized them in their writings in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The French Dominican theologian Father Yves Congar, in *Lay People in the Church* wrote that SCCs are “little church cells wherein the mystery is lived directly and with great simplicity... the church’s machinery, sometimes the very institution, is a barrier obscuring her deep and living mystery, which they can find, or find again, only from below.”<sup>15</sup>

In his preface to the book *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment* Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor, the retired archbishop of Westminster, England, quotes Congar and adds:

Congar hit upon an important truth: that renewal in the church has come about, time and time again in its history, in and through the inspiration of small communities – monastic, evangelical, missionary, lay communities, communities of women – fired by the Holy Spirit.<sup>16</sup>

Today there are over 180,000 Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the Catholic Church in the nine AMECEA countries. Tanzania has over 60,000 SCCs and Kenya has over 45,000 SCCs. Since 1973 they have been a key pastoral priority in Eastern Africa as a “New Way of Being (Becoming) Church” and a “New Pastoral Model of Church.”<sup>17</sup> The rich experience of the church in Eastern Africa especially pastoral, parish-based SCCs is contributing to the other parts of Africa and to the World Church.

SCCs is a pastoral model of church integrally connected to the structures, ministries, and activities of the parish. This helps local Catholics feel that “they are the church” and more responsible (“ownership”) for church life and decision making. Experiments of pastoral restructuring have taken place in Eastern African dioceses such as Same Diocese in Tanzania.

The then Bishop Josaphat Lebulu of Same and his pastoral co-workers restructured the diocese according to a “Communion of Communities Ecclesiology” and the geographical reality of the Northeastern part of Tanzania. The traditional structure of Diocese/Parish/SCC did not seem to fit the local reality that includes large, disparate, and unwieldy parishes and a physical geography of many hills and small mountains.

The new structure was Diocese/Center/SCC. Rather than focusing on the 17 traditional parishes they created 55 Centers (similar to sub-parishes or outstations) and around 250 SCCs. In this model the diocese is a “Communion of Centers” and the center is a “Communion of SCCs.” The pastoral animation and service try to get down to the grassroots where the people

live and work. Eight lay ecclesial ministries were started in the SCCs and continue on the center and diocesan levels. These lay ecclesial ministry leaders form a team of coordinators/formators on the SCC, center, and diocesan levels.<sup>18</sup>

The *Final Report (Relatio Synodi)* on “Family and Marriage” on 24 October, 2015 mentions SCCs (or their equivalent) three times:

Under “The Initial Years of Family Life” (No. 60).

The parish is the place where experienced couples may be made available to the younger ones, possibly in conjunction with associations, ecclesial movements and new communities. Strengthening the network of relationships between couples and creating meaningful connections among people are necessary for the maturation of the family’s Christian life. Movements and church groups often provide these moments of growth and formation. The Local Church, by integrating the contributions of various persons and groups, assumes the work of coordinating the pastoral care of young families.

Under “Accompaniment<sup>19</sup> in Different Situations” (No. 77).

The Church will have to initiate everyone — priests, religious and laity — into this ‘art of accompaniment’ which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. *Exodus* 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 169). The main contribution to the pastoral care of families is offered by the parish, which is the family of families, where small communities, ecclesial movements and associations live in harmony.

Under “The Family as the Subject of Pastoral Ministry” (No. 90):

May every family, incorporated in the church, rediscover the joy of communion with other families so as to serve the common good of society by promoting policy-making, an economy and a culture in the service of the family through the use of *social networks* and the *media* which calls for the ability to create small communities of families as living witnesses of Gospel values. Families need to be prepared, trained and empowered to guide others in living in a Christian manner. Families who are willing to live the mission *ad gentes* are to be acknowledged and encouraged. Finally, we note the importance of connecting youth ministry with family ministry.

A wide variety of names and terms related to SCCs are used in the document to describe family catechesis, marriage catechesis, and different forms of pastoral ministry connected to the family. The document synthesizes material from previous synods and questionnaires. It affirms the important role of SCCs in pastoral accompaniment of families and

married couples. But it does not break too much new ground in providing concrete pastoral solutions to the biggest challenges today.

With the conclusion of the Synod of Bishops on the Family, it is the responsibility of the Local Churches in Africa to “prepare, train and empower” families for this evangelizing work and to identify where, in the local communities, our families are being called to service. SCCs as a communion of families play a big role.

### **Pastoral Solutions to the Two Meanings of the Eucharistic Famine in Africa**

Pope Francis’ challenge to be bold and creative can be applied to the two meanings of the Eucharistic Famine (also called the “Eucharistic Hunger”) in Africa: First, due to the lack of priests on any given Sunday, most Catholics in Africa (up to 80% in some surveys)<sup>20</sup> rather than taking part in a regular Mass participate in a “Sunday Service without a Priest”<sup>21</sup> (especially in rural areas) where usually there is no Holy Communion. Second, many Catholics in Africa cannot receive communion because they are not officially married in the Catholic Church. In some surveys 60% of adult Catholics in Africa have not had their marriages blessed in church (sacramentalized). Other practicing Catholics are divorced and remarried civilly outside the Catholic Church so cannot receive the Eucharist.

Hopefully the ongoing process after the October, 2015 Synod of Bishops will find concrete pastoral solutions. Pope Francis in No. 47 of *Evanglii Gaudium* says: “The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.” Two creative pastoral solutions for Africa are:

- **Ordination of Married Community Elders (Married Priesthood)**

Providing the Eucharist to all Catholics in Africa is a great need. Malawian theologian Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, who died in 2012 emphasizes that the Eucharist community is the heart of our Christian life. He says that if Christian communities in Africa cannot receive the Eucharist because of the lack of ordained ministers that presently in the Latin Rite are male, celibate priests, then we must rethink our church laws and pastoral practices, for example, ordain mature married men of proven leadership skills (*virī probati* in Latin). Then many more people would be able to receive communion and our SCCs would truly be Eucharistic Communities.

The question arises: In reading the signs of the times is the pastoral solution of married priests an idea whose time has come?

The retired German *Fidei Donum* Bishop Fritz Lobinger of Aliwal Diocese, South Africa has written extensively on topics such as *Teams of Elders: Moving Beyond “Virī Probati”* (Claretian Publications, 2007) and *Every Community Its Own Ordained Leaders* (Claretian Publications, Philippines, 2008). He puts forward the case for ordaining married men in underserved areas. In commenting on the World Church, and particularly the Global South, Lobinger states: “The priestless communities of the South have already developed a ministry structure of their own. We just have to build on it.”<sup>22</sup> “Lay leaders preach, conduct services, conduct funerals, pray for the sick and in some areas they are even authorized to conduct

baptisms and marriages. There can be no doubt that they would also be accepted if they were ordained to the ministerial priesthood.”<sup>23</sup>

A key for Lobinger is that the ordination of elders would work in vibrant, self-reliant Catholic communities in Africa such as the networks of parish-based SCCs. He admits that some priests view a new path to ordination without formal academic training or the celibacy requirement as a threat that could undermine the traditional priesthood. But Lobinger argues that traditionally trained priests would fit into the new system. “The new local leaders (Married Community Elders) become a leadership team and the priests become formators.”<sup>24</sup>

This is similar to the vision of Cardinal Joseph Malula, the late Archbishop of Kinshasa Archdiocese in DRC, who died in 1989. He believed very much in the laity and created the lay ecclesial ministry of *Bakambi* (singular *Mokambi*) who were married men as responsible parish leaders. They were full time administrators of parishes empowered to lead communities in everything except in saying Mass. Malula’s vision was to have some of these men one day lead Eucharistic Communities, that is, celebrate the Eucharist, a vision that met with displeasure at the Vatican and gradually declined. In the church today we have lay people who can lead Eucharistic Communities but can’t because of the stringent rules.

The retired Bishop Colin Davies of Ngong Diocese, Kenya, writes:

I am going to advocate the incorporation of the Byzantine Rite into the Roman Rite which has the option of having married priests. Celibacy, a most treasured gift to the Catholic Church, has now become a block to helping to solve the problem, not only of Eucharistic Hunger but also of the Pastoral (Prophetic) Role of Christ active in the Eucharistic Ministry and in the Priesthood of the Laity. I am hoping it will be recognized and discussed as one of the “Signs of the Times” at the Synods of Bishops. I see SCCs as seeds for the growth of Eucharistic Communities with the possibility of mature laymen becoming ordained priests!<sup>25</sup>

But many other African bishops differ and want to maintain the present celibate priesthood discipline.

A related pastoral solution to the Eucharistic Famine is twofold:<sup>27</sup>

1. Dramatically increase the number of Eucharistic Ministers – sisters, brothers, and especially lay people. More religious sisters and brothers could easily make this part of their pastoral ministry.
2. Build strong, secure churches in the sub-parishes or Mass Centers. Have the Blessed Sacrament reserved in these churches. Then the Eucharist could be given out at all services.

As we journey towards Vatican III we should have more theological and pastoral research, discussion, and discernment on different forms of ordained and non-ordained ministry including greater leadership for women.



- **African Stages of Marriage**

One intriguing proposal in Africa for many years is to develop an inculturated Rite for the Catechumenate of Christian Marriage (Marriage Catechumenate) similar to the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA or the adult catechumenate). This could be two years or more depending on the customs and traditions (cultural dimension) of the local ethnic groups in Africa. It would integrate the basic elements of consent in the traditional African marriage rituals into the Christian sacrament of marriage.

This would follow the stages of marriage<sup>28</sup> in an African context (also called “marriage in stages”) where marriage is a process rather than a single event and marriage is between two families rather than just between two individuals. The Catholic sacramental and spiritual “moments” (not “moment”) would take place during different stages of the marriage process: from the first official meeting and agreement of the two families of the couple to the betrothal (engagement) to the living together to the paying of the dowry or bridewealth (that often takes place slowly over many years) to the wife’s pregnancy to the birth of the first child to the civil marriage to the Catholic Marriage Rite (that could be in a Catholic Church or in a SCC) to the wedding celebration.<sup>29</sup>

The couple usually live together during most of this process -- what is commonly called premarital cohabitation. During this period, sometimes called the “trial marriage” or “the test of compatibility” period, the couple test their ability to live together and to get along with their in-laws. In African ethnic groups it is essential for the couple to have successful consummation that leads to procreation. Infertility could be a cause for the break-up of the marriage.

An important dimension is the Ministry of Pastoral Accompaniment that is emphasized in the documents of the two World Synods of Bishops (2014-2015) on “Family and Marriage.”<sup>30</sup> SCC members accompany the engaged couple throughout the stages of marriage. A representative of the Catholic Church such as a priest or catechist is present at the important ceremonies and accompanies the couple in the key moments. For example, in a wedding of a couple of the Sukuma Ethnic Group in Tanzania the most important cultural ceremony is when the father of the groom hands over the dowry/bridewealth of cows to the father of the bride. This is a large, joyous event of the two families and the local community that includes the elders making a careful inspection of the cows themselves and a festive meal with plenty of food and local beer. In Bunda Parish in Bunda Diocese the parish priest participates in this celebration and gives a blessing.<sup>31</sup> Tanzanian Theologian Laurenti Magesa goes even further in suggesting that the cultural ceremony of the cows should be combined/integrated with the Catholic Church marriage ceremony.<sup>32</sup>

A number of African bishops have pointed out how hard it is to achieve a consensus on marriage rites given the wide variety of African cultural traditions, customs, and rites. Retired Kenyan Archbishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana’a Nzeki of Nairobi, Kenya, explained that the 1994 African Synod appointed him to a Commission on Marriage in an African Context. He said that our Catholic marriage laws are based on Western law (for example, German law). The hope was to develop common inculturated guidelines on marriage that could be used throughout Africa. But the commission failed and was disbanded.

At the Synod of Bishops on “Family and Marriage” in October, 2015 African bishops discerned the issue of couples cohabiting before marriage that legally goes against church teaching. Cardinal Napier’s views are summarized as follows:

On the issue of cohabitation, however, Napier argued that more leniency should be granted couples in Africa, for whom, he said, living together before marriage is often more a “step” in the marriage process than a rejection of matrimony or a trial marriage. “Cohabitation in our case is pro-marriage, not against marriage,” he said. “In regard to the traditional African marriage custom, first of all it’s not a marriage between two individuals but between two families. So there’s a whole process of negotiation,” he said. When a dowry is established by the bride’s family, the cardinal said, often it may take a young man a very long time, perhaps years, to raise the money to cover it. “In the meantime, the families could agree that at a certain point they would start living together as husband and wife, even though the marriage is not yet concluded,” he said.

The cardinal said the term “cohabitation” doesn't really fit that African experience. In the West, he said, couples may also live together for economic or other reasons, but it’s not the same. He added that it was up to African bishops to make sure that “that particular custom does get incorporated into the sacrament of matrimony.” That, of course, would be a major change. The same issue was discussed at the First African Synod, held at the Vatican in 1994, and there’s been no significant action on it since. But Napier said he thought that “with Pope Francis’ lead,” African bishops will have a new impetus for studying the issue.<sup>33</sup>

A further summary of the cardinal’s explanation:

He said sometimes people use the word “arranged marriage” but it is “actually negotiated” in that the bride’s family is “to say what the dowry should be.” Saving for the dowry can take a long time, the cardinal added, and in the meantime, “the families could agree that they can start living together as husband and wife, even though the marriage is not yet completed.” He said it is therefore different from the Western concept of cohabitation, which means moving in together because it’s less expensive or for some other reasons, but not necessarily with marriage as an end.<sup>34</sup>

Cardinal Napier is eager to explore the opening toward more local decision-making that Pope Francis raised during his speech at the synod when he spoke of a more “synodal” and collegial exercise of authority in the church. According to the USA bishops, almost half the couples who come in for marriage preparation courses in local parishes are cohabitating. The figure is really much higher. The rates of cohabitation across Africa are generally much lower, but studies indicate they are increasing in some countries, both as a prelude to marriage and an alternative to marriage.

The synod heard a suggestion, for example, for ritual adaptation to accommodate the stages of traditional African marriage – with the African bishops guiding the discussion. After many years of Rome emphasizing the limits of inculturation, this seems to be a time for new exploration of diversity in the church. Pope Francis, in fact, highlighted this possibility in his final synod speech on inculturation.

On a related family and marriage issue, the pastoral solutions to polygamy is an example of “healthy decentralization” that has to be settled locally, that is, in Africa. This was even emphasized by Western bishops at the synod.

Today in Africa there are still many St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict-appointed bishops with their more orthodox, traditional, and cautious style. Now Pope Francis-appointed bishops are emerging who have simpler lifestyles, are closer to the people and are more pastorally minded. An example of this diversity is the Catholic Bishops’ Conference in South Africa. Following the process of subsidiarity (decentralization) and collegiality, a big question is how a consensus on new pastoral solutions can evolve on the local level in Africa (for example, in a national bishops’ conference) on the challenges regarding family and marriage?

### **Integrating African Process and African Content**

One of the goals and objectives of our three theological colloquia (TCCRSA) was to initiate and experiment with a new way of doing conversational, cross-disciplinary, collaborative, and multigenerational theology. Our unique African theological process or method is African Christian Conversational Theology. This fits very well with Pope Francis’ vision of a communal search, not walking alone but relying on each other as brothers and sisters and a wise and realistic pastoral discernment.

This African Christian Conversational Theology is both the name of a process or method of theology and the name of the type of the content of theology (like Liberation Theology). As we walk together we continue to integrate African process or method and African content. This African process or method focuses on conversation, active dialogue, intensive listening and learning from each other (described as “listening in conversation”), and consensus. This African content focuses on inculturation and contextualization starting with the concrete, practical pastoral experiences needs of the African people on the grassroots level.

### **Relevance for the Catholic Church in North America and Europe**

These theological conversations and searches for pastoral solutions are not just for Africa. They are important for the World Catholic Church. Specifically some of these issues are very relevant for the Catholic Church in North America and Europe. Here are three examples.

- **Married Priesthood and Eucharist**

The terms Eucharistic Famine or Eucharistic Hunger are increasingly being used in North America and Europe and have two meanings. First, due to the shortage of priests, the aging of priests, the clustering of parishes, long distances to the nearby parishes, and elderly people without transportation more and more Catholics cannot go to mass on Sunday. The so-called circuit rider priest can only get to some of his parishes on a given Sunday especially in the rural areas. So without the Eucharist some Catholics go spiritually hungry. Opening the door to more types of priests is a priority. More Eucharistic Ministers is a priority.

Second, the terms refers to the many Catholics who are divorced and remarried civilly outside the Catholic Church and thus cannot receive communion due to present church laws. These Catholics may be very devout and have faithfully gone to Mass every Sunday for many years. They desire the Eucharist, the Bread of Life, the Food for the Journey, but they can't receive. The two Synods of Bishops in 2014-2015 discussed and debated this challenge extensively. Hopefully creative pastoral solutions on a case by case basis can give them permission to receive the Eucharist. Pope Francis' statement that "the Eucharist is a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak" needs to be emphasized here.

One pastoral solution is local experimentation within a specific context. An interesting proposal comes from England as an Editorial in *The Tablet* states:

It is estimated that one in 10 priests in diocesan ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales began his priestly vocation in the Church of England. Many of them are married. This is very relevant to the question increasingly being raised about the compulsory celibacy of the Catholic priesthood – compulsory except for former Anglican clergy who are given a dispensation. And what makes it urgent is the growing realization at all levels of the Catholic Church that the shortage of priests is gradually having a profound effect on Catholic parishes who are finding themselves – often with little consultation – being closed, merged, or told to share a priest.<sup>35</sup>

Because of the successful arrangement regarding married former Anglicans, England is uniquely situated to pilot a modest experiment.

- **Formation: Marriage and Priesthood**

The statistics on divorce are shocking. That 40% of Catholic marriages end in divorce is not significantly different from the national average in the United States. What does this say about the effectiveness of our many Pre-Cana, Cana, Marriage Encounter, and Couples for Christ Programs? A provocative question is raised: "Why do candidates for the priesthood spend eight to 10 years in formation and studies before ordination to the priesthood (a sacrament in the Catholic Church and a permanent, lifetime commitment) while couples preparing for marriage (also a sacrament in the Catholic Church and a permanent, lifetime commitment) can have as few as three marriage instructions before their wedding in church?"

Religious Brothers and Sisters undergo rigorous formation and training before temporary and final vows. American lay theologian Lisa Fullam draws this parallel. She

says that when young people enter a religious congregation, they spend time as a postulant, then at least a year as a novice (two years for some congregations). Only then do they make a commitment of temporary vows—and even that commitment is a temporary, conditional one. Why is it, she asks, that we allow young people to marry (a permanent commitment, at least in theory) with so little preparation or “come and see” time, but allow vowed religious plenty of time to “try it out”?

- **Restructuring, Lay Ecclesial Ministries, SCCs, and Family Ministry**

SCCs have never been center stage in the West, but the Catholic Church in Europe is now being forced to rethink its pastoral strategy as Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, the Archbishop of Vienna, Austria, said during the 2012 Synod of Bishops:

The key idea, which has been extremely present in this synod, is the Small Christian Community. Many, many bishops from around the world have spoken about the Small Christian Communities. We see the need, and we have the desire, not to lose communities but to increase their number. We’re forced to reduce the number of parish structures, with all their administration and expenses, but we want to favor a growing number of Small Christian Communities led by laity – laity who aren’t full-time, who aren’t bureaucrats, but volunteers. These are people living in the field who do what laity in many parishes and other communities already do which is to take responsibility for a large part of the life of the church, the vibrant aspects of community life.

We want to implement more explicitly the great theme of Vatican II: the common priesthood of all the baptized, with the ministerial priesthood at its service, promoting the holiness of the people of God. Laity today – or, I would rather say, the baptized today – are fully capable of being true witnesses to faith in Christ in their daily lives, and therefore in the lives of Small Christian Communities...[In the future] five small parishes in the countryside will form one greater parish. Their facilities, however, could be used to animate some of these Small Christian Communities.<sup>36</sup>

The Local Churches in North America and Europe and the Local Churches in Eastern Africa can learn from each other’s pastoral experiences in the spirit of the Ugandan proverb *one hand washes the other*. The Eastern African experience of evolving pastoral structures, lay ecclesial ministries<sup>37</sup> pastoral, parish-based SCCs, and family ministry described earlier can speak a great deal to the Catholic Church in the West.

During the Synod of Bishops on “Family and Marriage” in Rome in 2015 Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh Archdiocese, Northern Ireland, said that he has been struck by the ideas put forward by bishops in the Philippines and elsewhere [including Eastern Africa] especially about Small Christian Communities where families support one another in times of need. He compares these to the “paltry efforts I’ve taken so far in my own diocese” where he says he’ll be looking to do much more at the parish and diocesan level.<sup>38</sup>

After the synod, Bishop Peter Doyle, the Bishop of Northampton, England, commented on family life in Africa and other parts of the world:

The point that came across to me is the richness of family life in other parts of the world. Here [in England], marriage has become very much a privatized industry. What the immigrant community can bring is the fact that marriage is more than Jack and Jill but it is about their families, their extended families, about the community, about the parish communities as well – and that’s the sort of richness that our immigrant communities are already bringing in our parishes. There’s much more life, color and joy in their celebrations than there can be in ours.<sup>39</sup>

### **Conclusion: Let Us Journey Ahead Together**

As we evolve an agenda for Vatican III – or Nairobi I or any venue in the world -- let us journey ahead together and let us be bold and creative. Our process or method should be open, flexible, inculturated, contextual, collegial, decentralized, inclusive, a “big tent” approach to the changes and developments in the Catholic Church as a World Church. Whether it be (alphabetically) Eucharist (Communion), family, governing, lay leadership, liturgy, marriage, pastoral ministry, ordination, restructuring, or SCCs, it is obvious that one size does not fit all. We need “devolved” authority structures and decision-making processes. Different pastoral practices will develop in local communities “from below” in different countries and cultures.

Let us follow the well-known African Proverb that is also very popular in Western countries: *If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together.*

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### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> In the spirit and practice of this colloquium being a process or method of African Christian Conversation Theology and African Christian Palaver Theology (more commonly used in Africa), I have incorporated the comments and insights from the participants during our discussion and dialogue on this essay. I also invited many pastoral workers and theologians into the “conversation” on this essay and incorporated their comments and insights too.

<sup>2</sup> Separate volumes on each colloquium were published by Paulines Publication Africa.

<sup>3</sup> There have been 21 Catholic Ecumenical Councils over a period of 1,700 years starting with First Council of Nicaea (part of Asia Minor that roughly corresponds to the Asian part of Turkey) in 325. Most of these councils have taken place in different countries in the Middle East and Europe.

<sup>4</sup> The word “church” is specifically used in this article to refer to the Roman Catholic Church, but we have to be sensitive to the other meanings such as the many other Christian Churches (Protestant, Episcopalian, Evangelical, Pentecostal, etc.). In a specific context an adjective may be necessary such as “Catholic Church” or “Episcopalian Church.” In general, I prefer using “church” with lower case unless it is used in a title.

<sup>5</sup> The nations of Africa, Central and Latin America, and most of Asia are collectively known as the Global South and include 157 recognized states in the world. This term is preferred to the terms “developing countries” and “Third World countries” that are pejorative and are usually used in a narrow economic sense.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies*, 40, 4

(December, 1979), pp. 718, 724.

<sup>7</sup> Laurenti Magesa has insightfully commented: “John Paul II’s papacy and the nearly eight years of his successor Benedict XVI (2005-2013) saw some practical retrenchment from the theological vision of Vatican II, something which, after Benedict’s surprise resignation on 28 February, 2014, Pope Francis his successor, has been trying to undo since his election on 13 March, 2013.”

Laurenti Magesa, “Endless Quest: The Vocation of an African Christian Theologian” in Jesse Mugambi and Evaristi Magoti (ed.), *Endless Quest: The Vocation of an African Christian Theologian*, a Festschrift for Professor Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2014), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Summarized from Robert Mickens, “Can Pope Francis Succeed in Reforming the Curia?” *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*, 26 May, 2015. National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved on 27 May, 2015, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/roman-observer/can-pope-francissucceed-reforming-curia>.

<sup>9</sup> The English word “contemporary” has a more up-to-date, “here and now” meaning than the word “modern.”

<sup>10</sup> The full text is on the Vatican Website:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20151026\\_relazione-finale-xiv-assemblea\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20151026_relazione-finale-xiv-assemblea_en.html).

<sup>11</sup> This is the logical place because the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the agency of the United Nations that coordinates its environmental activities, has its headquarters in the Gigiri neighborhood of Nairobi, Kenya. Pope Francis visited here in November, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Deborah Castellano Lubov, “INTERVIEW: Head of Ethiopian Catholic Church: Human Rights Crises Merit More Attention at Synod,” “ZENIT: The World Seen from Rome,” 23 October, 2015, ZENIT Website, retrieved 25 October, 2015, [http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/interview-head-of-ethiopian-catholic-church-human-rights-crises-merit-more-attention-at-synod?utm\\_campaign=dailyhtml&utm\\_content=%5BZE151023%5D%20The%20world%20seen%20from%20Rom&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=dispatch&utm\\_term=Image](http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/interview-head-of-ethiopian-catholic-church-human-rights-crises-merit-more-attention-at-synod?utm_campaign=dailyhtml&utm_content=%5BZE151023%5D%20The%20world%20seen%20from%20Rom&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dispatch&utm_term=Image).

<sup>13</sup> AMECEA is an acronym for “Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa.” It is a service organization for the National Episcopal Conferences of the nine English-speaking countries of Eastern Africa, namely Eritrea (1993), Ethiopia (1979), Kenya (1961), Malawi (1961), South Sudan (2011), Sudan (1973), Tanzania (1961), Uganda (1961) and Zambia (1961). AMECEA is one of the eight Regional Episcopal Conferences of SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar).

<sup>14</sup> See Joseph Healey and Jeanne Hinton (eds.), *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005, and Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006), 155.

<sup>15</sup> Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, first published in 1953 (London: Geoffrey Chapman Revised Edition, 1985), 341.

<sup>16</sup> Healey and Hinton, *Small Christian Communities Today*, xi.

<sup>17</sup> See the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website and “Facebook Page:” [www.smallchristiancommunities.org](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org).

<sup>18</sup> See Joseph Healey, “Diocesan Structure of Small Christian Communities in Same” in “Twelve Case Studies of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa” in Agatha Radoli, (ed.), *How Local is the Local Church? Small Christian Communities and Church in Eastern Africa* (Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, *Spearhead* 126-128, 1993), 59-103.

<sup>19</sup> The *Final Report* has 13 references to “accompany,” eight references to “accompaniment,” and four references to “accompanying.” The *Instrumentum Laboris* has 16 references to “accompany,” 13 references to “accompaniment,” and eight references to “accompanying.” SCC members accompany engaged couples throughout the stages of their marriage and married couples in their first years of marriage.

<sup>20</sup> American Catholics may not have a sense of the magnitude of this crisis especially as Catholic dioceses in the USA continue to import African and Indian priests.

<sup>21</sup> Also called “Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest,” “Sunday Worship without a Priest,” “Sunday Service of the Word with Communion”, and “Eucharistic Prayer Service Outside of Mass.”

<sup>22</sup> Fritz Lobinger, letter to the author dated 28 September, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Fritz Lobinger in Benjamin Soloway, “Brazilian Bishop Urges Ordination of Married Community Elders,” *Religious News Service*, 24 November, 2014, p. 1. Reprinted in *Washington Post*, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/brazilian-bishop-urges-ordination-of-married-community-elders-as-priest-shortage-grows/2014/11/24/1e657fb8-7412-11e4-95a8-fe0b46e8751a\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/brazilian-bishop-urges-ordination-of-married-community-elders-as-priest-shortage-grows/2014/11/24/1e657fb8-7412-11e4-95a8-fe0b46e8751a_story.html) and *Huffington Post*, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/25/brazilian-bishop-ordain-married-elders\\_n\\_6215286.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/25/brazilian-bishop-ordain-married-elders_n_6215286.html).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Colin Davies, email messages to the author, 21 April, 2014 and 22 April, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> This solution was developed during discussions in a SCCs Workshop in Tororo, Uganda in May, 2015. This could solve the problem of some Catholics in distant rural areas in Uganda (and other African countries) who only receive the Eucharist twice a year.

<sup>28</sup> In an interview with the author in Washington DC on 9 October, 2014 Orsy mentioned that in the history of the Catholic Church the German tribes had this “gradual” approach to the sacrament of marriage. It was only confirmed after the couple lived together successfully for six months.

<sup>29</sup> I asked a devout Catholic married woman in Iramba Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania what was the happiest day of her life. She answered: “Not the day of my marriage or the day of the birth of my first child. It was the day my first born son was circumcised.” For her this symbolized that her son had passed to manhood and the continuance of the family lineage was assured. As a mother she had successfully done her part.

<sup>30</sup> See Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) General Secretariat, “*Relatio Synodi 2015 – Pastoral Guidelines for a Process of Discussion and Action*,” Nairobi: Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2015. Online Version: “Family and Marriage in Kenya Today: Pastoral Guidelines for a Process of Discussion and Action,” <http://www.kccb.or.ke/home/news-2/pastoral-guidelines-for-a-process-of-discussion-inaction>.

<sup>31</sup> Based on American missionary Father Bill Vos’ several conversations with the author in 2013 and 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Laurenti Magesa’s conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 14 March, 2007.

<sup>33</sup> John Thavis, “Cardinal Napier Has Praise for Synod Process, Pope Francis’ Leadership,” “The Blog,” retrieved on 25 October, 2015, <http://www.johnthavis.com/cardinal-napier-has-praise-for-synod-process-pope-francis-leadership#.VjCWxLerQgs>.

<sup>34</sup> Diane Montagna, “African Bishops Ending Synod with ‘Sense of Optimism,’” 21 October, 2015, retrieved on 26 December, 2015, <http://Aleteia.Org/2015/10/21/Cardinal-Napier-African-Bishops-Ending-Synod-With-Sense-Of-Optimism>.

<sup>35</sup> Editorial: Married Priests: “England Can Break New Ground,” *The Tablet*, Vol. 268, No. 905 (15 November, 2014), p. 2, retrieved on the *Tablet* Website on 28 November, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/editors-desk/1/3879/england-can-break-new-ground>.

<sup>36</sup> John L. Allen Jr., “Interview with Cardinal Christoph Schönborn,” *National Catholic Reporter [(NCR)]* (25 October 2012) on the *National Catholic Reporter* Website, retrieved on 28 October 2012, <http://ncronline.org/node/37906>.

<sup>37</sup> A list of “Lay Ecclesial Ministries in Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa” is found as Online Resource No. 4 in the free, online Ebook *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa* on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved on 6 June, 2015 at [http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build\\_new.pdf](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build_new.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> Eamon Martin, “Irish Church Must Respond Better to Challenges of Family Life.” Vatican Radio, 23 October, 2015, retrieved on 24 October, 2015, [http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/10/23/irish\\_church\\_must\\_respond\\_better\\_to\\_challenge\\_of\\_family\\_life/1181552](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/10/23/irish_church_must_respond_better_to_challenge_of_family_life/1181552).

<sup>39</sup> “Elation, But Compromise Too,” *Tablet*, Vol. 269, No. 9124 (31 October, 2015), 8, retrieved on 26 December, 2015, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/downloadpdf/311015issue.pdf>.

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He co-edited *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment* (Orbis Books and Paulines Publications Africa) and is the Moderator of the [Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org) ([www.smallchristiancommunities.org](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org)). He co-authored *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (Orbis Books and Paulines Publications Africa) and is the Moderator of the [African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website](http://www.afriprov.org) ([www.afriprov.org](http://www.afriprov.org)). He contributed a chapter on “Small Christian Communities: Promoters of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Eastern Africa” in *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace – the Second African Synod* (Orbis Books and Acton Publishers) and a chapter on “Historical Development of the Small Christian Communities/Basic Ecclesial Communities in Africa.” in *Small Christian Communities: Fresh Stimulus for a Forward-looking Church* (Herder and Claretian Publications). His most recent book is *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications – CUEA Press Double *Spearhead* Nos. 199-200 (2012). The book is updated every month and is available as a free online digital (electronic) Ebook on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/ebooks/47-ebooks-.html> He has helped to produce a number of videos and DVDs on SCCs as well as coordinate radio and TV programs.

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