

PAKIKINIG SA PAHIWATIG: HORIZONS IN A SYNODAL CHURCH

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As a core element of synodality, effective listening is essential for the Church's discernment and mission. However, listening is shaped by biases and prejudices, making it necessary to recognize each person's diverse horizons and what these reveals about the Church's synodal journey. This paper examines the listening process in the Philippine synodal consultations, drawing from diocesan national reports and various consultation experiences. It explores how pahiwatig—non-verbal communication—manifests different voices, unveiling new horizons for deeper listening and discernment. To foster a more embodied synodal praxis, this study advocates for a renewed attentiveness to the corporate body, awakening the senses in the listening process, and empowering liminal leaders who navigate the Church's peripheries.

Keywords: synodality, listening, horizons, Pahiwatig, corporate body, senses, Philippine church

INTRODUCTION

The vision of synodality “designates the particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the Church”¹ one that takes listening as the first act of the Church.”² The Church “lives from listening: listening to the Word of God, listening to the Holy Spirit,

¹ International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” 70a

² XVI Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris*, How to be a missionary Synodal Church for the Second Session, 2024, no.6. “*Instrumentum laboris*” of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

listening to one another, listening to the living tradition of the Church and its Magisterium.”³

Listening has been the “one of the greatest fruits,” the “first conversion,” for those who were involved in the synodal process ⁴ and not surprisingly, because of this, the synod recommends instituting a ministry of listening and accompaniment which will depend on the local context, experiences, and available resources.”⁵ It is also for this reason that many Catholic lay associations have reoriented their community life towards structures of listening to one another and in their apostolates.⁶

The synod reiterates that listening is a call for all baptized and all communities to cultivate. As an “ecclesial service and not a personal initiative,” an “open door that welcomes people without feeling threatened or judged.”⁷ Understanding this is important as the reports indicate the lack of “communal processes of listening and discernment,” the persistence of structures that “fragment relationships between priests and laity,” and the “absence of in-between spaces that foster encounters between members of mutually separate groups.”⁸ As the synod emphasizes the need to create spaces of encounters, it also implies the invitation to explore new ways of listening and entering new spaces to enable more voices and a renewed understanding of the Church together with them.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., no.19.

⁵ Ibid., no. 34.

⁶ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, “Salya: The Philippine National Report on Synodality 2024,” no. 21. <https://synodphilippines.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/SALYA-The-Philippine-National-Report-on-Synodality-2024.pdf>

⁷ *Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 34.

⁸ General Secretariat for the Synod, “Enlarging the Space of your Tent, Working Document for the Continental Stage, 33. <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/dcs/Documento-Tappa-Continentale-EN.pdf>

Given the foregoing, this paper will analyze the listening processes unfolding in the praxis of synodality in the Philippine context and how horizons were explored and interpreted. It will then propose horizons expressed through Filipino communication patterns and how they manifest in ecclesial life. Finally, it will suggest how listening and understanding can be enriched through a more critical turn to the corporeal body, awakening and intentional listening to the senses, and empowering liminal leaders.

HORIZONS IN THE SYNODAL PROCESS

Horizons are important in understanding people and communities. Horizon is a “range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point.”⁹ People are historically conditioned and thus understand the world from one’s social location, cultural background, and inherited tradition. As horizons limit the “possibility of vision,” it also brings out biases and prejudices; an important starting point of interpretation.¹⁰ New ways of understanding together happens through a fusion of horizons which happens when people interact and dialogue with different social locations and contexts.¹¹

In the synodal process, this fusion is nuanced in the proposed listening and spiritual conversations on different aspects of church.¹² The 3-year synodal process began in 2021 through local consultations in the dioceses and parishes with particular attention

⁹ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. (New York: Continuum, 2006), 301.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 305.

¹² Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality, Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches: First Phase [October 2021 – April 2022] in Dioceses and Bishops’ Conferences Leading up to the Assembly of Bishops in Synod, October 2023, <https://www.synod.va/en/news/the-vademecum-for-the-synod-on-synodality.html>

given to those in the existential peripheries. As the working document for the synod emphasized the importance of listening at various levels, the Philippine dioceses reported various strategies of listening to different horizons.¹³ Respondents ranged from 1% to 15% of the total Catholic population of the parish and/or diocese, while some dioceses required 30 to 50% of respondents. Depending on the local setting, teams reached out to different sectors. Most of the dioceses indicated that they consulted the youth, LGBTQIA, PDLs, PWDs, and families in difficult situations. One diocese was reported to have reached forty-five sectors.¹⁴ In one diocese, the bishop personally wrote a letter of invitation to different sectoral groups to ensure their participation. Many organized sessions per sector, while others preferred multi-sectoral gatherings with due attention given to the presence of those from the peripheries. Some used the parish's regular activities to gather information and create an encounter. For instance, consultations were conducted alongside the preparation for the baptism, marriage, and the other sacraments. Various approaches were employed to gather information, such as survey questionnaires, face-to-face/house-to-house interviews, and online sessions. For those who gathered to consult people, there were around 10-20 participants per session to allow more in-depth sharing.

Some dioceses relied on the members of their ministries and Sunday Mass-goers as respondents, believing they represent the

¹³ The author is a member of the national synod team tasked to facilitate the synodal processes in the country. This includes immersion in regional assemblies, facilitation of the national synod gathering, as well as the writing of the national reports throughout the different phases of the synodal process. The team utilized content analysis of reports and integrated observations from stories and experiences shared in the regional synodal assemblies.

¹⁴ The Diocese of Masbate reached out to 45 sectors including 200 lay people engaged (2021-2022), est 70,000 people reached directly and indirectly, including 45 sectors.

various sectors that must be reached. However, to reach out to as many as possible, questions were translated, put in context, simplified, and pilot-tested by some dioceses. One parish reimbursed the sectors' foregone day's labor since they lost their income when they attended the consultation.

While most parishes willingly obliged to undertake the task, it was difficult and time-consuming, and some parishes did not find the process as important as their regular pastoral activities. In one diocese, twenty-six of the forty-one parishes did not organize any consultations, expressing that it would be just another activity from above and that nothing would happen.

How synod results were compiled and interpreted reflect various horizons.¹⁵ In the various synod assemblies, there are stories of ministers censoring consultation results or omitting responses that do not reflect positively about their community and their leadership. Some also reported about synod teams correcting and/or preaching to the respondents especially when they expressed challenging opinions/views about the hierarchy. There are diocesan reports with thick descriptions of their synodal encounters, narratives of people they have consulted, as well as opinions of dissonant voices indicating their capacity to listen and fuse horizons with others. However, there are reports that appear to have more theology than the actual reflections of participants in the consultation which may indicate an interpretation from the horizon of those who have compiled the reports.

Though creating space and employing methods for effective listening are essential, it is also important to give nuance to the horizons that each one represents, to create connections with

¹⁵ The synod team compiled the diocesan consultation results using content analysis with an intentional listening to convergence and dissonance, and through a participatory observation of regional assemblies where the diocesan reports were presented and the national consultation where the regional reports were presented and discerned on.

the horizons of so called “others,” and to facilitate the fusion of horizons. With the limitations reflected in the various strategies of listening and interpreting people’s voices, other horizons might not be heard but are speaking out powerfully in other ways.

PAKIKINIG SA PAHIWATIG: EXPANDING HORIZONS

Synodality works to “acquire the right horizon of inquiry”¹⁶ so that authentic listening and walking together can happen despite fragmentation and polarization.”¹⁷ Aside from acknowledging the different horizons each one represents, synodality also implies expanding horizons for greater understanding.

Attending to horizons requires a conscious effort to recognize the role of history in shaping one’s capacity for dialogue and how one listens. The synod experience in the Philippines reveals the “narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening of new horizons.”¹⁸

Horizons can be indicated not only by the message relayed verbally or non-verbally. Filipinos communicate bodily, and this is alluded to by many body terminologies expressing emotions in the Filipino language. Other cultures often interpret non-verbal communication as vague or unclear. However, as studies indicate, Filipino non-verbal communication reflects a high degree of relational context since what is conveyed “lies not in the text but in the context – customs, beliefs, values, and other unwritten codes of meanings known to all.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 301-302.

¹⁷ XVI Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris*, For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission, 2023, no. 28. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2023/06/20/230620e.pdf>

¹⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 301.

¹⁹ Melba Maggay, “*Pahiwatig: Kagawiang Pangkomunikasyong Filipino*.” (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 2002), 12-13.

In the Filipino language, it is called *pahiwatig*,²⁰ a native method of expression that is indirectly conveyed but understood and perceived through keen sensitivity and careful reading of cues, or through the accompanying verbal and nonverbal signals. It is a message with high ambiguity and uncertain meaning.²¹

Pahiwatig is expressed in various ways. It can be verbal; expressed through a *parinig* or *pasaring* or a satirical remark. It can be nonverbal; expressed through various behaviors like silence, shrugging of the shoulders, a certain gaze at the other, and other expressions. It can be a combination of both verbal and non-verbal behavior. Filipinos resort to *pahiwatig* to respond to or address delicate or not-so-pleasant situations in social interactions to maintain good relationships with the other.²²

There are various ways by which *pahiwatig* is expressed in ecclesial life. It is revealed among members of the community in structured and unstructured settings. It is also shown in everyday life in the form of strategies and tactics of resistance. It is also disclosed in implicit religiosity, which is prevalent today.

²⁰ There are other Filipino terms that refer to *pahiwatig* such as *pasaring*, *pahaging*, *padaplis*, *paramdam*, *papansin*. See Maggay, *Pahiwatig: Kagawiang Pangkomunikasyong Filipino*. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 2002), 26-27.

²¹ Melba Magga, "Mga Katutubong Pamamaraan ng Interpersonal na Komunikasyon." *Handbook of Filipino Psychology* Vol 2, ed., Rogelia Pe-pua, (Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 2019), 367.

²² Maggay, *Pahiwatig*, 50.

PAHIWATIG SA BUHAY KOMUNIDAD: DYNAMICS IN ECCLESIAL LIFE

While ecclesial life creates spaces of encounter where even behavioral cues are sensed and expressed, there are no structured ways of listening to expand the ecclesial horizon. People can read the *pahiwatig* of companions, members, and leaders; many express that the listening remains within private conversations and relayed as *tsismis* or gossip.

Behavioral messages are shown by people's attendance, participation, and performance and are expressed through emotions like indifference, withdrawal, or frustration.²³ This is reflected in a story that a lay leader in an urban parish relay.

During the pandemic, our parish responded to the needs of many by organizing a community pantry. As there were many developing communities in our parish, many of them came to pick up things they needed. The number grew to two hundred daily. After a week of successful distribution, our parish priest thought including catechism when people came to line up was good. He instructed the catechists to let the people sit for a 20-minute catechism before getting goods from the pantry. In a few days, the number of people coming decreased, and in less than a month, the community pantry closed operations, but it was not because people did not need it.²⁴

People's adherence or indifference to formal and informal processes may reveal other voices, especially those outside the leadership circle. How people respond to formal processes like

²³ Carl Dudley, "Process: Dynamics of Congregational Life," in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, eds., Nancy Ammerman, et.al (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1998), 106.

²⁴ Interview of the author.

written rules of ministries and organizations and prescribed procedures in parish management and informal processes, including how people address each other and the regular flow of meetings, reveal values and understanding. Such patterns of social connections reveal cultural norms that are seldom evaluated and are only followed out of convenience and functionality.

Unfortunately, such processes can become dysfunctional and sometimes destructive. They may change naturally in response to new conditions. Often by benign neglect, they are conveniently forgotten. But sometimes, the entrenched and unproductive process needs to be challenged and intentionally altered. Worn-out habits can be reassessed and intentionally renewed.²⁵

Creative tension reveals relevant areas for listening and discerning. Horizons are indicated within tensions existing in ecclesial communities between the young and old, mandated organizations and basic ecclesial communities, strategic planning, and spontaneous mission, appointed leaders and emerging leaders, mandatory rules and discretionary processes, continuities, and discontinuities against the demands of constant change.²⁶

The Philippine synodal report mentioned that aside from a gross lack of dialogue and communal discernment in most dioceses, many people prefer to be quiet in meetings for fear of committing a mistake or being misinterpreted.²⁷ Among the noted reasons for not being able to do so are “fear of being judged, feelings

²⁵ Dudley, “Process: Dynamics of Congregational Life,” 107

²⁶ Leas and Parsons, “Understanding your Congregation,” in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, eds. Nancy Ammerman, et.al (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1998), 120.

²⁷ Salubong, The Philippine Catholic Church Synodal Report 2022. <https://synodphilippines.com/salubong-the-philippine-catholic-church-synodal-report/>

of unworthiness and low self-esteem rooted in the lack of understanding of the Christian faith, *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) and connivance, bribery, as well as blind obedience to authority.” Those who can express themselves without fear are the donors and benefactors (dubbed as the “owners of the church”).²⁸

Such an atmosphere in conflict situations breeds “conspiracies of silence,” where avoidance is the mode instead of confronting the difficult situation.²⁹ In immorality or corruption, people tend to gossip or talk among themselves and are quiet in front of the parish priest instead of resolving the issue through guided conversation and discernment. Though it has obvious negative effects, studies suggest gossiping helps exchange information, deepen intimacy, entertain, and establish influence.³⁰

Though gossiping in the Scriptures is revealed in many accounts as unhealthy (1 Tim 3:11; 5:13; 2 Tim 2:16; Tit 3:2), it is also the way by which Jesus became known (Mk 1:28; 5:20; Lk 4:37; 7:17). A study on the Fourth Gospel using the framework of gossip, interestingly posits how in the first 12 chapters Jesus became known through gossiping of the first followers (1:19-51), within and outside Israel (2:1-5:54), and during the Feast of the Jews (5:1-10:42).³¹ Similarly, while Paul in the early church, lamented and taught the evils of gossiping, he also spoke about certain people in a negative light (1 Tim 1, 19-20, 2 Tim 4:10, Gal:11-14) to correct wrong behavior and to teach the community.

Gossips express truths that may propose pastoral care and intervention. To respond to the needs of those afflicted by

²⁸ Salubong, The Philippine National Report 2022

²⁹ Dudley, “Process: Dynamics of Congregational Life,” 107.

³⁰ Eric Foster, “Research on Gossip: Taxonomy, Methods, and Future Directions,” in *Review of General Psychology* 8, no. 2 (2004): 83-89. DOI: 10.1037/1089-2680.8.2.78

³¹ John Daniels Jr., “Gossip in the New Testament,” in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 42 no. 4: 204-13. DOI: 10.1177/ 0146107912461876 <http://btb.sagepub.com>

extrajudicial killings, a parish relied on *tsismis* or neighborhood gossiping.³² Information about the killings is learned from the grapevine from which some basic data can be obtained. Women involved in the BECs, out of a desire to help, will gather more information by speaking to the family members or relatives or friends discretely. Since they know how most families would be afraid to have their case documented, they try to find out other needs they might help with employment, educational assistance, or food supply. Finding these as openings, they offer individual help or parish services, and by doing so, relationships with the family are gradually established, even when their story of victimhood is left on the sideline for a while. The connection takes them a step closer to finding healing and transformation together.

PAHIWATIG SA ARAW-ARAW: STRATEGIES AND TACTICS OF RESISTANCE

Sectors speak up (communicate) nonverbally to ecclesial beliefs, regulations, and culture by responding through strategies and tactics. Strategies are developed from a structure and thus belong to the governing authority or those with the power to create them.³³ The tactic is developed by those outside the power structure and, thus, does not have a locus and plays on space, in the in-between, through manipulation and by adjusting those spaces according to the desired need.³⁴ As the “art of the weak,” a tactic is the space of the other.”³⁵ In ecclesial life, strategies are involved in carrying out the pastoral plan. Catechists have strategies for giving

³² Interview, Danny, Caloocan City, March 4, 2019. As shared by the respondent, who was the social action coordinator of the parish, *Chismis* became a strategy to reach out to the victims of extrajudicial killings.

³³ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), 36.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

catechesis, and social workers follow a certain strategy prescribed in their field to conduct their tasks.

The multiple electrical wirings on electric posts in poor urban communities, which always catches the attention of foreign visitors, is a powerful image of tactical practices of everyday life. While there is only one electric conductor for every home, because of many illegal dwellers or those who cannot pay their utility bills, there are “jumpers,” or illegal connections made to make electricity possible for them. *Lo cotidiano* is a “problematized reality that one can find in it subversive and creative elements that enable questioning oppression and resisting it.”³⁶

Tactics are horizons in everyday life, the *lo cotidiano* referred to by *Latino/a* and *mujerista* theologians.³⁷ While *lo cotidiano* refers to reality – the story and the place where it takes place, it is also how one deals with reality.

The materiality of *lo cotidiano* brings into focus the fact that I always refer to embodied experiences; the embodied quality of *lo cotidiano* is consciously important to the oppressed and the impoverished...it refers to what is reproduced or repeated in a conscious manner, that which is part of the struggle for life and for liberation.³⁸

Life in the basic ecclesial communities facilitate the *lo cotidiano*,” “people and communities living times and places, not closed in on themselves but bearers of stories that must be recognized, respected, and opened to broader horizons.”³⁹

³⁶ Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, “*Mujerista* Discourse: A Platform for Latina’s Subjugated Knowledge,” In *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*, eds. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Fordham, 2012), “*Mujerista* Discourse,” 49.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 11.

While the theory of tactics has been used to uplift forms of resistance to a dominant culture, tactics expose an absence.⁴⁰ Tactics fill a void or a gap. Many times, in synodal consultations, the reality of poverty is mentioned as a factor in people's absence in ecclesial life. However, people employ tactics to "make do" with their duties as Catholics. We find urban workers passing by the church for a quick prayer or doing online mass while on the bus to work. In basic ecclesial communities that employ very strict regulations in celebrating the sacraments of baptism, wedding, and funeral, families are seen to organize themselves so that one family member is present in a meeting just to comply with the rule. Now, even as same-sex unions are not accepted in the Church, LGBTQ members create their own rituals to "sacralize" their union.

Such practices from the ordinary Catholics may be overlooked and seen as carrying no weight in the overall life of the community, and yet we know how such movements are relevant horizons to explore as they have political implications in everyday life.⁴¹ Are they expressing their understanding of the Christian faith? When asked about the basis of their practices, we realize that their life decisions have gone through a series of experience-reflection-action. They are dealing with their lives intelligibly, rooted in their instinctive desire for liberation. It is "part and partial of the flourishing of all life."⁴²

⁴⁰ Antonio Eduardo Alonso, "Listening for the Cry: Certeau Beyond Strategies and Tactics," *Modern Theology* 33, no. 3 (3 July 2017): 371.

⁴¹ Issasi-Diaz, "Mujerista Discourse," 55.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 56.

PAHIWATIG SA PANANALIG: HABITUS OF THEOLOGY

Although all these reveal people's religious beliefs and values, it is helpful also to look at the horizon of everyday religious practices. The "habitus of theology," or how people "live theologically," open pathways to embodying synodality.⁴³

An "increasing recognition" within the Church of the realities and a "diverse range of human experiences" can create more effective and effective programs considerate of all. At the same time, there is a need to let go of traditional categories that look at membership in church organizations as a criterion for one's Catholicity.⁴⁴

One dimension of defining religion identifies four distinct types.⁴⁵ Conventional religion reflecting the official and prescribed practices. Common religion or popular religion are those that reflect folk or indigenous practices. Invisible religion refers to attitudes and values held by individuals and which is reflected in practices and decisions. Surrogate religion, which some refer to as implicit religion are "organized equivalents to religion" like art as hobby, sports, music. In a study done on implicit religiosity, a table of frameworks compiled related to implicit religiosity include internet/cyber church, sports, love, work and even the fight for justice.⁴⁶

⁴³ Edward Farley had argued regarding the understanding of theology, which until the 18th century has been seen as sapiential and personal knowledge. He uses the term *theologia* as "reflective wisdom of the believer," as opposed to theology which suggests a "body of information and theory of God."

⁴⁴ *Salya*, no. 22.

⁴⁵ Richard Toon referred by Astley, *Ordinary Theology*, 90-91.

⁴⁶ Tatjana Schnell, "A Framework for the Study of Implicit Religion: The Psychology of Implicit Religiosity," *Implicit Religion* 6, nos. 2-3, (2007).

Though the Church attests to the missionary power of popular religiosity, it also suggests stringent criteria for listening to this horizon. The Church maintains that popular religiosity may only manifest the *sensus fidei* if it is “being nourished by the Word of God,” “not being politicized or trapped by ideologies,” if it is in communion with both the local church and the universal Church as well as the Church’s pastors and with the magisterium, and if it is “being fervently missionary.”⁴⁷ However, some authors argue that how people live and the impact of popular religion in their daily lives are powerful indicators; when they can freely worship, experience liberation, and reflect a sense of agency, they can “discern the things of God.”⁴⁸ Aside from the communal dimension that lived or common religion operates in, it is helpful to consider “authenticity, the location of the sacred, the presence and mediation of sacred power, and practical rationality” in discerning.⁴⁹

Popular devotions convey four spiritual dimensions: spirituality of the body, spirituality of the many, spirituality of celebration, and spirituality of negotiation.⁵⁰ Dancing with the crowd, walking on one’s knees, hiking for several hours to pray for healing, and other bodily needs reveal the *pahiwatig* of the masses. It is praying together with others while simultaneously praying and celebrating with family and community. It is so much different from what the seminary teaches about praying alone and silently.

⁴⁷ International Theological Commission, “*Sensus fidei* in the Life of the Church,” 2014, no.112.

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html

⁴⁸ Jose Maria Francisco and Jayeel Cornelio, *People’s Christianity: Theological Sense and Sociological Significance*, (Quezon City: Claretians Publications, 2023), 19.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁰ Albert Alejo, “Popular Spirituality as Cultural Energy,” in *Handbook of Filipino Psychology* Vol. 2, ed. Rogelia Pe-Pua, (Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines), 317-327.

Of course, the celebration is always there with the community. One can find food in every cultural practice; feasting and *salu-salo* convey participation even more as people share food and partake of the leftovers after the feasting. The final dimension, bargaining or negotiation, is actively expressed in practice. *Pahiwatig* emerges in acts of negotiation with the spirit, such as leaving food as an offering to prevent disturbances or the widespread devotion to novenas, where the faithful believe that making sacrifices brings them closer to God. The rich *pahiwatig* of popular religion offers valuable horizons for exploring synodality.

Surrogate or implicit religion have received much attention in the recent past because of how it has taken the place of conventional or official religion. Like conventional religions, there are practices that are implicitly religious because they offer myths, rituals, and transcendent experiences.⁵¹ In many Western countries, as the number of people participating in church is continually decreasing, the number of people involved in sports events either as athlete or spectator is continually increasing.⁵² Some churches that listen to this trend has opened up their ecclesiastical structure to include sports chaplaincy. Music has also turned many young millennial Catholics to worship as it expresses their ultimate concerns and makes them appreciate God, who is there for them no matter what happens.⁵³ All these examples are also reflected in the fast-changing culture in the Philippines. Similarly, with the Philippines remaining among the top social media and internet users worldwide, the virtual space creates communities that are in dialogue for common interests or issues to

⁵¹ Schnell, "A Framework for the Study of Implicit Religions," 101-102.

⁵² The Conversation, "How Sport became the New Religion," March 1, 2023, <https://theconversation.com/how-sport-became-the-new-religion-a-200-year-story-of-societys-great-conversion-199576>.

⁵³ Michel Charrboneau, "Hillsong brings Religion to a New Generation," in *America the Jesuit Review*, October 29, 2015. <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/manna-desert>

fight for, implying a lived synodality that demands intentional listening.⁵⁴

TOWARDS A FUSION OF HORIZONS: EMBODYING LISTENING AS A CHURCH

As suggested by these many forms of *pahiwatig* and the way they reveal the horizons of many others who remain voiceless in ecclesial life, synodal listening must be seen as a framework for being church. Embodying listening as a Church calls for an openness to various voices within us and around us.

A hermeneutic of multiplicity takes seriously the presence and perspective of otherness that is highlighted through alterity. As we somatically attune to our body and the presence of others, we become increasingly aware of our own internal multiplicity; and by acknowledging and internally caring for our own multiplicity, we gain the lenses to attend to the multiplicity of persons in community and the multiplicity within persons in community.⁵⁵

An embodied ecclesial synodal praxis should reflect a re-grounding on the corporate body, awakening the senses and empowering liminal leadership. While these are reflected in some ways in our way of being church, this section will also challenge pastoral strategies that hinder authentic listening and a fusion of horizons.

⁵⁴ Christina Eloisa Baclig, "Social Media Internet Craze Keep PH on top two of World List, *Inquirer.Net* April 29, 2022. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1589845/social-media-internet-craze-keep-ph-on-top-2-of-world-list>

⁵⁵ Baldwin Jennifer, *Acroatic, Embodied Hearing and Presence as Spiritual Practice, Sensing the Sacred: Exploring the Human Senses in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care*, ed. Jennifer Baldwin. (New York: Lexington Books, 2016), 80.

KATAWAN NI KRISTO: OUR CORPORATE BODY

Though the image of Church as the body of Christ is often emphasized, the real corporate body is forgotten or most of the time overlooked in ecclesial life. In fact, there is a certain disembodiment from the actual bodies of people, especially those marginalized.⁵⁶

The body practices of the church are a physical language—the routines, rules, and practices of the body, conscious and unconscious. In the church, the body practices are the physical discourse of inclusion and exclusion. The practices reveal the hidden ‘membership roll,’ those whose bodies matter in the shaping of liturgies and services.⁵⁷

The call for greater transparency and accountability has been consistent throughout the synodal process. Such an exercise of co-responsibility is needed not only because of the many recent problems of sexual scandals and corruption, which bring out the evil face of clericalism but also because “its foundation is found in the very nature of the Church as a mystery of communion.”⁵⁸ Many times, transparency and accountability refer to financial management. However, accountability is about the entire Christian life, including “pastoral plans, methods of evangelization, and how the Church respects the dignity of the human person, for example,

⁵⁶ Bonnie Miller-Mclemore, “Embodied Knowing, Embodied Theology: What happened to the Body?” in *Sensing the Sacred: Exploring the Human Senses in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care* ed. Jennifer Baldwin, (London: Lexington Books, 2016), 3.

⁵⁷ N.L. Eisland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1994), chapter 1, 112. Cited from Graham, Elaine, “Words Made Flesh: Women, Embodiment and Practical Theology,

⁵⁸ *Instrumentum Laboris*, 2024, nos. 73, 74.

regarding the working conditions within its institutions.”⁵⁹ Thus, there needs to be “structures and forms of regular evaluation of ministerial responsibilities” for ministers and the community to grow.⁶⁰

For instance, the concern for women’s participation in governance structure and ministry reflect this dis-embodiment of the body of Christ. When priests in their homily play jokes on religious nuns as well as women, and when full-time religious sisters and even catechists are not justly paid for their hours at work, how can we even begin to talk about equality? Similarly, while dress codes prescribed during liturgy express our basic respect for Jesus, can it also not suggest excluding some members of the body?

The effects and dynamics of power, truth, reason, good and evil never exist as transcendent ideals; they remain to be embodied, enacted and performed in human communities as forms of bodily practice. So, the deepest dynamics of the social, political, and economic order are always incarnated into persons/bodies in relation.⁶¹

While our body plays a significant role in ecclesial life, little attention is given to holistic formation, which includes the needs and important role of the body. A body spirituality that engages the individual’s mindfulness towards his/her body in worship and daily life, attends to the dissonance of mind and body in terms of relationships, ethical decisions, and political participation.

So, bodies offer a ‘vantage point’ from which the complexity of human nature, as creator and creation of culture, can be experienced and analyzed. Bodies are the bearers of important narratives, some of

⁵⁹ Ibid., no. 76.

⁶⁰ Ibid., no. 77.

⁶¹ Graham, “Word Made Flesh,” 115.

which unsettle superficial or entrenched understandings, and such unexpected stories excite compassion and serve as the foundation for new moral narratives of hope and obligation.⁶²

Bodies have hierarchies in the ecclesial community. Just as the bishops and priests are served different meals and are given special tables in assemblies, some communities have bodies that are higher than others. In a parish formation session, the author was struck by how the BEC representatives did much of the physical work before, during, and after. They were there an hour before the session to prepare the chairs, during the sessions to distribute the food during snacks and break time, and after to clean up. The author asked why they were the only ones taking all the heavy tasks. They remarked that in the pastoral council, the executive committee will meet to plan and decide on activities, and then, after they have decided and have come up with the plan, they will call on the rest of the council members, including the BEC leaders, to execute what they have decided upon. Such disconnect in the corporate body implies an implicit inattention to the exchange of gifts, extending horizons, which is called for in a synodal church.

TAGAPAMAGITAN: LIMINAL LEADERSHIP

In Filipino culture, the *Tagapamagitan*, or mediator, plays a vital role in bridging two parties and enabling them to communicate their message to one another.⁶³ The mediator is most needed, especially in conflict situations where it is difficult to convey emotions directly. The *tagapamagitan* relays the message of the other, even if s/he has nothing to do with the issue at hand.

⁶² Ibid., 118.

⁶³ Maggay, “Mga Katutubong Pamamaraan ng Interpersonal na Komunikasyon.” *Handbook of Filipino Psychology* Vol 2, ed. Rogelia Pe-pua, (Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 2019).

However, s/he could also facilitate that both sides could hear each other out peacefully to settle and resolve their concern. Whether what is relayed is a plea, an order, a reminder, or a desire, the mediator acts as a bridge between the two parties in the context of a relationship, all expressed between the two parties.

In ecclesial life, lay leaders or ministers between the hierarchy and the ordinary lay faithful could carry out this role. Lay ministers trained theologically or pastorally and occupying a position of authority should be aware of their prophetic role in the middle space. As lay people, they are grounded on the same realities as other lay people and can also resonate with the perspective of the ordained ministry.

Liminal leadership is essential in a synodal church. Liminal leaders like *Tagapamagitan* respond by seeking different perspectives and thus “embody a variety of geographies and social locations.”⁶⁴ They spend significant time in disrupted spaces, “providing avenues for interconnection regarding memory, identity, and narrative that each person brings and thus are willing to be a pilgrim or an exile.”⁶⁵ Ministers responding to the needs of calamity victims are pilgrims who are open to visiting disrupted spaces and locations to understand the real situation from ground zero. Mission stations in Caloocan where some religious communities and lay movements have committed to serve live in the area and become neighbors with people entrusted to their care.

Liminal leaders manage creative tensions through intentional listening to different voices. They have the capacity to assuage people’s fear and anxiety and are open to reevaluate pastoral directions and priorities.

⁶⁴ Andrew Orton and Lisa Withrow. “Transformative Potentials of Liminal Leadership,” *Journal of Religious Leadership*, 14, no. 1, (2015):29.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

A transformative liminal leader goes even further and uses the inherent tension of the in-between space-time to foster creativity for potential solutions, scenarios, or renewed identities for the future, and then facilitates movement toward these potentialities at just the right time.⁶⁶

Liminal leaders believe that God's voice is heard in the liminal space. They are open to the sparks of the divine present in every encounter. This makes them creative and energy givers, healers, and hope givers. Just like the prophets in the Old Testament, they enable people in exile to reengage in God's story.

DAMANG PANANAMPALATAYA: LITURGY AND PASTORAL CARE TO AWAKEN THE SENSES

The liturgy is a space for listening, not only to God but also to the horizons of needs and cries of the community. Though much can be mentioned about how a liturgical renewal is also needed towards a more synodal church, it is good to highlight the need for a heightened awakening of the senses. As worship is a space where the transaction between ultimate meanings and the encounter of the divine is happening, awakening the senses helps us to walk together amid the realities and concerns of the bigger community.

Synodality is activated through the senses. Senses unite people, make people participate, and lead people to a concrete response. As much as the smell of home-cooked food brings one back to family memories, the smell of neighborhood garbage leads people out of their homes to complain and talk about it. As the sight of newborn babies brings hope and joy, the sight of sick bodies brings us to our common vulnerabilities and need for healing. Similarly, the visual imagery of statues and the colorful processions,

⁶⁶ Ibid., 28.

the smell of incense and flowers and the scent of human sweat amid the worshipping crowd, the touch of the divine on the sick part of the body, and other sensory experiences bind people.

In the two phases of Philippine synodal consultations, the senses played a significant role in facilitating people to come together and to allowing their voices to be heard. During the first phase, the theme of *Salubong*, our Easter religious practice of mourning Mary and the Risen Christ, was developed.⁶⁷ Throughout the sessions, the subthemes of *pagsalubong* (welcome), *salubungan* (encounter), and *pasalubong* (mission). To welcome one another, participants were encouraged to bring their local food to share with others. In the regional assembly in Bicol, the various food delicacies from different dioceses were placed at the center of the hall. From the start, during breaks, and whenever hunger struck, people would gather at the center to partake in the offerings. Each one eagerly sampled unfamiliar flavors or sought to confirm the taste of familiar ones. It was a feast for the senses—sweet, sour, savory, and spicy. More than just food, it became an invitation to share stories just as rich and varied—some sweet, some sour, some savory, and even some with a touch of spice!

In the second phase, the theme of *Salya* and *Salok* were developed. *Salya*, the classic shout of the Nazarene devotees for the crowd to cross over or to move was brought to life through the image of the cross, which people carried together, touched in silence, and brought out in the streets together at the end.⁶⁸ The *Salok*, meaning to draw water, used the story of the Samaritan Woman, which symbolized our gathering to draw water from each

⁶⁷ *Salubong*, The Philippine Catholic Church Synodal Report 2022.

⁶⁸ “*Salya Crossing Over to the other Side*,” Appendix 2, 18, <https://synodphilippines.com/salya-the-philippine-national-report-on-synodality-2024/>

other's wells.⁶⁹ At the start of the session, small buckets of water from different communities were poured into the well-constructed area at the center. Then, after the entire session, which reflected the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, people were again invited to bless themselves and one another from the water of life.

Pope Francis reminds us to be “shepherds with a “smell of sheep.”⁷⁰ When God breathes life into the earth, the entire creation becomes “smelling and smelly beings.”⁷¹ Jesus smelled like one of us and smelled bodies of the sick, the poor, and even the dead. He smelled cooked fish, freshly baked bread, and wine. Similarly, Jesus said, “this is my body, take and eat,” we cannot but connect what the Psalms tell us to “taste and see the goodness of the Lord.” To experience community is to dine and taste food cooked and prepared by people.⁷²

Jesus touched the bodies of the outcasts and healed them through touch. It is said that we can convey and decode many different emotions by touching.⁷³ We realize the importance of touch during the pandemic when we cannot touch our loved ones for fear of the virus. The image of people touching the hands of family members across glass windows remains vivid to us. Pastoral care, however, sometimes overlooks the essential need of everyone

⁶⁹ Salok: A Lenten Recollection, Appendix 1, 14, <https://synodphilippines.com/salya-the-philippine-national-report-on-synodality-2024/>

⁷⁰ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html

⁷¹ Martha Jacobi, “Smelling Remembrance,” *Sensing the Sacred: Exploring the Human Senses in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care*, ed. Jennifer Baldwin, (New York: Lexington, 2016), 35.

⁷² Stephanie Arel, “Savoring Taste as Religious Praxis: Where Individual and Social Intimacy Converge,” *Sensing the Sacred: Exploring the Human Senses in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care*, ed. Jennifer Baldwin, (New York: Lexington, 2016), 67.

⁷³ Shirley Guider, “Embodying Christ, Touching Others,” in *Sensing the Sacred: Exploring the Human Senses in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care*, ed. Jennifer Baldwin, (New York: Lexington, 2016), 44.

to touch and be touched. Ministers assigned to visit the sick sometimes carry out their tasks by remaining glued to the liturgy guide, sometimes blessing the sick from a distance. While safeguarding policies are much needed in the church, we must be careful not to lose this special connection achieved through our bodies.

Our Sacraments and liturgies are about sensing the sacred through signs and symbols, but very often, the power of the senses is not fully activated. Our liturgies tend to be fossilized by our strict rubrics and the “liturgical protagonism of the priest.” Unlocking the senses in ecclesial life needs space, silence, and savoring moments, but it also needs its vital connection with daily life.

CONCLUSION

Though the synodal consultations have revealed many of the cries of the people of God, horizons of ecclesial structures and human tendencies indicate limitations in listening. The bodies are sending powerful signals, *pahiwatig*, to the Christian community as indicated by dynamics in ecclesial life, strategies, and tactics of resistance, as well as *habitus* of theology in the secular sphere. It thus implies a more nuanced listening that attends to bodies and that honors alterity. Synodality becomes a lived experience when listening is fully embodied in daily life. This requires awakening the senses within the sacred spaces of sacraments and liturgies, empowering liminal leaders who bridge the gap between hierarchy and the faithful and embracing a holistic spirituality that unites rather than divides the body of Christ by function or position. As pilgrims of hope in a world yearning to be heard, may the horizons of a synodal Church and the journey toward a more embodied synodal praxis unite us all. May this path lead to an “ecclesial we,” fostering inclusive spaces of encounter, encouraging full

participation, and transforming society toward a “new heaven and a new earth.”

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