

## About this Issue

MST Review 26, no. 1 (2024) intertwines the two themes of ecclesiology and religious education by focusing on the role of the youth as children, students, and Church faithful. Engaging and offering alternatives to traditional social and ecclesial expectations, these article contributions challenge the prevalent view that the youth are ‘incapable’ of self-direction and discovering their contribution to the Church's ecclesial processes. Such a marginalizing perspective reinforces the idea that only adults are competent to lead the Church as active members while belittling the youth as passive followers. By pastoral implication, it cultivates paternalistic practices that affect the youth's social relationships, their capacity to learn, and their social application of the faith. Adult-led processes or decisions, even if they are products of long experience, however, do not necessarily mean continuing relevance, social inclusivity, or effective responsiveness to the younger generation of Church members.

Ikenna Paschal Okpaleke's article “Of Skeptics and Believers: Observing the Synod on Synodality from the Margins” discusses the faithful's attitudes, tendencies, and concerns toward Pope Francis's initiative on Synod on Synodality. Following the synthesis reports from different countries, Okpaleke observes an attitude of indifference among the Church faithful regarding the Synodal process. Such attitude is especially seen among the youth, who are regarded as marginalized in the process and have the tendency to be attracted to traditional Catholicism that emphasizes spirituality as its source of the Church's stable relationship with God. This tension raises the question whether synodality is a viable path to reform Church structures. To address this

issue, communal discernment must be cultivated through listening and humility to avoid the extreme outcomes of having an “*unreversed pyramid*” clericalist Church or a “*reversed pyramid*” anti-clerical Church. In this regard, Synodality should clarify its objectives (what) and the reasons (why) for taking this process in response to the internal and external crises that the Church has encountered in recent times. While Synodality also entails entertaining different ideologies, which has been fostering skepticism among the traditional faithful, not listening to non-traditional positions could denote that the Church is not following Synodality's emphasis on walking together with its members. Thus, Okpaleke suggests different “gradations of listening” to avoid extreme ideologies that could either polarize or fragment the Church amidst the tensions of the need to accompany the faithful while keeping its moral teachings.

Levy Lara Lanaria's article “*Sambahayan ng Diyos and the Four Creedal Attributes*” appropriates the concept of ‘*sambahayan ng Diyos*’ (family household of God) to make the four marks of the Catholic Church (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic) culturally relevant in the Filipino context. *Sambahayanan*, goes beyond the limited practice of a nuclear family by including non-kin family members as part of a household. In this regard, unity is expressed as *pagkakaisa* (unity) of children (*mga anak*) not through social, ethnic, or kinship ties but under God's parenthood whose relationships are founded on mutual respect (*ginagalang*) and filial gratitude (*utang na loob*). Holiness is animated by *sambahayanan's* familial spirituality dwelling in the household, grounded on the Trinitarian God's divine calling to bridge strife and division in the world by challenging unjust social structures. *Sambahayanan* expresses catholicity through its outward orientation to

encompass the whole world and live under God's household by going beyond "ethnic parochialism" or "social individualism" through cultural dialogue. Lastly, *sambahayanan's* apostolicity refers to its missionary endeavor inherited from the apostles by continuing God's mission to care for the poor. *Sambahayanan* as a Filipino ecclesial model is thus a dynamic verb geared toward an inclusivist missionary orientation instead of a static noun resting on traditional, exclusivist, and ahistorical principles.

Romela D. Sanga and Ferdinand D. Dagmang's article "The Kingdom of God in Selected Christian Living Education Modules viewed through Jesus of Nazareth's Vision of the Reign of God" selects ten Christian Living Education (CLE) modules for junior and senior high schools in Metro Manila to evaluate them from the perspective of Jesus of Nazareth's ministry to actualize the kingdom of God as a response to Roman Empire's violent rule in ancient Palestine. Following Richard Horsley's imperial reading of the gospels, Sanga and Dagmang see that although the selected CLE modules affirm the kingdom of God's centrality, they also see the pedagogical gap that links Jesus's historical context with his transcendental vision. The CLE modules overlooked the sociopolitical and economic factors influencing the Christian narrative through its modern tendency to 'spiritualize', 'intellectualize', or 'individualize' the kingdom of God by detaching it from worldly issues. This problem fundamentally affects how Christian discipleship is taught to students by its emphasis on the idealized view of Jesus whose tendencies lean toward attaining salvation through 'cheap grace' while forgetting the practical costs of Christian discipleship through its prophetic dimension to fight the structural causes of poverty, injustices, and violence.

Lastly, Julius Anthony L. Poqueriño's article "Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Insights for Catholic Schools in the Philippines" offers alternative strategies to nurture children's spirituality in Catholic schools in the Philippines. The traditional approach to spirituality views children as "empty vessels" that must be filled by adults so that they can spiritually mature. This approach, however, reduces children's spirituality in terms of linear development that is dependent on the adult's supervision. Poqueriño argues that children are "competent subjects" who have their ways of expressing spirituality, stressing that a "nurturing spirituality" is a better strategy to recognize their subjectivity since it promotes their resilience of character, participation in the community, and holistic understanding of the person as an active subject. As framework, Poqueriño sees that Catholic schools can practice "nurturing spirituality" in the child's 1) physical, emotional, and auditory spaces, 2) time to focus on the present through dialogue-oriented processes, 3) body to nurture them into well-rounded individuals, 4) relationships to learn trust and intimacy in a spiritual community that allows them to see their selves, the world around them, and the transcendent, and 5) agency by recognizing their "power within" to balance the power dynamics of "power with" and "power over" them to foster healthy relationships.

In addition to the usual scholarly contributions, the present issue also publishes Stephen Bevans' paper "Filipino, Theologian, Friend: Celebrating his Life, Remembering his Genius, Cherishing his Memory"—a tribute to José M. de Mesa's (1946-2021) contribution to theology as one of the pioneering and prominent theologians in the Philippines. Written in commemoration of De Mesa's third death anniversary, Bevans' eulogy reflects on De Mesa's sources of theological inspiration. Bevans highlights De Mesa's strong love for

the Filipino culture and language to do theology which led to a better understanding of the discipline among students. He also explains the concepts of *pagdama* (intuitive feeling), *kagandadahang loob* (the person's beautiful inner self), and *ginhawa* (holistic well-being) as De Mesa's key pivoting themes for doing Filipino inculturated theology. Last but not the least, Bevans reminisces De Mesa as a father, a personal friend, and theological collaborator in various theological and pastoral institutions.

On behalf of the MST Review's Editorial Board, I hope these articles will foster joy and hope especially for those who passionately accompany the youth as active members of the Church community to emulate Jesus and help actualize the kingdom of God. As Pope Francis stated during the welcoming ceremony at the World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal (1-6 August 2023), God has "called by name" every one of us despite being sinners as a Church community that loves, invites, and welcomes<sup>1</sup> It is thus crucial to recognize the youth's capacity, creativity, and contributions to building an inclusive Church that gives room to everyone.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, "Address of His Holiness," *Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Portugal on the Occasion of the XXXVII World Youth Day (2-6 August 2023)*, 3 August 2023, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2023/august/documents/20230803-portogallo-cerimonia-accoglienza.html> (accessed 29 June 2024).