

JDDJ Zoom Webinar Tuesday 26 January 2021 at 10am

The implications of JDDJ in the life and teaching of our churches.

Sub group: **Ecclesial authority**. 30 mn

Input of 20 mn by Christophe Boyer before discussion (inspired by an article of Kristin Colberg, USA)

Decision making process linked to ecclesiology and ecumenism is shifting in the Catholic Church and WCC. It is less European, more globalized and localized at the same time. It is more concerned by praxis than by dogmas. Authority inside the Catholic Church and authority between Churches journey in parallel rather than in cooperative and mutually enriching ways. It is worthwhile to see how the developments in methodology and praxis of authority in both cases can influence each other. **The Catholic Church authority shifts to synodality and ecumenical authority moves to discernment.** Both show similar theological commitments and promote participation strategies. Their situations have changed dramatically but their mutual relation is their best hope for this new millennium.

Ecumenical authority asks very difficult questions to Catholic ecclesial authority. One difficulty is to understand what is the ecumenical authority and conversely the Catholic authority. Like between computers or smart phones the **operating systems must be compatible** otherwise communication and mutual understanding are impossible. The ecclesiology behind the authority of decision making process of the Catholic Church and the one of the WCC are operating systems. Each ecclesial community has its ecclesiology or operating system. Often they are different and prevent full mutual recognition. We must focus on decision making process or ecclesiology before considering ecumenical thought. **Ecclesiology conditions ecumenism.** Ecclesiology must be able to support a dynamic ecumenical vision.

New paradigms of authority and therefore of ecclesiology and ecumenism are slowly emerging but they are not yet very clear. This prevents paying enough attention between ecclesiology and ecumenism. **This generation thinks that local informal practical ecumenism is more important than global official doctrinal dialogue.** In fact ecclesiology or decision making process of authority are critically important if we want ecumenism to progress at all in this new beginning. **We need ecumenical gifts exchange or receptive ecumenism.** New developments in ecumenism and ecclesiology can enrich each other for better ecclesial authority.

We need to **rethink its methods, areas of focus and dialogue partners.** Its context is thoroughly **globalized and highly technological**, and it is **shaped by demographic changes as well as changing attitudes about religion and institutions.** It is formed by a **heightened awareness of** the way that the church's mission interacts with a variety of **social, historical and political forces.** It needs to **"be more efficient, more reflective of the world's population and more inclusive of a wider range of voices while remaining consistent with theological commitments** and the witness of

tradition.” The question for a better authority is: “What structures would best promote the church’s ability to speak meaningfully in this new context?”.

The first Pope of the global South, Francis, wants to rethink the Church structures via a pastoral and missionary conversion. The Church like a bicycle finds equilibrium in its mobility. Authority must focus beyond the Church to lead it properly. Francis does not view authority “movement in the church as one-directional; rather it sees the church as constituted by both “centrifugal” forces—as a community of disciples focused on outreach—and “centripetal” forces—which draw God’s people into communion”. The church’s mission is therefore not merely one of “going forth”; it is also one of listening, receiving and openness to the presence of the Spirit.“

He calls for a renewal of universal Church governance via synodality (syn = same and hodos = way or road) to give more important role to the local church, especially dioceses and episcopal conferences. He wants a church authority that listens, learns and shares mission. “Listening is more than simply hearing. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: All listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit.”

“Adopting a listening disposition requires decreasing the distance between centre and periphery in ecclesial structures so that the church gains greater access to a wider variety of voices as well as a deepened appreciation of the context necessary for appreciating what is heard.” Thus decision making process is better informed and richer. He is the first Pope ordained a priest after Vatican II council and its commitment to collegiality. He acknowledges the need for a strong centre but also for strong local and regional elements and the integration of the peripheries. Bureaucracy must be balanced by collegiality and solidarity. We need not unanimity nor uniformity but unity in the richness of diversity.

The centre should not do all the talking. Shortage of priests and certain moral matters are to be dealt and solved by all local churches. We need a sound decentralization. “His writings are full of references to documents authored by regional episcopal bodies including The Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), and the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa (SECAM).” He makes “effort to create ecclesial structures that are responsive to a wider range of voices.” It’s not modernizing but rebalancing the church to express better its nature. It is difficult but necessary and rooted in God’s will for the church in this millennium.

Churches authorities experienced that ecumenism growth has been more or less quick according to the period. Advances or new ecumenical understanding have been made possible by new pathways or new holes in the roof as seen during the healing of a paralysed man in Mark’s gospel. “The ways to shared understandings of the Christian faith can often seemed blocked by the presence of fixed opinions, teachings and ways of understanding.” “At times, the answer is not to keep trying to push through blocked doors, but to create another way in.” The ecumenical

movement has been a story of creating “holes in the roof.” One key discovery was the way that agreements about ministry can serve as fruitful points of entry. After years of halting progress over traditional issues related to faith and order, some ecumenical groups have looked to the exercise of ministry in one another’s communions as a means of seeking mutual understanding and appreciation of each other structures and cooperation with the Holy Spirit.

Those “questions of faith and order” which had long been understood as dividing the churches were “put on the back burner in the early twenty-first century and replaced by the newer church-dividing issues on ethical questions.” “There is today much more anxiety about the dividing positions on human sexuality than about the ecumenical issues of a generation ago, such as Eucharistic sacrifice, the historic episcopate, or universal primacy. “Churches today experience acutely the divisive consequences of moral disagreement, both within Christian communities and between them.” “Rather than remaining trapped behind the impasse of seemingly incompatible moral conclusions, might it be possible for communities to come together by exploring the discernment processes that led to these positions? Moreover, might it even be possible, to discern together what fidelity to Christ looks like in relation to particular moral issues?”.

“Behind talk of “diversity” always lies notions of “legitimate diversity” and “illegitimate diversity.” The inevitable presence of this language behind all talk of diversity raises questions about who determines what diversity is acceptable and what criteria are used to make this determination. Each church has a different answer and is an ecumenical challenge because they are not explainable by reason alone but by each one’s faith. All the same sharing about these differences can help understanding each other difference and grow in fraternity.

“Recognizing the importance of questions related to discernment, the World Council of Churches’ convergence text The Church: Towards a Common Vision emphasizes the need for churches seeking to move toward a “common vision” to create common means of discernment.” “It identifies the need for greater clarity about this last term as a key goal in the next phase of the ecumenical journey.” So the goal is not only for different churches to discern on the same issue but to share about their processes of discernment on the same issue so as to harmonize them a bit more before reaching complete harmony of processes.

“The most common and enthusiastic ecumenical question that church leaders can hear is “What can we do together?” One suggestion is to coordinate opportunities to respond to local needs within the community—on topics such as migration or public health—through common statements and coordinated practices.”

“Insight can be achieved by comparing synodal structures and processes of discernment given that, within the church, structures of decision-making are inherently related to structures of communion.” “Talk about processes of decision-making is always also talk about structures of authority and vice versa.” In that way

churches authorities can get closer. “Who gets listened to on which issues? How is unity maintained while allowing for a diversity of voices? What does fidelity to Christ look like?” Synodality and common discernment are not just pragmatic solutions to church problems but God’s will for churches authorities.

“Catholic authorities move towards synodality has helped the Catholic Church develop a deeper understanding of its own identity which, in turn, has informed its ability to engage in fruitful ecumenical exchange.” “Synodal structures are rooted in a renewed understanding that the church exists as a communion of churches, a development which, in many ways, represents a retrieval of the earliest Christian tradition.” “Local communities are the subject of the proclamation of the gospel. It recognizes that the Gospel is not a timeless discourse, but that there is a need to discern what the Spirit is saying to the church in a particular time and place.” The Church has an inherent oneness as the locus of God’s saving work and not primarily through external bonds such as the bonds of jurisdiction. Synodality’s communion ecclesiology with its strong view of local churches and emphasis on the internal, not external, union of churches provides new opportunities for ecumenical “syncing”. Simply put, how we listen and who we listen to within our own ecclesial community impacts who we listen to and what we hear outside of it.

Catholic authorities and doctrine could learn slowly how to tolerate significant expressions of diversity within itself and recognize diversity as a source of vibrancy rather than a threat, and perhaps there is a chance for real ecumenical advance. Francis has promoted this sense of greater diversity within the church in many ways including his motu proprio, *Magnum Principium*, on liturgical translations which allows for greater diversity and more local expressions within the liturgy.

“A commitment to consulting the *sensus fidelium* is not limited to hearing only from Catholics, but extends to all the baptized.” A synodal church therefore has an intrinsic and extrinsic orientation. Multiple official Catholic documents have affirmed the presence of both the *sensus fidei* and the *sensus fidelium* beyond the boundaries of the Catholic Church.

“On the other hand the better knowledge of other churches processes of discernment allows greater mutual appreciation and learning from each other how to improve them and even improve church structures. Common discernment illumines critical aspects of what a synodal church looks like.” “Moving towards synodality—becoming a listening church—is largely about establishing processes of decision-making. It is rooted in questions such as: Whose voices are heard on which questions? How are disagreements resolved? On what issues can we have diversity and where must we have uniformity? How much tension is the community willing to sustain on a particular issue? Ecclesial governance is about answering those questions.

The many local centres of ecumenical dialogue balance the global one and inspire the decentralization of the Catholic Church.

We are navigating between old models or paradigm of church authorities and new ones that we are slowly discovering. It is confusing and frustrating. We explore the new world context. Church leadership is transforming itself to adapt to it. It will increase communion within and without the church.