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The Pattern of Biblical Synodality in the Act of the Apostles and Its Relevance to the Asian Catholic Families Today

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Abstract

Synodality is defined as the way of life and act of the Church. The question is whether this way of life and act has only begun recently, especially when the synod for synodality was echoed throughout the universal Church or it has been existed since the early Church. This article aims to trace the theme of synodality as the way of life and act of the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles. The Lukan sequel was chosen because it recorded many stories about the early Church. Narrative analysis focusing on the formal structure of the plot is used to explore the synodality theme presented in the texts. The goal is to find a biblical synodality pattern that could be duplicated step by step by the Asian Catholic Families today. This is the relevance of synodality as the way of life and act of the early Church for the Asian Catholic Family today as the most basic level of the Church.

Keywords

Synod, Synodality, The Acts of the Apostles, Biblical Pattern, The Asian Catholic Families

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Introduction

One of the popular themes that is being discussed throughout the universal Church today is synodality. It happened because Pope Francis invited all baptized to participate in the Synod for Synodality.[1] In the document "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church" issued by the International Theological Commission, synodality is described as *modus vivendi et operandi* - the way of life and act of the Church.[2] Even it has been practiced since the early Church. The reference to the biblical story that appears in the document, one of them, comes from Acts 15:1-35 about the First Council.[3] The same story is also offered by the document "Biblical Resource for Synodality" along with the story of Mary in prayer with the Apostle (Acts 1:13-14) and the story of the Path to Communion (Acts 10:1-11:8).[4]

This article aims to trace synodality as the way of life and act of the early Church in Bible, especially in the Acts of Apostles and presents its relevance to the Asian Church today at the most basic level, family. Therefore, this article will focus on:

1. Looking for other stories in the Acts of Apostles that match to the theme of synodality that have not been mentioned in both documents above.
2. Exploring and formulating the synodality pattern as the way of life and action of the early Church in these texts.
3. Presenting the relevance of synodality as the way of life and action of the early Church to the Asian Catholic Families today as the most basic level of the Church, family, in order

[1] Secretary General of the Synod of Bishop, *Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality* (September 2021), art. 2.1.

[2] International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of The Church* (March 2nd, 2018), art. 6.

[3] *Synodality in the Life and Mission of The Church*, art. 20-21.

[4] Secretary General of the Synod of Bishop, *Biblical Resources for Synodality* (March 2022), 53-79.

to enliven the theme of FABC 2022: Journeying Together as Peoples of Asia.

Selected Stories on Synodality in The Acts of The Apostles

First, we need to clarify the definition of synod and synodality. Synod is composed of a preposition σύν (with) and the noun οδός (path). It indicates the path along which the People of God walk together.[5] Since the first centuries, the word "synod" has been applied, with a specific meaning, to the ecclesial assemblies convoked on various levels (diocesan, provincial, regional, patriarchal, or universal) to discern, by the light of the Word of God and listening to the Holy Spirit, the doctrinal, liturgical, canonical and pastoral questions that arise as time goes by.[6]

The synod meaning moves from the general meaning, walking together, to the specific meaning used by the Church, meeting together. From the specific meaning above, synodality is defined as a specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelising mission.[7]

Based on these definitions, this section attempts to look for the other stories in which the apostles gather to discuss together a problem in the Acts of the Apostles. Of course, the famous and legendary story is the Jerusalem Council. The story is recorded in Acts 15:1-35 and mentioned in both documents above. Other similar stories that have not been mentioned in both documents are the election meeting of Judas' successor in Acts 1:15-26 and the election meeting of the seven deacons in Acts 6:1-7. Those are the three selected stories will be explored in this article.

[5] *Synodality in the Life and Mission of The Church*, art. 3.

[6] *Synodality in the Life and Mission of The Church*, art. 4.

[7] *Synodality in the Life and Mission of The Church*, art. 6.

Method of Interpretation

The three selected stories above will be explored using narrative analysis focusing on the formal structure of the plot. Jean Louis Ska, a Jesuit exegete, offered formal structure of the plot as a simple way to summarize a story in a pair of words, in a simple opposition that gives the essence of the story.[8] There are pairs of words in the structuralist research such as order / execution, desire / fulfilment, problem / problem solving, conflict / resolution of the conflict, imbalance / balance, incompleteness / completeness, difficulty / difficulty removed, danger / danger averted, / wrong / wrong punished.[9]

Robert C. Culey, explaining "Structure in Some Biblical Narrative", proposed "Then it is possible to go even further and suggest a structure like problem / problem solved." Culley also said "Very many stories indeed would share this pattern."[10] If observed at a glance, the three selected stories also have the same pattern with Culey's proposal.

To make sure the formal structure of three selected stories, the article follows Ska suggestion. To discover the formal structure, that it is useful to compare the initial with the final stage of the narration.[11] Following Ska's suggestion, it seems clear that these stories have similarity in the beginning and the end. The beginning part is problem and the end part is problem solving. Therefore, simple opposition namely problem/ problem solving is suitable for all three selected stories. The detail similarity of these selected texts in the formal structure can be seen in the table below.

Table 1 – Similarity of the tree selected stories in the formal structure

[8] Jean Louis Ska, *Our Father Have Told Us, Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives*, (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2000), 19.

[9] Jean Louis Ska, *Our Father Have Told Us, Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives*, 20.

[10] Robert C. Culley, *Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narrative*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 70.

[11] Jean Louis Ska, *Our Father Have Told Us, Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives*, 20.

Simple Opposition	Selected Stories		
	Acts 1:15-26 The election meeting of Judas' successor	Acts 6:1-7 The election meeting of seven deacons	Acts 15:1-35 The Jerusalem Council
Problem	Acts 1:15-22 When the apostles and disciples gathered, Peter explained that Judas' position as an apostle was vacant.	Acts 6:1 When the number of the disciples was multiplied, services to the widows were neglected in daily ministration.	Acts 15:1-2a There were dissenting opinions about circumcision as a requirement to be accepted as a disciple.
Problem Solving	Acts 1:23-26 The apostles and disciples discussed the problem and decided together to name Matthias as Judas' successor. Then they carried out the decision together.	Acts 6:2-7 The apostles and disciples gathered. They discussed the problem and decided together to choose seven deacons to serve the widows in daily ministration.	Acts 15:2b-35 The apostle and elders gathered. They discussed the problem. After discussion, the Jerusalem Council decided that circumcision was not a requirement to be accepted as a disciple.

As a historian,[12] Luke recorded the three selected stories with a clear structure in his second book. Each account begins by presenting a clear identification of the problem (Acts 1:15-22, Acts 6:1, Acts 15:1-2a). Then Luke tells the problem solving step by step clearly as well (Acts 1:23-26, Acts 6:2-7, Acts 15:2b-33). Luke's clear structure makes it easier to determine the formal structure of the plot in these texts.

Finally, the formal structure of the plot, especially the simple opposition, helps us to identify the dynamics of the three selected stories. Looking closely at these texts verse by verse, it immediately appears what the apostles and disciples did to solve the problems that arose at that time. Therefore, based on the table, this article will

[12] Bob Utley, *Luke the Historian* (Texas: Bible Lessons International, 2011), 7-8. See also F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of Apostles. Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 27-33.

explore the synodality pattern that exists in the formal structure of such texts.

Synodality pattern in THE Acts of THE apostles

When juxtaposed the three selected stories, there are similar patterns in what the apostles and disciples (further mentioned as the early Church) did to solve the problems. The table below shows the similar patterns.

Table 2 – Similarity of the three selected texts in what the apostles and disciples did to solve the problems

Steps of problem solving	Selected Stories		
	Acts 1:15-26 The election meeting of Judas' successor	Acts 6:1-7 The election meeting of seven deacons	Acts 15:1-35 The Jerusalem Council
Gathering together	Acts 1:15	Acts 6:2a	Acts 15:6
Discussing together	Acts 1:16-25	Acts 6:2b-5a	Acts 15:7-21
Deciding together in prayer	Acts 1:26a	Acts 6:5b-6	Acts 15:22-29
Executing decision together	Acts 1:26b	(Acts 6:7)	Acts 15:30-33

The problem-solving steps in these texts fit to the definition of synodality in which People of God gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelising mission.[13] The similarity steps in the three selected story confirms the synodality pattern that became the way of life and act of the early Church. Therefore, this section will elaborate the steps above in these stories.

[13] *Synodality in the Life and Mission of The Church*, art. 6.

A. *Gathering Together*

It is interesting to elaborate the first step, gathering together, with juxtaposing the three selected verses.

Table 3 – The Word Gathering in the three selected text.

	Acts 1:15 The election meeting of Judas' successor	Acts 6:2a The election meeting of seven deacons	Acts 15:6 The Jerusalem Council
Greek expression about "gathering"	ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ	προσκαλεσάμενοι	συνήχθησάν

The table shows us that the expression about "gathering" in the three verses vary. It occurs because Luke used different words to describe "gathering" in the Acts of the Apostles. Aaron W. White recorded that Luke used six words and two idiomatic phrases for "gathering," "assembling," "coming together," etc.[14] The six words consist of five verbs i.e., συνάγω (Acts 4:5, 26, 27, 31; 11:26; 13:44; 14:27, 15:6 in the third selexted story, 30; and 20:7, 8.), συνέρχομαι (Acts 1:6, 21; 2:6; 9:39; 10:23, 45; 11:12; 16:13; 21:16; 22:30; 25:17), συντρέχω (Acts 3:11 and 21:30) , συναθροίζω (Acts 12:12 and 19:15), and ὁμοθυμαδόν (in negative sense: Acts 7:57; 18:12; 19:29 and in positive sense 1:14; 4:24; 2:46; 5:12; 15:25) and one noun, ἐκκλησία (Acts 5:11; 8:1, 3; 9:31; 11:22, 26; 12:1, 5; 13:1; 14:23; 14:23, 27; 15:3, 4; 2:41; 16:5; 18:22; 20:17, 28). The two idiomatic phrases are παντὸς τοῦ πλήθους and ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ that found in the first selexted story.[15]

Phrase ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ is from preposition ἐπὶ and pronoun αὐτὸ with definite article τὸ. The preposition ἐπὶ has a basic meaning "on" but

[14] Aaron W. White, "Gathered Together: The Grammar of 'Church' from Acts", *Presbyterion* 45/2 (2019), 64

[15] Aaron W. White, "Gathered Together: The Grammar of 'Church' from Acts", *Presbyterion* 45/2 (2019), 64-66.

with a range of meanings according to context.[16] With accucative τὸ αὐτὸ that means itself, phrase ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ literally means on itself. If people are on themselves, that means they are upon at the same place,[17] at the same time.[18] If there are people at the same place, in one at the same time, this can be understood as the act of gathering together.[19] So, ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ is an idiom to describe "gathering". Idiom ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ in LXX is used to render Hebrew word יַחַד [20] that means in union, together, altogether.[21] Let us take a closer look to LXX. The idiom appears in Pss 2:2; 4:9; 18:10; 33:4, 36:38, 48:3, 10; 54:15; 70:10; 73:6, 8; 97:8; 101:23; 121:3; 132:1)[22]

Luke used the idiom from LXX to describe "gathering" in the Acts of the Apostles, escpecially in Acts 1:15.[23] The verse tells us that they came together because there was a problem to be solved. The problem arose because of the vacancy of the apostle's position left by Judas. Therefore, they needed to choose one among them to replace Judas. Interestingly, the problem was not solved by the apostles themselves but was solved along with one hundred and twenty other disciples. If

[16] Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Mille Timothy Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament,* (Victoria: Trafford, 2005). Acceced from BibleWorks v7.0.

[17] Charles Robson, *A Greek Lexicon to the New Testament*, (London: Whittaker, 1839), 163

[18] Thomas Sheldon Green, *A Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament*, (Slough: Hollen Street Press, 1976), 69.

[19] Wesley J. Perschbacher (ed.), *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1990), 61.

[20] F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of Apostles. Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 108.

[21] R. Laird Harris (ed), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament Volume I*, (Chicago: Moody Press), 372-373.

[22] Alan Thompson, One Lord, *One People: The Unity of the Church in Acts in its Literary Setting*, (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 68.

[23] F. F. Bruce, The Acts of Apostles. *Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 108. See also Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of The Apostles. A Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 159. C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Acts of the Apostles*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 96. The debate about the mistranslation of this idiom from Hebrew to LXX can be seen in C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Acts of the Apostle*s, 172-173.

we look at the previous verses, then we soon find that gathering was the first action they took after being a witness of Jesus being lifted up into heaven.

If White only noted six words and two idioms to describe "gathering" in the Luke's sequel, after looking at the table above, we need to add the word προσκαλεσάμενοι that found in Acts 6:2a to the White's note. The word προσκαλεσάμενοι has the root, προσκαλέω. The word προσκαλέω consists of preposition προς that means to, toward and verbs καλέω that means to call.[24] So, προσκαλέω is used of commanding call to an individual (Mt 18:2; Mrk 15:44) or to an existing, fairly well defined group (Mt 10:1; Mk 6:7; 12:43; also Acts 6:2) or the people (Mt 15:1-10; Mk 7:14).[25] Therefore, προσκαλέω means summon.[26] Summoning people at the same place and same time means making a gathering. With that meaning, it is no surprise that Luke also used the word προσκαλεσάμενοι in the second selected story (Acts 6:2a) to describe gathering together. The verse tells us that due to the increasing number of disciples the apostles needed additional personnel to serve the widows who were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. Therefore, the twelve summoned all of the disciples to solve the problem.

In the third selected text, the meaning of gathering together appears in Acts 15:6 with the word συνήχθησάν. The word has a root, συνάγω. The word consists of συν that means together and άγω that means lead, guide.[27] So, συνάγω means to bring together, to gather together.[28] Other dictions e.g.: collect an assembly, to convoke, to

[24] Wesley J. Perschbacher (ed.), *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, 218.

[25] Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Volume I, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 274.

[26] Charles Robson, A *Greek Lexicon to the New Testament*, 401. See also H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and R. McKenzie, *A Greek and English Lexicon with a Revised Supplement*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1515. And Wesley J. Perschbacher (ed.), *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, 353.

[27] Wesley J. Perschbacher (ed.), The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, 5.

[28] Charles Robson, A Greek Lexicon to the New Testament, 442. See also H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and R. McKenzie, A Greek and English Lexicon with a Revised Supplement, 1691.

come together, to meet are used to render the word to συνάγω.[29] The dictions describe the nuances of unity. Interestingly, the third selected story gave us an important information about the unity of the Church. When the Christians have increased in number and spread to various regions, if there was a problem that cannot be decided by themselves in that regions like in Antioch, the problem should be decided at the highest authority level. In the early Church, the highest authority level was the apostles. Of course, not all Antiochians could be present together at the meeting, so Paul and Barnabas were sent as their representative (Acts 15:2b).

The use of the word συναγειν in ancient Greek even specifically referred to bring together for deliberation or festivity.[30] This information helps us to understand that the apostles and the disciples not just gathered together but they gathered for deliberation. The nuances of "bring together for deliberation" are also felt in the use of the words ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ and προσκαλέω. Thus, according to these three selected stories, the first step "gathering together" always occurred if the apostles and the disciples have had to decide the important thing for the early Church that experienced many unpredictable situations.

The unpredictable situation experienced by the early Church is interesting when viewed through VUCA lens. VUCA is acronym of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.[31] Although volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity situation is proposed in the year 1985 by Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus[32] and the term VUCA popularized by Herbert F. Barber during the cold war,[33] in fact the the

[29] Wesley J. Perschbacher (ed.), The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, 388.

[30] H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and R. McKenzie, A Greek and English Lexicon with a Revised Supplement, 1691

[31] Nathan Bennet and G. James Lemoine, "What a Difference a Word Makes: Understanding Treats to Performance in a VUCA World", Business Horizons 1126 (2014), 1.

[32] Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, Leaders Strategies for Taking Charge (New York, Harper Collins, 2012), 38, 79.

[33] Herbert F. Barber, "Developing Strategic Leadership: The US Army War College Experience," Journal of Management Development Vol 11 No. 6, 1992, 4-12.

twelve and the disciple had faced the quick changes during a volatile week. After Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, He suffered, crucifed, and died. They scared (Mrk 16:8a). Then in just three days, there was a change again because of Jesus' resurrection. Luke recorded that the disciples can not understand the chain of events experienced by Jesus (Luk 24:13-27). It wasn't until Jesus lifted up into heaven that they became bolder. They gathered and elected the Judas's succecor (Acts 1:16-21) to continue proclaiming the gospel like in the first selected story.

The early Church also faced uncertain situation due to lack of personnel to serve the community when the number of Christians increased (Acts 6:1). They needed more personnel to serve the community, especially the widows (Acts 6:2-3). So, they elected seven deacons to serve the daily food distribution to the widows and to serve the table like in the second selected story.

The early Church also faced a complexity and ambigous problem as a logical consequence of proclaiming the gospel from Jerusalem, all Judaea, Samaria, and event to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:8). Christianity, which was rooted in Jewish tradition, then met the hellenism. When the Gentiles were baptized, circumcision became a complex and ambigous issue. Should the Gentiles be circumcised? They had had faith in Jesus Christ. Should the Gentiles follow Jewish tradition according to the custom of Moses? (Act 15:1-5) It recorded in the third selected story.

Interestingly, every time faced with the VUCA situations, the Early Church responded by gathering together to discern, by the light of the Word of God and to listen to the Holy Spirit. In the next sections, it will be reviewed what they did when gathering together.

B. Discussing Together

Reading carefully the three selected stories, the readers will see the same step. After gathering together, the apostles and disciples discussed together. Luke recorded it in his sequel, in Acts 1:16-25; 6:2b-5a; 15:7-21.

Let us take a closer look at the first story, Acts 1:16-23. There's a veiled issues in this story. It used to be that the one who chose

the disciples, including Judas was Jesus Himself (Mat 10:1-4; Mrk 3:13-19; Luk 6:12-16). Now who has the authority to choose Judas' successor? Peter realized that he did not have that authority so after Peter's explanation about Judas' position as an apostle was vacant that was recorded in 7 verses, more than half of the total verses in the text, he gave a space for discussion.

There are two interesting models of discussion to look at. The first is they discussed among themselves. The Luke's sequel recorded that the disciples proposed two men, Joseph called Barsabbas who also known as Justus, and Matthias (Acts 1:23). The second and the more important point of this text is they did not only discuss it between them but also discussed it with God in prayer (Acts 1:24).

In the second text, Acts 6:2b-5a, the discussion is shortly recorded. After explaining the problems related to the daily food distribution to the widows and the serving table, the apostles proposed a solution to choose deacons. The proposal pleased the whole community. Although shortly recorded, the discussion process was still ongoing. The proposal from the apostles was immediately approved by the whole community so that the discussion was over fast.

Unlike the previous two stories, the third story in Acts 15:7-21 recorded the discussion at length. In the text, Luke used the word ζητήσεως, which is a genitive feminine singular from ζήτησις. In addition to appearing in Acts 15:7, this word also appears in Acts 15:2. Acts 15:7 in P^{45} recorded an additional phrase τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Βαρναβᾷ πρὸς αὐτούς conflating with verse 2.[34] The same figures who debate or discuss in verse 2 and 7 confirms the problem-solving dynamic in the early church. When the problem cannot be solved at a base level, Paul and Barnabas were sent as Antiochians' representative to consult the highest authority level (Acts 15:2b).

Interestingly, based on Greek lexicons, ζήτησις originally means act of seeking[35] or philosophical investigation.[36] In the New Testament,

[34] F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of Apostles. Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 108., 335. See also Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on The Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2022), 378.

[35] Charles Robson, *A Greek Lexicon to the New Testament*, 192.

[36] H. Greeven, "ζήτησις", TDNT Vol. II, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 893. See also Timothy

the word means dispute - debate or discussion [37] based on context. In Acts 15:2, ζητήσεως was used with the word στάσεως which means dissension.[38] The word nuance leads to controversy,[39] division, and discord.[40] Therefore, ζήτησις is more suitable to translate into dispute or debate rather than discussion. Whereas in Acts 15:7, the word ζήτησις was used with the word ἰδεῖν in the previous verse. The word ἰδεῖν is an infinitive aorist active from ὁράω which literally means to see.[41] The phrase ἰδεῖν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τούτου - to see about this matter can be understood as considering something. The word nuance leads to find the solution about the controversy. So, in this verse, ζήτησις is more suitable to translate into discussion rather than debate.[42]

The discussion continued with Peter's presentation about his priority and experience in the Gentiles mission.[43] Then they listened to Paul and Barnabas which tells about the signs and miracles that God had done through them among the Gentiles. Finally, James as leader of the Jerusalem Church gave a conclusion.

Based on these dynamics above, in the discussion together, dissenting opinion is not a taboo. Dissenting opinion can be interpreted positively. Different opinions enrich meeting participant's point of view. Therefore, during the discussion, each meeting participant did not just hear but also about listened each other to seek God's will. With this understanding, discussion can be a tool to discern.

Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, (Victoria: Trafford, 2005), 186.

[37] Charles Robson, *A Greek Lexicon to the New Testament*, 192.

[38] Charles Robson, A Greek Lexicon to the New Testament, 430.

[39] Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 186.

[40] H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and R. McKenzie, *A Greek and English Lexicon with a Revised Supplement*, 1691.

[41] W. Michaelis, "ὁράω", *TDNT* Vol. V, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 893. See also H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and R. McKenzie, *A Greek and English Lexicon with a Revised Supplement*, 1244.

[42] C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Acts of the Apostles*, 228.

[43] C. K. Barrett, *Acts. A Shorter Commentary*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002), 228-229.

c. *Deciding Together in Prayer*

The next step taken by the apostles and disciples after discussing together was to decide together in prayer. The records can be found in Acts 1:24-26a; 6:5b-6; and15:22-29. Let us take a closer look at third step in the three selected stories one by one.

The story of the election meeting of Judas' successor gives us a unique information about how the early Church decided to choose one of two good candidates. Using Marguerat - Bourquin Quinary Scheme,[44] the story has an interesting complication which began when Peter has set a specific requirement for Judas' successor. The requirement is a man who have companied them all the time that Jesus went in and out among them (Acts 1:21), beginning with the baptism of John untuk the day that He was taken up from them (Acts 1:22). Then they offered two candidates who both met this requirement. Choosing the best one between the two candidates is certainly easy. But choosing one of these two equally good candidates who met those criteria is not easy. So, they cast lots for them to choose Judas' successor.

The casting lots in the first selected story is not an ordinary casting lots. Looking back at the previous verse, the casting lots as a way of decision making is done by involving God in prayer. In this discussion of third step, we need to recall the veiled issues in this story. It used to be that the one who chose the disciples, including Judas was Jesus Himself (Mat 10:1-4; Mrk 3:13-19; Luk 6:12-16). Now who has the authority to choose Judas' successor? By casting lots, not voting, the result is no longer a human decision but Christ's that enrolled Matthias to the twelve.[45] This awareness appeared when they **prayed** and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." (Acts 1:24-25).

[44] Daniel Marguerat dan Yvan Bourquin, How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narratve Criticism (London: SCM Press, 1999), 43-45.

[45] C. K. Barrett, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Acts of the Apostles, 105.

Likewise, in the story of the election meeting of seven deacons, prayer was the part of decision making process. After they chose the seven deacons: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, they had these men stand before the apostles, who **prayed** and laid their hands on them (Act 6:5-6). As we know in the previous section, Luke did not detail the discussion process that led to decision-making. Luke used sentence ἤρεσεν ὁ λόγος ἐνώπιον παντὸς τοῦ πλήθους to indicate that the proposal from the twelve (Acts 6:2b-4) is directly acceptable to the whole community (Acts 6:5).[46]

It is interesting that παντὸς τοῦ πλήθους rendered as the whole community. As a White's note, phrase παντὸς τοῦ πλήθους in the sentence was an idiom that Luke used to describe "gathering of believer". So, the idiom means the whole conggregation[47] or the whole community. Thus, the use of this idiom reaffirms that the decision-making process is carried out in the togetherness of the whole community. Although done in togetherness, the difficulty level in decision-making in this story is lighter than in the previous story. So, the apostles' proposal could be taken for granted by the whole community. In contrast to the previous model which cast lots, the decision making model in this story uses the deliberation for concensus model.

Then in the third story, there is no explicit word of prayer, προσευξάμενοι, like the other two stories. The third story showed the process of the Jerusalem Council, the first council recorded by the Church. The emphasis of this story is more towards discernment. For information, Pope Francis explains that "To discern we need to be in an environment, in a state of prayer."[48] Thus, using the Pope Francis explanation as a lens, the discernment process in this story is in the state of prayer.

Following in the footsteps of Saint Ignatius Loyola, discernment is about finding the voice of the Spirit of God speaking to us in the ordinary

[46] F. F. Bruce, *The Book of The Acts. NICNT*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 121.

[47] Aaron W. White, "Gathered Together: The Grammar of 'Church' from Acts", 66.

[48] Fransiscus, *Catechesis On Discernment: 3. The elements of discernment. Familiarity with the Lord.* (September 28th, 2022) https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2022/documents/20220928-udienza-ge-nerale.html (access 25.10.2022).

and practical details of our lives.[49] By trying to listen to the Spirit which speak through other apostles' mouth without being attached to their own desires and ideas, the apostles and the elders tried to find God's will for the future of the Church.[50] The explanation about discernment above helps the readers understand verse 28 which says that this decision of the Jerusalem Council was not only the decision of the apostles and elders but firstly the decision of the Holy Spirit.[51] Finally, the result of the discernment became a decision that written in a letter (Acts 15:23-29).

Based on the description above, it seems clear that the decision-making model can vary. There are three models i.e., casting lots model, deliberation for concensus model, and discerment model. Nevertheless, there is a similarity between the three selected stories. The similarity is decision-making in prayer. Prayer plays a key role in the life of the Early Church. Prayer is also unique to Luke. Not only in his gospel, Luke, recorded more prayer in his sequel than others book (Acts 1:14, 24, 2:42; 4:23-31; 6:6; 8:15; 9:11, 40; 10:9, 15; 11:2, 18; 12:12; 13:1-3; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 27:17; and 28:8).[52]

D. Executing Together

Luke recorded the execution of the decision explicitly in Acts 1:26b; 15:22-29 and implicitly in Acts 6:7. In the first selected story, sentence συγκατεψηφίσθη μετὰ τῶν ἕνδεκα ἀποστόλων, he was added to the eleven apostles, in verse 26b indicates that decisions that have been taken before are executed. So, after the result of casting lots fell on Matthias, they executed the Christ's decision to add Matthias as the twelfth apostle.

[49] Jesuits, *Discernment*. https://www.jesuits.global/spirituality/discernment/ (access 25.10.2022).

[50] This idea is in line with Rev 2:7 NRSV that Holy Spirit "is saying to the Church". See also Fransciscus, *Apostolic Constitution Episcopalis Communio of the Holy Father Francis on the Synod of Bishop*, (September 15th, 2018), art. 8.

[51] Luke took a good note about it by placing the phrase τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ in front of the phrase ἡμῖν.

[52] Ignatius Cardinal Suharyo, *Injil Lukas Injil Doa*, (Jakarta: Obor, 2020), 5-8.

The second selected story ends in verse 7. Indeed, there is no information about the decision that being executed in this story. As a conclusion,[53] there was only note about the good result of their ministry. The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. The good result in verse 7 indicates the seven deacons do their jobs well so the twelve can focus on prayer and serving the word appropriate as the plan that be made by the apostles in verse 4.

Next the third selected story recorded how the decision was executed in Acts 15:30-35. Judas who called Barsabbas and Silas were chosen to execute the decision of Jerusalem Council that has been written in a letter to Antiochians. They went to Antioch. They gathered the whole community in Antioch and delivered the letter. When the Antiochians read the letter, they rejoiced at its encouragement.

Borrowing the terms of Marguerrat and Bourquin again,[54] in the final situation of these stories, the readers can see the final step, executing together. If they did not add Matthias as a Judas' successor, they lacked one apostle to proclaim the gospel. If they did not choose seven deacons, then service to the Hellenistic Jews widows were being overlooked. Likewise, if the decision not to circumcision was not conveyed to the congregation in Anthiokia, then the Gentiles who become Christians is not large in number. Finally, executing together makes early Church grower fast.

Relevance of The Pattern of Biblical Synodality for The Asian Catholic Families Today

Naturally, synodality as the way of life and act of the early Church has been transmitted as a good tradition by the Church today. The real form of this transmission is the Synod of Bishops. At the beginning of the second decade in the XXI century, the Synod of Bishops took

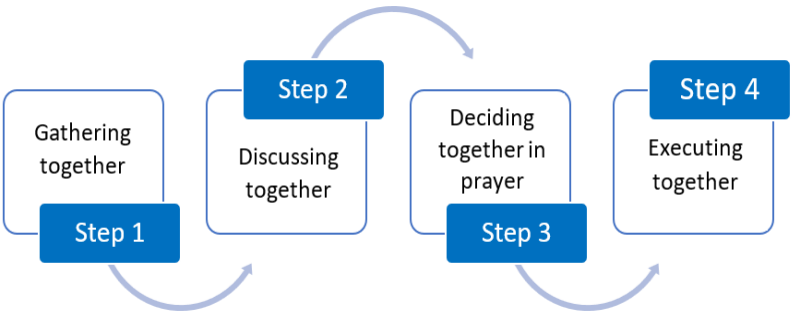
[53] Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of The Apostles. A Commentary*, 264

[54] Daniel Marguerat danYvan Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narratve Criticism*, 43-45.

on the theme of synodality.[55] Pope Francis echoes synodality not only in the center of the Church by inviting the Bishops all over the world to Rome but also echoes to all corners of the world by involving all baptized[56] in their diocese.[57]

Scientifically, this article also attempts to formulate the pattern of biblical synodality in the three selected stories of the Acts of the Apostles. Biblical exploration of these stories indicates that step by step of problem-solving always appears in each text. Based on the similarity of problem-solving steps in these stories, the article proposes the pattern of biblical synodality in the Acts of the Apostles below.

Graphic 1 – The Biblical Synodality Pattern in the Acts of the Apostles



By formulating in four steps, the pattern of biblical synodality can be duplicated by the Church, especially the Asian Church today, at the most basic level. The most basic level of Church refers to family as *ecclecia domestica*.[58] Discussing Asian Chruch, Asian Catholic family

[55] Secretary General of the Synod of Bishop, Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality (September 2021), art. 1.4.

[56] Secretary General of the Synod of Bishop, Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality (September 2021), art. 2.1.

[57] Secretary General of the Synod of Bishop, Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality (September 2021), art. 1.5, 3.1, 4.1-5.

[58] Lumen Gentium art 11. Although the term ecclesia domestica was re-popularized by Pietro Fiordelli in the Second Vatican Council, ecclesia domestica is actually an ancient term that has been used by Apostolic Fathers Augustine and John Chrisostomus.

as ecclecia domestica is a significant and relevant *locus theologicus*. Even in the Ecclesia in Asia, Pope John Paul II quoted the term family as *ecclecia domestica* when addressing Asian Catholic families as the witnesses to the gospel.[59]

The family has always had an important place in the context of the Asian Church.[60] Not only in Ecclesia in Asia, in the FABC 2022 discussion, Asian Catholic families became the first emphasis when discussed about synodality.

> Synodality means orient ourselves to others, being ourselves by being with others. Speaking about "the others", we wish to mention, among many others, three objects of synodality that could be emphasized in Asia. First, synodality begins at the grass root of family; the Church should be synodal even from its domestic level. Family itself has gone through the pandemic with its own losses and revival, one sign of which is the ability to form together a home, a true community of persons of dialogue, a true domestic church and not simply a boarding house of individuals,[61]

Today the Asian Catholic families as a part of Asian families have economic challenges. They live in Asian countries. specifically Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam, are categorized as emerging markets because they are low-income but rapid-growth economies that use economic liberalisation as their primary growth engine. In management research, emerging economies are often correlated with VUCA.[62] The term VUCA reminds us of the situation experienced by the Early Church. As we know above, every time faced with the VUCA situations, the Early Church responded by

[59] John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia* (November 1999), art. 7.

[60] Ramesh Lakshamanan, "A New Way of Being Church: FABC Teaching on Basic Ecclesial Communities" *Asian Pacific Mission Studies* 1.2 (2019), 50-52.

[61] Nguyen Hai Tinh, *The Church of Bodiliness, Paschal Mystery and Synodality: A Theological Portrait of the Post-pandemic Church in Asia,* 5-6. file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/Post-pandemic%20Church%20in%20Asia%20-Tinh.pdf (access 20.01.2023).

[62] A. S. Santoso et al., "Strategic Enterpreneurship in a VUCA Environment: Perspectives from Asian Emerging Economies", *International Journal Entrepreurial Venturing* Vol. 12 No. 4 (2022), 345.

gathering together to discern, by the light of the Word of God and to listen to the Holy Spirit.

These economic challenges are increasingly felt when the COVID-19 pandemic hits the world, including Asia. Asian Development Bank, that owned by 49 Asia Pacific country and 19 outside the region,[63] released the research about impact of covid on household in ASEAN Countries that a part of Asian region in May 2022. In the conclusion, the economist from ADB write:

> Most households in all countries experienced significant declines in income and employment, although there was significant variation by country. Nearly three quarters of households experienced declining income (mostly in the range of 26–50% compared with the base period) during the first-wave period, but less than half experienced declines in the second period (47%). Income from all sources declined, but that of household enterprise/self-employment fell most. About a third had household members who lost their jobs or had to reduce their workload. Our empirical results suggest that the following household characteristics were associated with an increased probability of income declines: belonging to a lower income class, having business income, lower education level of the household head, having a female household head, and having at least one person who lost their job. These factors were also correlated with expenditure declines.

The economist from ADB also presented the following data.

> About 60% of households experienced financial difficulties during the first-wave period, and this ratio actually increased to 78% in the second-wave period. Furthermore, 49% of households in the second-wave period experienced moderate or major financial difficulty. This suggests that the prolonged nature of the pandemic has put increasing strains on household finances, even though incomes have stabilized somewhat. Similarly to the case of income declines, factors contributing to the experience of financial difficulty include: having lower income and education,

[63] https://www.adb.org/who-we-are/main (access 20.01.2023).

> having a female household head, and having at least one person who lost their job or had reduced working hours. In addition, a larger household size and being in a lockdown area also contributed to financial difficulties. Nearly all households experiencing financial difficulties had to reduce consumption, about half drew down cash and savings, while roughly a third borrowed from friends or relatives, delayed payments and debt repayment, and applied for government aid. [64]

In line with ADB, FABC also recorded these economic impacts more specifically in many sectors.

> The economies were severely hit resulting in a deep recession in 2020. The unemployment rate continued to soar as firms and stores downsize their workforce after severe cuts of sales and revenues, especially in the export and tourism industries. Millions of people lost jobs. Migrant laborers had to return home. Many did not get regular salary. Business, tourism, travel, and industry were all adversely impacted. In Korea, some took to the streets to highlight their financial difficulties. Even those who have regular incomes were not financially secure. Families must shoulder extra expenses to have internet connection and electronic equipment such as computers, etc.
>
> The gross domestic product was at its lowest and inflation highest in many decades. Prices of petrol, diesel, vegetables, fruits, oil, sugar, etc. were all sky-rocketing. The shutdown of all economic activities overnight resulted in so many micro and small enterprises being closed down. As someone observed: "If immediate measures are not taken more people will die of poverty than of Covid-19." In Thailand, though the government introduced fiscal packages (soft loans, debt payments extension, tax benefits, support for households including reducing and delaying utility bills, employment-related measures, economic stimulus and other measures), after more than a year of the pandemic, the government was running out of money and the

[64] Peter J. Morgan and Long Q. Trinh, "Impacts of Covid-19 on Household in Asean Countries and Their Implication for Human Capital Development: Medium-Run Impacts and The Role of Government Suport", *ADBI* No. 1312 May 2022. https://www.adb.org/publications/impacts-covid-19-households-asean-countries (access 20.01.2023).

> help offered was never enough to face the needs.
>
> The whole situation, nevertheless, has been improving since early 2021. Towards December in Taiwan, economic activities, especially manufacturing and export industries continued to flourish. In contrast, the domestic service industry had a huge employment population.[65]

The data above shows how vulnerable the economies of Asian families are if they are hit by a crisis or experience uncertainty. Amid economic recovery efforts in various Asian countries, ADB cut its forecast for Asian economic growth in 2023 from 4.9% to 4.6%.[66] In addition, the unpredictable effects of global conflict and climate change will continue to cast occasional dark shadows on Asia's economies in 2023.[67] Thus VUCA become a new normal.[68]

Faced with the VUCA situation like the Early Church in one hand dan actualizing the sugesstion of FABC 2022 to begins synodality at the domestice level in other hand, Asian Catholic families were invited to respond by using the pattern of biblical synodality. They gather to discuss together how to face the VUCA situation. The pattern of biblical synodality can be used as a curative action to find the solution that overcome family problems due to the VUCA situation. It can also be used as a preventive action to anticipate the impact of the next VUCA situation. The pattern is suitable for actualizing FABC's 2022 suggestions for discussing and planning together how to help other neighbors.[69]

[65] FABC-OTC, *The Body of Christ in the Pandemic: Theological Reflekction from Asian Perspectives*, 12-13. https://fabc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FABC-Papers-168-.pdf (access 20.01.2023).

[66] https://www.adb.org/news/adb-lowers-growth-forecast-developing-asia-amid-global-gloom (access 20.01.2023). See also https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/ADB-cuts-developing-Asia-s-2023-growth-forecast-again (access 20.01.2023).

[67] https://asiafoundation.org/2023/01/11/the-future-forecast-asia-in-2023/(access 20.01.2023).

[68] https://investor.id/investory/212045/vuca-norma-baru-pasar-era-covid19(access 20.01.2023). See also Nathan Bennet and G. James Lemoine, "What a Difference a Word Makes: Understanding Treats to Performance in a VUCA World", *Business Horizons* 1126 (2014), 1-7.

[69] FABC-OTC, *The Body of Christ in the Pandemic: Theological Reflekction from Asian Perspectives*, 33. https://fabc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FABC-Papers-168-.pdf (access 20.01.2023).

The first two steps of this pattern are also an attempt to respond to FABC's 2022 invitation for Asian Catholic Families to learn family values as self-sacrifice, resilience, acceptance of discomfort and difference, to better listen to one another, mutual understanding, and forgiveness, etc.[70] When discussing together, each family member can give their opinions. A child whose voice is not considered can be a way for the Holy Spirit to give an out of the box idea. This is an opportunity to better listen to one another. Listening to one another makes a mutual understanding. This is also a discerning process for family.

Following the three steps of the pattern, the family involves God in this process when deciding together in prayer. The decisions that have been taken are not just a mere discourse, so the family needs to execute together immediately. The pattern helps Asian Catholic family to do the best and let God do the rest. Thus, continous using of the pattern will guide Asian Catholic families make synodality as their way of life and act.

Conclusion

Exploring synodality as the way of life and act of the early Church in these three selexted stories above generates the pattern of biblical synodality. By formulating in four steps, the pattern of biblical synodality can be duplicated by the Church, especially the Asian Church today, at the most basic level, family. Introducing the pattern of biblical synodality to Catholic families in Asia as the most basic level of the Church is a simple effort of contextualizing biblical theology. Thus, the pattern of biblical synodality is not only spiritual advice but can be lived out in the challenging daily life of Asian Catholic families.

Connecting the relevance of the pattern to Asian Catholic families is in line with FABC 2022 that confirming Asian Catholis families should be one of the main focuses of the post-pandemic Church in Asia. FABC also suggested the Church should be synodal even from its

[70] FABC-OTC, *The Body of Christ in the Pandemic: Theological Reflekction from Asian Perspectives*, 33. https://fabc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FABC-Papers-168-.pdf (access 20.01.2023).

domestic level.[71] Finnaly, the pattern of biblical synodality extracted from the three stories as a form of the way of life and act of the Early Church can be transmitted and duplicated by Asian Catholic families as the way of life and act of the Church today at the most basic level, family.

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[71] Nguyen Hai Tinh, *The Church of Bodiliness, Paschal Mystery and Synodality: A Theological Portrait of the Post-pandemic Church in Asia,* 5 file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/Post-pandemic%20Church%20in%20Asia%20-Tinh.pdf (access 20.01.2023). See also FABC-OTC, *The Body of Christ in the Pandemic: Theological Reflekction from Asian Perspectives*, 20. https://fabc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FABC-Papers-168-.pdf (access 20.01.2023).

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