Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, ed. *African Synodal Theology: A Tall Tree is as Strong as its Roots*. Orbis Books, 2025, 244 pp. ISBN: 978-1-62698-644-2.

This book, a compilation of articles, is another testament to the work of the African Synodality Initiative, promoted by the Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar. It is centred on the theology, importance, challenges, and inspirations of synodality, specifically for the African ecclesial context. The contributions of the authors collected in this book, which serve as a response to Pope Francis' call "to take a courageous step forward and to develop a theology of synodality" and "to continue research aimed at clarifying and deepening the meaning of synodality," (p. xxiii) point to the fact that the constant call and reminder to the Church and her members to embrace synodality cannot be overemphasised.

The contributors did not only present a theology of synodality; they also presented synodality through an African lens, an intent that furthers the interest of inculturation in the present time. Another important feature of the contributors' intentionality regarding synodality and African traditional values is their critique of certain African cultural and sociological practices in the African Church that do not reflect the principles of synodality.

The image of a tall tree with its roots, which constitutes the subtitle of the book, could be instrumental in understanding the internal organization and structure of its contents. Firstly, the image of the tree and its roots fits well with the general understanding of corresponsibility, relationality, and communion, all of which are vital elements of synodality. The roots, irrespective of their size and length, collectively form the strong foundation that sustains the tree's growth by drawing nutrients from the earth.

Furthermore, the contributors are drawn from distinct theological, academic, and professional formation, which means that each of them, like roots, contributed from their own field to this tall tree. The interconnection among the roots of the same tree can be seen in the way each contributor interacts with the ideas of other contributors, as can be noted in their intentionality of citing each other where necessary.

Regarding the individual contributions of the authors, Anne Arabome, in her piece, "A Spirituality of Synodality: Drawing from the Wells of African Spirituality", stated that there are lessons the Church can draw from African culture,

religion, and spirituality in order to effectively be synodal, and this is because synodality is connatural with African spirituality.

In Marcel Uwineza's piece titled "Theological Foundations of Synodality", the primary focus is on the traditional and historical sources of the Church that present God as one who journeys with his people. This piece highlights the ecclesiology of synodality and its importance in the world today because it brings the hope of unity to our divided world.

The place of communication in the synodal Church was presented by Chijioke Azuawusiefe in his piece, "Communication and the Synodal Church: Ngiga as an African Symbol of Synodality". Here, he focused on the deeper meaning of communication, using *Ngiga*, an instrument found in traditional *Igbo* homes. The article highlights the dynamic nature of synodality, not just as a journey but also as a reality of communication, communion, and community, three qualities that are inspired by the Blessed Trinity.

Josée Ngalula posits that the search for the biblical foundations of a synodal Church is a process of opening oneself to the invisible God who reveals himself out of the abundance of his love as contained in the Sacred Scriptures. The essay, titled "Scriptural Foundations of a Synodal Church", highlights certain biblical instances that serve as a strong basis for the Church to be seen as synodal. The African experience, manifested by the values and ideals of community and interconnection, helps in the comprehension of the practical relevance of the Trinity for the Church.

In "Synodality or the 'Remodeling' of the Church", José Minaku Lukoli focused on the examination of the ecclesiological models postulated by Avery Dulles, mirroring their strengths and weaknesses. He postulates that synodality and its process constitute a new and dynamic model of the Church that corrects the weaknesses of other ecclesiological models postulated by Dulles.

Anthony Egan's piece, "Dialogue, Discernment and Trust: An Ethic for Synodality in a Global, Divided Church", provides insights into how a synodal Church should act. The essay examines some of the documents that have been instrumental to the Synod on Synodality in order to delineate the ethics of a synodal Church that is enshrined in dialogue, discernment, and trust. The need for these cannot be overstated; it is a reminder that synodality is not an abstract idea but an *ethos* that is lived out practically.

In "Religious Women Teachers of Synodality: The Abundant Catch of the Peripheries", Léocadie Lushombo focused on the role of women religious as teachers of synodality and its characteristics. The author builds her position, firstly, from the biblical perspective of women who used their talents for the good of the people and, secondly, from the equality of dignity and corresponsibility championed by the Church. The gifts of women have to be recognized in order for synodality to truly take place in the Church.

Ludovic Lado examines the place of authority in the synodal Church. In his piece titled "The Gift of Authority in a Synodal Church", he points out the necessity of authority in every society, including the Church. The author posits that synodality has a correctional effect against patriarchalism in the Church, but that this needs to be done with a revaluation of the doctrinal and legal provisions that shape the leadership role distribution in the Church. Importantly, he suggests a move from the Synod of Bishops to the Synod of the Church as a way of perpetuating the Church first.

Veronica Rop, in "Consecrated Women Religious Journeying Together for a Missionary Synodal Church in Africa", discusses the experiences and contributions of women religious under the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa (ACWECA) to the discourse on synodality. Pointing out the existing relationship of collaboration between the Bishops and the consecrated women religious, she highlights certain lapses like the failure to recognize the voice, agency, and role of women and their participation in the decision-making processes. For her, a truly synodal culture paves the way for a better and fuller participation of consecrated women religious in the affairs of the Church.

David Kaulemu presented love as the theological foundation of corresponsibility in his piece titled "Theological Foundation of Co-responsibility". This coresponsibility is a practice of sharing with one another our talents and looking out for the good of each other. It is founded on the sacrament of baptism, from which we receive a special and equal identity. Corresponsibility forms the base for a synodal ethic that inspires each member of the Church to take individual responsibility of participating and getting involved in the creation and sustenance of structures, spaces, and times that allow for inclusivity, openness, and sincere invitation to collaborate in the mission of the Church.

Inspired by Pope Francis' *Christus Vivit*, Sheila Pires, in her contribution titled "A Synodal Church of the Young and the Young at Heart", points out that the

Church cannot be without young people who serve as the Church's present and future. These young people are noticeably present in all the gatherings of the Church; hence, space must be provided for them to contribute their talents towards the growth of the Church. The Church has to create avenues for these people and not reject them in order to be a truly synodal and participatory Church.

After highlighting the principal focus of each contributor to this book, it must be stated that the quest for an African theology of synodality is a timely one. A more detailed reading of each piece in this book, given that it is quite easy to read and comprehend, consolidates the idea that synodality is a spiritual responsibility and imperative that the Church must live out through and in her members. It keeps alive the relevance of synodality in the Church and serves as a constant challenge to practices that do not live up to the synodal standards and expectations of the Church.

It is understood that this book did not pretend to be an exhaustive exposition of the theology of synodality, and so the articles contained therein are primarily focused on synodality and its relevance within the internal workings and organigram of the Church. This, therefore, raises an important question about the relevance of synodality outside the Church, within public sphere. This could be an area that requires reflection and discernment as time goes on. However, the desire to construct and present an African theology of synodality is already off to a beautiful start: a journey of hope and immense benefits for the Church on the African continent and universally.

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