

# Introduction

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The very title of the book *Ecclesia of Women as Synodal Third Space* might arouse curiosity and wonder with regard to its significance as each word is charged with meanings that defy clear cut definitions. This title could also raise critical questions in view of the connotations associated with the expression “ecclesia of women” and the challenges this could pose to the way of being church today.

*Ecclesia of Women as Synodal Third Space* calls for expanding the set frontiers of perception. Knowledge making becomes an exciting adventure when it pushes the established boundaries of the given and treads into the unfamiliar and uncharted paths. It demands going beyond the settled foundations of the known into open-ended and often unrecognized and unacknowledged fields with awareness in order to gather the seeds of wisdom that are scattered on the grounded realities of life. This is precisely what is attempted through the pages of this book, which invites the reader to move beyond the “comfortable” spaces of the established theological knowledge and venture into the new and unexplored realms of understanding.

The dynamics of theologizing that unfold through the chapters of this book demand a better grasp of the context from which this work has emerged. This calls for a better comprehension of Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA), the praxis of synodality, and what we mean by a “Third Space.”

## **Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA) as the Grounding Field**

The notion of “Ecclesia of Women” becomes intelligible when set against the backdrop of Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA), which is a collective

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of feminist theologians in the Asian setting. In 2001, a sense of disturbance at the meager presence of women in theological knowledge-making spaces led a few theologians who had gathered for an Asian conference to ask some critical questions about this shadow reality of the church. Drawing inspiration from Karl Rahner, they coined the expression “Ecclesia of Women in Asia” to create a platform that would help Asian women exercise their ecclesial agency. In a historic attempt to make Asian Catholic women seen and heard in the sphere of theology, fifty-five women theologians from all over Asia gathered at the WE-Train International House in Bangkok, Thailand, for a five-day conference (November 24–29, 2002) entitled “Ecclesia of Women in Asia: Gathering the Voices of the Silenced.”<sup>1</sup> This was the birthing moment of EWA.

The creation of EWA was envisioned as a platform for the development of theology from Asian women’s perspectives. EWA was initiated on the conviction that it could facilitate the recognition of theological agency of Asian Catholic women within the church and the academy. Thus, EWA emerged from the assertion that women are church and always have been church and so they want to enter the mainstream church as fully responsible ecclesial participants and partners in the life of the church.<sup>2</sup> Based on this conviction, the mission of EWA was spelled out as a move to encourage and assist Catholic women in or from Asia to engage in research, reflection, and writing towards theologizing that is inculturated and contextualized in Asian realities. This theologizing by Asian Catholic feminist theologians was to be built on the religious experience and praxis of the socially excluded; promote gender mutuality and the integrity of creation; and foster dialogue with other disciplines, faiths, or religions.<sup>3</sup>

To realize this ambitious mission, EWA brings together for its biennial conferences Catholic women and other feminist theologians from

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<sup>1</sup> “EWA’s Herstory,” *Ecclesia of Women in Asia*, [ecclesiaofwomenblog.wordpress.com/2017/05/19/ewas-herstory/](http://ecclesiaofwomenblog.wordpress.com/2017/05/19/ewas-herstory/).

<sup>2</sup> “Home,” *Ecclesia of Women in Asia*, [ecclesiaofwomenblog.wordpress.com](http://ecclesiaofwomenblog.wordpress.com).

<sup>3</sup> “Constitution and By-Laws,” *Ecclesia of Women in Asia*, [ecclesiaofwomenblog.wordpress.com/about/constitution-by-laws/](http://ecclesiaofwomenblog.wordpress.com/about/constitution-by-laws/).

ecumenical settings who engage with liberative theological questions. This is done from the standpoint of the academy and grassroots commitments to evolve a theology that responds to the signs of the times and to contextual concerns. The proceedings of these conferences are published regularly. This present work is yet another contribution to this series.<sup>4</sup>

## **The Significance and Challenges of the Church Becoming Synodal**

Since the main thesis of this book is the assertion that “ecclesia of women” is a “synodal third space,” it is imperative to position this work within the broader canvas of synodality. For this, we examine first what is meant by synodality and how this notion has emerged in the Catholic thinking.

At a ceremony commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the synod of bishops in 2015, the late Pope Francis in his address spoke about the need for strengthening cooperation in all areas of the church’s mission as a demand of the world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve even with its contradictions. In this setting, Francis made a ground-breaking declaration that it is “the path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”<sup>5</sup>

Certainly, the obvious question would then be: What is the “path of synodality?” For the Catholic Church, which has been functioning over the ages in a hierarchically-structured and clericalized mode of leadership, the notion of synodality is apparently paradoxical as it literally means that the whole church journeys together in an inclusive manner. While there have been synods of bishops since Vatican II, most Catholics are not familiar with the word ‘synodality’ even though there have been many councils and gatherings of theologians and bishops at various times in church history. But the call for the church to become a synodal church,

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<sup>4</sup> For a list of EWA publications, visit [ecclesiaofwomenblog.wordpress.com/books-by-the-ecclesia-of-women-in-asia/](http://ecclesiaofwomenblog.wordpress.com/books-by-the-ecclesia-of-women-in-asia/).

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, “Ceremony Commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops,” October 17, 2015, [vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151017\\_50-anniversario-sinodo.html](http://vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html).

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which involves all the baptized and which has strong implications for the way of exercising ecclesiastical leadership, is something new. However, a reading of the earliest sources also tells us that in the Council of Jerusalem, outlined in Acts 15, the momentous decision about reaching out to the Gentile community was made in a synodal way, as the disciples listened to the experiences of Paul and Peter and were prepared to adapt and change their mindsets about Gentiles becoming Christians.

The 2018 document *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* by the International Theological Commission makes it explicit that “synodality is the 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 evangelizing mission.”<sup>6</sup> Further, the document reiterates that “the concept of synodality refers to the involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church.”<sup>7</sup>

Understanding the church as the “People of God” has been a major turning point in the ecclesiology that has evolved with the Second Vatican Council.<sup>8</sup> All the same, the Catholic Church has continued to function for the most part on an exclusively male, clericalized mode of exercising leadership, particularly in its pastoral life and mission. Against this backdrop, the notion of the synodal church as a “Church of participation and co-responsibility” is a major breakthrough as it makes clear in an unambiguous manner that in exercising synodality, the church is called to “give expression to the participation of all, according to each one’s calling.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” March 2, 2018, no. 6, [vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_sinodalita\\_en.html](http://vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html).

<sup>7</sup> International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” no. 7.

<sup>8</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 13.

<sup>9</sup> International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” no. 67.

Since “participation and co-responsibility” are meant to be the grounding features of the synodal church, it is important to ask what is signified by this “co-responsibility.” Would this mean that every baptized member with a Christian commitment, whether male, female, married, or single trans-person, or those belonging to sexual minorities and gender non-conforming groups share in the mission of the Church, taking responsibilities of leadership and service in every aspect of mission? Would new structures evolve in the Church that would make possible for persons who are imbued with the Spirit of God and with sufficient training to take responsibility for ecclesial life and mission? This question is all the more pertinent as the document on synodality affirms: “participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit.”<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps we can find a clue for comprehending what is implied by this participation and co-responsibility in the working document for the continental stage of the synodal process titled “Enlarge the Space of Your Tent (Is 54:2).”<sup>11</sup> The metaphor of the tent is subversive as it challenges the dominant hierarchical structuring of the church. Paying heed to the call to enlarge the space of the tent can alter the DNA of the church. It has the potential to recast an average Catholic from the *homo hierarchicus* or the hierarchical human who upholds a kyriarchal religious structure to a person capable of exercising spiritual/theological agency by virtue of his or her baptismal agency. The metaphor of the tent invites a radical re-imagination of the way of being church, going beyond dogmatized pyramidal power structures that are once and for all established, to organizational patterns that can change in response to the needs of the times while being at the service of the Reign of God. The “tent” imagery invites conversations that can facilitate egalitarian relationships among the

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<sup>10</sup> International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” no. 67.

<sup>11</sup> General Secretariat of the Synod, “Enlarge the Space of Your Tent” (Is 54:2): Working Document for the Continental Stage, October 2022, [synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/dcs/Documento-Tappa-Continental-EN.pdf](https://synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/dcs/Documento-Tappa-Continental-EN.pdf).

baptized and an active engagement of the faithful in realizing the mission of the church in today's world.<sup>12</sup>

It is within this broader setting of synodality, where the Christian faithful as the people of God participate and exercise co-responsibility for “enlarging the space of our tent” as church, that we situate the “ecclesia of women” as a “synodal third space.” We take “ecclesia of women” as a catalyst for the creation of a more inclusive church that is grounded in the complexities and fluidities of life in the diverse contexts of Asia or the world today.

## **The Implications of a Synodal “Third Space”**

As social theorists observe, spatiality is an important tool for exploring into the demarcations of human geography.<sup>13</sup> Human beings inhabit social spaces, but social space is not something natural or given; it is a social product.<sup>14</sup> Space is not a passive locus of social relations but a contested site, embedded in the center-periphery relation in an oppositional manner through all forms of binary logic.<sup>15</sup> There are beneficiaries of space, just as there are those excluded from it and those deprived of it. Power relations are embedded in space. Hegemony makes use of space in the establishment, on the basis of an underlying logic which makes it desirable for some and undesirable for others.

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<sup>12</sup> See Kochurani Abraham, “Are We a Listening Church?” in *Synodality: An Indian Theological Reflection*, ed. Edwin Rodrigues (ATC Publishers, 2024), 51–74.

<sup>13</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson Smith (Blackwell, 1991); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Harvard University Press, 1984); Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Social Theory* (Verso, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> Henri Lefebvre calls social space a social product, but according to him, the act of production of social space is a process. For it to occur, it is necessary for the society's practical capabilities and sovereign powers to have at their disposal special places: political and religious sites. Cf. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 26–34.

<sup>15</sup> The binarized categories such as subject-object, mental-material, global-local, agency-structure, colonizer-colonized, white-black, man-woman, majority-minority are all spatial representations of power. See Edward W. Soja, *Third Space: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Blackwell, 1996), 89–90.

In seeking a spatial perspective within the framework of critical feminist thought, it is important to consider how gender relations are constructed and negotiated spatially.<sup>16</sup> Women's space is marked out by the gendered spatial strategies of a society as defined by its socio-political, economic, and religious ideologies.<sup>17</sup> The hegemonic construction of "femininity" in religion informed by patriarchal ideology, and the consequent exclusion of women from religious leadership and decision making, is illustrative of spatial practices organizing religious spaces.

The notion of "third space" becomes appealing for women when set against the backdrop of spatial politics that informs gender relations in diverse contexts. Third space is all the more attractive because it is considered "a distinct mode of critical spatial awareness that is appropriate to the new scope and significance"<sup>18</sup> and so, it is applicable to the different locations that women find themselves in. Seen from this perspective, third space becomes potentially a transformative space, that which facilitates redefining of roles and structures which are restrictive. For women, this is very appealing as it could help evolve a new meaning to their being and doing. Third space becomes for women a liminal space, a threshold to venture into the new, into the unknown, while creating new paths.

The notion of "third space" makes possible the realization of the synodal call for "Enlarging the Space of Our Tent." This Working Document for the Continental Stage explains the liberative significance of

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<sup>16</sup> Seemanthini Niranjana's enquiry into how spatial considerations figure in the constitution of femininity has led her to conclude that gendered bodies are at once spaced and spacing. See Seemanthini Niranjana, *Gender and Space: Femininity, Sexualization, and the Female Body* (Sage, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Lefebvre explains the way femaleness is assigned a limited portion of space and reduced to a "femininity" which is subordinated to the principle of masculinity using the phallic imagery. He finds the alliance between Ego and Phallus expressed in the verticality, political arrogance, and feudalism of towers occupying the central city space. The Phallus, a symbol of power and fecundity takes the space of God, of Father, or of a Leader producing spaces for whatever serves its purpose by force, violence, and power. This space, no longer the space of cryptic signs, becomes rather the space of the written word, the rule of history, of military violence, and hence a "masculine space." See Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 261–262.

<sup>18</sup> Soja, *Third Space*, 57.

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the tent metaphor as a space of communion, a place of participation, and a foundation for mission. Within this space, listening becomes an expression of “openness to welcome,” which starts from a desire for radical inclusion—no one is excluded. The application of the tent imagery to the synodal Church takes diversity as a precondition for welcoming (no. 28). Diversity is the authentic base of a synodal church and the theological foundation of a unity which is capable of resisting the push toward homogenization. This enables us to continue to promote and make good use of the variety of charisms that the Spirit, with unpredictable abundance, pours out on the faithful (no. 9). This is “a path of recognition for those who do not feel sufficiently recognized in the Church” (no. 32).

The document “Enlarging the Space of Our Tent” further argues that “instead of behaving like gatekeepers trying to exclude others from the table, we need to do more to make sure that people know that everyone can find a place and a home here” (no. 31). This observation is made in the light of the reports presented in the working document, which point to the persistence of structural obstacles, including: hierarchical structures that foster autocratic tendencies, a clerical and individualistic culture that isolates individuals and fragments relationships between priests and laity, socio-cultural and economic disparities that benefit the wealthy and educated, and the absence of “in-between” spaces that foster encounters between members of mutually separated groups (no. 33).

Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA) takes cognizance of this absence of “in-between” spaces and commits itself to the creation of fields or platforms that would help realize the praxis of synodality in the Asian context. As made explicit in the Call for Papers of the EWA XI conference, in lieu of the *status quo*,

Women are clamoring for a listening, dialogical, and serving church that is a non-hierarchical communion of a “discipleship of equals” marked by mutuality, relationality, and inclusivity. Leadership in the Church needs to be redefined in ways that are empowering to women. Small communities and liminal spaces emerging from local contexts and from

below demand recognition and mainstreaming. A feminist/womanist transformation of the Church can lead to a more discerning and imaginative way of being Church, that is more vibrant, authentic, just, and totally at the service of the Reign of God.<sup>19</sup>

Against this backdrop, EWA envisages the Ecclesia of Women as a synodal *third space* that redefines synodality from below and from the perspective of the excluded. A *third space* is an *in-between* space for those who seem to fall into the cracks of mainstream or officially recognized spaces. It is a space of negotiation, where women negotiate and subvert power as ecclesiastical citizens in their own right, their convictions emerging from their baptismal consecration as members of the Church. They do this taking commitment to justice and inclusive relationships as integral dimensions of their faith and exercising their ecclesial agency by mediating healing and a sense of belonging to those who have been marginalized and excluded by systems of religious power, mediated officially through the sacramental life of the church. The “in-between space” is a site for negotiating nationhood, community interest, and cultural values, and is thus also a site of hybridity.

The attempts by EWA to crystallize the vision of a “synodal third space” is what we see unfolding through each chapter of this book. We see Asian women with feminist theological sensibilities seeing themselves as journeying companions to the marginalized and excluded and speaking out on their behalf after engaging in active listening to their overt and covert voices. Exercising their ecclesial agency, “ecclesia of women” assume co-responsibility for participating in the church’s synodal life, which “presents itself, in particular, as *diakonia* in the promotion of a social, economic, and political life of all peoples under the banner of justice, solidarity, and peace.”<sup>20</sup> In addition, this book results from an ecumenical

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<sup>19</sup> “EWA XI Call for Papers: Ecclesia of Women as Synodal Third Space,” *Ecclesia of Women in Asia*, [ecclesiaofwomenblog.wordpress.com/2022/09/01/ewa-xi-call-for-papers/](https://ecclesiaofwomenblog.wordpress.com/2022/09/01/ewa-xi-call-for-papers/).

<sup>20</sup> International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” no. 119.

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commitment, which, as pointed out in the document *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, “marks out a journey involving the whole People of God” with “openness to each other in order to demolish the walls of diffidence which have separated Christians from each other for centuries and in order to discover, share and rejoice in the many riches that unite us as gifts of the one Lord in virtue of the baptism we share . . . witnessing to the Gospel to serving the poor and outcasts, from commitment to a society of justice and solidarity to a commitment to peace and the common good.”<sup>21</sup>

This book is divided into three sections. The first part deals with the *Theological Underpinnings of Ecclesia of Women as a Synodal Third Space*. In this section, Monica J. Melanchthon, a Lutheran feminist theologian, brings a fresh eye to the topic in her keynote address. Speaking from outside the Catholic tradition, she explores ideas associated with synodality and third space but then moves to a creative juxtaposition of two texts—one a film, heavy with the pain and finality of moving out from oppression, the other a text from Jeremiah: Rachel lamenting her children. For exercising agency as “synodal third space,” Melanchthon reclaims the power of naming what is wrong and finding in God the compassion and challenge to move forward.

Judette Gallares in her keynote lays the theological foundations of “synodal third space” by grounding this in the role of women in the Upper Room. In this Cenacle space, the birthing space of the church, with the outpouring of the Spirit on the disciples in the presence of Mary and her companions, we see the seeds for the emergence of “ecclesia of women” that has a special mission of bringing to birth the synodal church in the world today. In a similar vein, Nelavala Gnana Prasuna, a Lutheran pastor who approaches synodality from outside the Catholic tradition, takes Mary, who urges Jesus to begin his mission in John’s story of the wedding at Cana, as an archetype of women initiating the synodal way of being

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<sup>21</sup> International Theological Commission, “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church,” no. 115.

church today. Prasuna sees Mary through the eyes of Dalit women in India who are on the edge, or more accurately, at the lowest rungs of the gender and caste hierarchical pyramid. Taking her own story and that of a Dalit woman bishop as cases that testify to the many the possibilities that can be realized when women step into new roles of leadership, she argues that the Catholic Church should be reading the signs of the times and ordaining women for ministry.

*Women Birthing a Synodal Church by Exercising Agency in the “Third Space”* is the focus of the second part of the book. Sharon A. Bong celebrates the “third space” of Catholic Women Preach, an online platform for Catholic women to exercise their spiritual agency through preaching as this space is denied for them in the regular circumstances of pastoral ministry. In the weekly series of homilies given by Catholic women across the globe, Bong sees Catholic women reclaiming their priestly, prophetic, and ruling roles bestowed on them by virtue of their baptismal consecration and, in so doing, exercising which she terms as women exercising a “feminist genius.” This notion of “feminist genius” replaces the idea of “feminine genius” attributed to women by the Catholic magisterium, which exalts them for their ‘feminine’ roles as caring and self-sacrificing sisters and mothers within a gender-stereotyped framework. On a similar note, Metti Amirtham examines the experiences, challenges, and contributions of Indian Catholic women, using a feminist theological lens to analyze the gap between the ideal of synodality and the gendered realities women face in India. Building on the notion of women as “an engine of synodality” as pointed out by Sr. Nathalie Becquart, she argues that since women are already walking the synodal path, the church in India can evolve into a participatory, egalitarian, and inclusive institution by recognizing their contributions.

Helen Romero’s reflections on this topic emerges from a woman’s personal experience of exclusion and confusion pain, having found meaning and love in a lesbian relationship, after living through a painful, abusive marriage. Romero raises critical questions about the synodal way of being church when this woman and others find themselves in similar

obscure and complex situations and face the risk of meeting with condemnation though they know that they are loved unconditionally by God. In her opinion, this calls for revisiting the understanding of God's mercy and grace and its implications for what it means to be a synodal Church.

Xiaoping Guo, in her review of the significant role women have historically played in nurturing faith within the Catholic Church in China, asserts that women continue to be agents of faith formation for the key roles they play in families for keeping faith alive. Identifying synodal signposts in the way women exercise agency as formators of faith in the Chinese and Tibetan churches, Guo argues that these are important indicators of their contribution for realizing synodality. Christine Burke's chapter also identifies a place where women are creating a "synodal third space" as she reflects on her experiences of educating seminarians on synodality. In the challenges and rewards of initiating the seminarians to a synodal understanding of church, she argues that the notion of synodality can move from being an arcane term to a way of being a sacrament of God's love in daily lives. In the light of her experiences, she invites theologians to look attentively at the ways that ordinary people fulfill their mission in everyday life so that synodality becomes a lived experience for all.

The third part of the book focuses on *Synodal Church Beyond Ecclesial Spaces*. In this section, Marinda Keng Fan Chan seeks to voice the importance of synodality, a way of listening and journeying with each other from the ground, particularly among women in grief. Taking the cases of two women living in Macao who were separated from loved ones at the time of their deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic, she advocates for an integrated approach to managing grief in a synodal spirit and invites local churches to become communities, journeying companions that accompany persons in their experience of grief. The reflections of Kristin Meneses and Megawati Naibaho on synodal experiences beyond ecclesial spaces come from the Indonesian context. Delving into the lived experiences of select Indonesian women with disabilities within the church and larger society, Meneses and Naibaho addresses dis/ableism taking into

account the absence and erasure of those with disabilities from discourse and praxis. Setting dis/ableism within the framework of the Catholic Church's commitment to the synodal path, they challenge the church to re-evaluate its position on people with disabilities, making the ecclesial setting a welcoming and hospitable space for all.

Marnie Racaza and Bernadine Lanot take the discourse on the praxis of synodality further by addressing the pervasive issue of domestic violence among Filipino women and the challenge it poses to church to become truly synodal by taking more committed measures in order to end the cycle of abuse and violence in many homes. Their study attempts to deconstruct and reconstruct the concept of "home" and "homemaking" from a feminist theological angle, by acknowledging the suffering victim-survivors who are women while recognizing their agency for reclaiming the presence of God within them and creating a sense of home (*tabanan*) which is a space of care and comfort. In the final chapter, Diana Therese Veloso examines the lived experiences and the roles of women in the advancement of peace and social justice in conflict zones in the Philippines as a model of women exercising ecclesial agency in a synodal third space. Examining gender and other intersecting social locating factors using a critical feminist lens, she argues that the inclusion of women's perspectives in promoting justice and peace would contribute to the church's attempts towards realizing the vision of synodality.

## **Conclusion**

Synodality implies a whole new way of being church. It will be interesting to see how women's assertion of being ecclesia as the "synodal third space" relates to synodal process of the church hierarchy at this stage of its implementation. The Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops titled, "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission," states that "the synodal form of the Church is at the service of its mission, and any change in the life of the Church is intended to make it more capable of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and witnessing to the Gospel of the Lord to the men and women

of our time.”<sup>22</sup> Further, Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Secretariat of the Synod, observes that implementation of the synod is a task for which all the baptized share responsibility and that “the entire People of God are the subjects of the synodal journey.”<sup>23</sup>

Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA) offers this book as our contribution to the synodal process, assuming our responsibility as subjects for the actualization of a synodal way of being church. Our way of exercising subjectivity on this synodal journey impels us to move beyond clear cut notions of theological knowledge-making and rigid boundaries that sets limits to the liberative flow of thought. It is on this canvas that we position the “third space” experiences and explorations of synodality that we, as Christian women, are daring to venture into based on our convictions of what it means to be church.

**Kochurani Abraham** is an Indian feminist theologian, researcher, writer and trainer on issues related to gender, sexuality, spirituality and ecology. She has a Licentiate in systematic theology from the Pontifical University of Comillas, Madrid, and a PhD in Christian studies from the University of Madras, India, with a special focus on feminist theology. She was the convener of the Indian Christian Women’s Movement (ICWM) at the national level and of the Kerala region. Besides ICWM, she engages with other liberative theological forums committed to justice, equality, and freedom such as the Indian Women Theologians’ Forum, Indian Theological Association, Ecclesia of Women in Asia, World Forum of Theology and Liberation, *RE-EXISTE*, and Indian Christian Collective of Justice. She is one of the founders of Sisters in Solidarity, a group that closely accompanies women survivors of clergy sexual abuse and those affected by gender-based violence. She is the author of *Persisting Patriarchy: Intersectionalities, Negotiations, Subversions* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2019).

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<sup>22</sup> Mario Cardinal Grech, “Preface,” in *Pathways for the Implementation Phase of the Synod 2025–2028*, 3, 4, [synod.va/content/dam/synod/process/implementation/pathways/250102--ENG-Pathways-for-the-implementation-phase.pdf](https://synod.va/content/dam/synod/process/implementation/pathways/250102--ENG-Pathways-for-the-implementation-phase.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Grech, “Preface,” 3.

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