

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

**THE ASSOCIATIVE DIMENSION
AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR
SYNODALITY AT THE
SERVICE OF FRATERNITY**

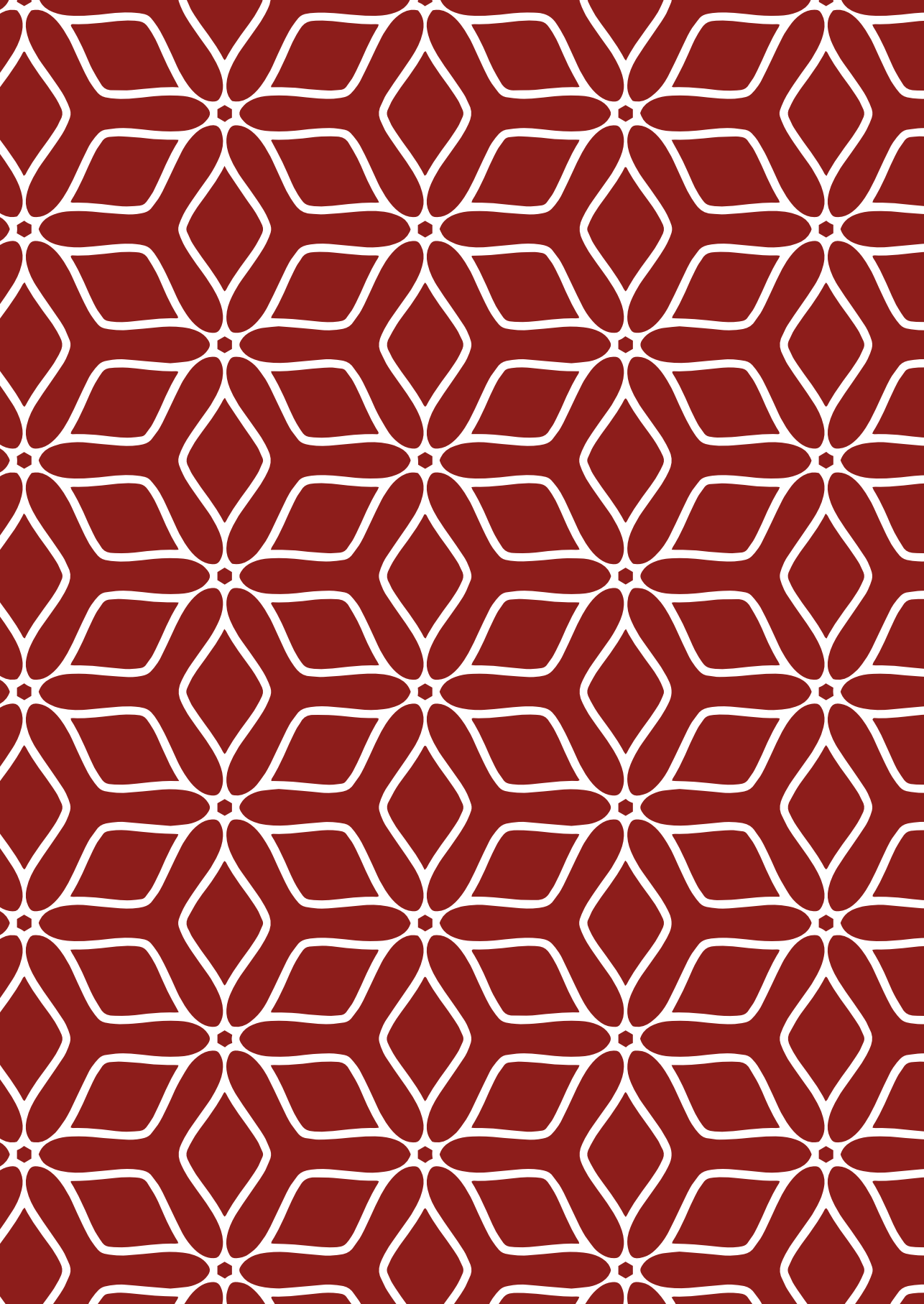
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The Associative Dimension as an Opportunity for Synodality at the Service of Fraternity

CAROLINA BACHER MARTÍNEZ

June 2024



**Brothers of
the Christian
Schools**

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INTRODUCTION

Between the end of the year 2024 and the beginning of 2025, we Lasallians are getting through, discreetly and quietly, an important Tercentenary. It is that of the civil and ecclesiastical recognition of our entity, of our mission, of our identity. In fact, the Royal Patents in France and the Bull *In apostolicae dignitatis solio*, by Pope Benedict XIII, conclude the process of the foundation of our Institute. It is a long journey from that morning in 1679 when Adrian Nyel met Monsieur De La Salle at the doorway of the house of the Sisters of the Child Jesus up to the General Chapter of August 1725 when our Brothers received the Bull and pronounced the new vows. It is the path of the mission carried out daily and of the awareness that emerges out of it.

This awareness was expressed in stammering words, in a series of waves that showed ever new traits of an ecclesial and social identity proper to those modern times that were unfolding in France and would come to cover the whole world. From the Memoir on the Habit to the Meditations for the Time of Retreat and the Rule of 1718, the process that accompanied our Father. And, from the letter that Brother Timothy, Superior General, wrote to Father Vivant to entrust him with the proceedings of the Bull to the Rule of 1725 with its Preface, the journey that the Brothers undertook already without him. It is a journey which continues up to the present day and continues to expand ever more inclusive and nuanced waves in what we call today the Lasallian Family.

A resolutely synodal way. A way which, at the heart of its development, contains that central value of our identity which is the Association to sustain the schools, Association for the mission, together and by association to procure the Glory of God in the daily work of education.

We have asked Dr. Carolina Bacher Martínez, an Argentinian theologian who currently works mainly in Chile, at the Universidad Silva Henríquez, to elaborate for us precisely this theme in which she has been involved for some time: synodality and lay associations. Carolina has worked for four years as a lecturer for our Pastoral Institute of Adolescence in Buenos Aires (Argentina) in the formation of parish catechists in the centres that the Institute has in some of the city's working-class neighbourhoods.

There, she has been able to contribute her professional competence, which constantly intersects the perspective of the Social Sciences with that of Pastoral Theology.

We thank her for this work and we hope that it can be inspiring for the entire Lasallian world.

With it we begin a series of Bulletins which, in the context of the Tercentenary, will focus on the fifth Pathway of Transformation adopted by the latest General Chapter: Association for Mission.

Hno. Santiago Rodríguez Mancini, FSC
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**THE ASSOCIATIVE DIMENSION
AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR
SYNODALITY AT THE SERVICE
OF FRATERNITY**

The Associative Dimension as an Opportunity for Synodality at the Service of Fraternity*.

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Introduction

The Pontificate of Pope Francis stands out by encouraging the Church both to go out on mission in the service of the fraternity, and by the communitarian modality of fulfilling this vocation through the synodal exercise of doing it together. These dynamics, which surprise some people, can be understood as a constitutive moment of the reception of the perspectives brought by the Conciliar Constitutions *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*.¹

* This study takes up the author's previous publications: "The Synodal Path 2021-2023 in Latin America: An Ecclesial Process from an intersectional Perspective". In C. Cerda Planas; N. Kalbarczyk; M. Luber (eds.) *Doing synodality. Empirical and intercultural Perspectives on the German Synodal Way*, Frankfurt, 2024, 143-157; "Los Consejos Diocesanos: ensayo de lectura teológico-pastoral en perspectiva sinodal", *Teología* 142 (2023), 185-205; "El ministerio del catequista como oportunidad: los liderazgos situacionales en una iglesia sinodal", *Medellín 186* (2023), 125-142; "Apuntes para una caridad pastoral en clave sinodal", *Seminarios sobre los ministerios en la Iglesia* Vol. 67/2 n° 231, December 2022, 143-154; "Caminar juntos en Argentina, desde América Latina y en un horizonte global". Published in: "Syodalität, neu entfaltet. Gemeinsam unterwegs in Argentinien", *Herder Thema Weltkirche im Aufbruch - Synodale Wege* (2022) 44-45.; Bacher Martínez, Carolina; Catalina Cerda-Planas, "La crisis eclesial como oportunidad: sinodalidad, mujeres y liderazgos", in F. Correa; B. Mathot (eds., 2022) 44-45. Mathot (eds.), *Irrupciones, fisuras procesos a la luz del Dios de la vida*, Ediciones del Pueblo, Paris/Santiago, 2023, 39-56.

1 Cf. Carlos M. Galli, "Líneas teológicas, pastorales y espirituales del magisterio del papa Francisco," *Medellín. Teología y pastoral para América Latina y el Caribe* 43 (2017): 93-158; Cf. Rafael Luciani, and Serena Noceti, "Advancing the Reception of the Council, Episcopal Collegiality, Collegial Synodality, Synodal Ecclesiality," in *The Synodal Pathway. When Rhetoric Meets Reality*, ed. by Eamonn Conway, Eugene Duffy and Mary McDaid (Dublin: Columba Books, 2022), 51-61.

Francis' proposal is called to be deployed in all ecclesial dimensions: both informally, as a transformation of Christians and their pastoral heart, and formally, as a renewal and creation of pastoral processes and structures.²

The studies that have focused on the structural mediations of the synodal transformation show the discussion on the constitution and dynamics of the Pastoral Councils, both diocesan and parochial and, in some cases, on new instances of consultation, deliberation and/or pastoral decision-making at regional level. At the same time, they show the insufficient theological-pastoral reflection on the associations as instances to determine and promote a missionary synodality at the service of fraternity.³

For this reason, this paper proposes the associative dimension as a way of realising and consolidating missionary synodality in an organic way. This perspective helps us to recognise that, although the ecclesiological foundation is essential, it is insufficient. It is also necessary that we perceive that this *journey together* pinpoints and expresses that “since our conception, we are the fruit of relationships and we are completely inexplicable without that dense network of people who have contributed decisively to our being what we are and to our being where we are”.⁴ For this reason, it also offers a reflection on what is required at the personal level, as well as at the level of processes and structures, so that associative practice can be a condition for the possibility of synodality. Finally, the document briefly illustrates this associative dynamism with the outline of an experience carried out in the Argentina-Paraguay District of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

2 Cf. Borras, “Sinodalidad eclesial, procesos participativos y modalidades decisionales”, in *La reforma y las reformas en la Iglesia*, Antonio Spadaro and Carlos M. Galli, editors, 229-255. Madrid: Sal Terrae: 2016, 229-255.

3 Jos Moons (ed.), “Synodality and the Roman-Catholic Church. An Academic Bibliography 2013-2023”, *Cahiers Internationaux de Théologie Pratique*, série “Documents” No. 17, en ligne: www.pastoralis.org, novembre 2023 (3rd édition).

4 Pedro Trigo, “Caminar juntos hacia la fraternidad de hijas e hijos de Dios por el camino que es Jesús de Nazareth”. *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología*, 114 (2021), 231-265, 242.

**1. THE RIGHT OF
ASSOCIATION OF THE
CHRISTIAN FAITHFUL**

In order to live synodality, it is really helpful to understand it as a way for Christians to be truly human. In the words of the theologian Pedro Trigo,

*“It is necessary to understand that being Christian is a manifestation of being human. We become human by following Jesus of Nazareth, the prototype of humanity. He is the full image of God, in whose image we are created, and therefore the archetype of humanity. He humanises us by his relationship, drawing us from the Father with the infinite weight of his humanity.”*⁵

In the same vein, the Second Vatican Council underlined the importance of associated forms of apostolate of the faithful:

“The group apostolate of Christian believers then happily corresponds to a human and Christian need and at the same time signifies the communion and unity of the Church in Christ, who said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20).” (AA 18).

At the same time, it acknowledged that associations provide training and support to those who participate in it, and that they organise the mission in a suitable and organic way, so that more fruit can be expected from working in association than from working separately.

The dynamics of association among the faithful, and between them and others, can take different forms. Attention must be paid to the fact that we Christians are both faithful and citizens at the same time. As members of the faithful, the dynamics of association can be generated within the framework of Canon Law. As citizens, the faithful themselves can set up civil associations of Christian inspiration in accordance with the legislation of

5 Pedro Trigo, “Caminar juntos hacia la fraternidad de hijas e hijos de Dios por el camino que es Jesús de Nazareth”. *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología*, 114 (2021), 231-265, 265.

each country, or taking into account international regulatory frameworks.⁶ Depending on the options, these bodies are sometimes independent and sometimes coincide in the mission and vision of the association, which is expressed in the corresponding statutes.

The associative dynamic has been present throughout the history of the Church since its origins and appears even more strongly in times of change, and of social and ecclesial crisis.⁷ For example,

*“Several pastoral initiatives at De La Salle’s time had the name of association. It was a way of breaking out of the too narrow constraints imposed by the conception of religious life at the time. St. Vincent de Paul, St. Louise de Marillac, Blessed Father Barré did so. All of them, known to De La Salle. It was a matter of avoiding the traditional forms of the vows, the habit and enclosure in order to achieve the necessary freedom and creativity that the mission required”.*⁸

Although it cannot be considered a novelty, it is clear that the associative dynamic has grown in the years since Vatican II, making it possible for communal charisms to be expressed through it. According to Juan L. Scarbino,

“Although the right of association was never proclaimed, we have been able to realise how, from the very preaching of the Lord and later in the nascent Church, the right of association existed in its concrete exercise. Over the years, in one way or another, it was

6 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, proclaims the right of association in its number 20: “Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association”. United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, Accessed online 25.04.2024 at: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

7 Cf. Juan L. Scarbino, (2017). El derecho de asociación de los fieles: ¿es una novedad del Código?, *Anuario Argentino de Derecho Canónico*, 23 (2), 401-424, 402.

8 Santiago Rodríguez Mancini, *La asociación para el servicio educativo de los pobres de los Hermanos de las Escuelas Cristianas: ¿Cuarto voto, primer voto, voto central, único voto, o algo más?*, Distrito Argentina-Paraguay, 2008, online: https://www.academia.edu/7218280/Asociaci%C3%B3n_para_el_servicio_educativo_de_los_pobres_Un_voto_primer_voto_cuarto_voto

*institutionalised and also became present, in its own way, in the life of the Church, in the canonical reflection of the time and also in some of the writings of the Popes”.*⁹

The Code of Canon Law states in number 215 that “The Christian faithful are at liberty freely to found and direct associations for purposes of charity or piety or for the promotion of the Christian vocation in the world and to hold meetings for the common pursuit of these purposes”. Associations which arise by agreement among the faithful are private, are governed by the faithful themselves, and dispose of their goods in accordance with their statutes (can. 321). The statutes require approval by the competent ecclesiastical authority (can. 299), in which case they can acquire juridic personality (can. 322), remaining under the supervision of the ecclesiastical authority, and of the Holy See (can. 305).¹⁰ As Carmen Peña rightly points out,

*“Within these rights generically recognised for all the faithful, the right of association, the right to found and direct associations (can. 215), which is recognised in the current Code in all its breadth, is of special interest in view of synodality and the role of the laity”.*¹¹

Having made this right explicit, and its ecclesiological and anthropological foundation, it is interesting to develop a pastoral theological reflection that favours the deepening of synodal dynamics in associative networks, and that promotes the transformation of those that hinder them.

9 Cf. Juan L. Scarabino, (2017). El derecho de asociación de los fieles: ¿es una novedad del Código?, *Anuario Argentino de Derecho Canónico*, 23 (2), 401-424, 410.

10 The ecclesiastical authority can also simply recognise the Statutes, as well as erect associations of the faithful, which are considered public (c. 301).

11 Carmen Peña, “Synodality and the laity. Co-responsibility and participation of the laity in the synodal vocation of the Church”, *IUS CANONICUM* VOL. 59 (2019), 731-765, 738.

**2. ASSOCIATION AS A
SACRAMENT OF
SYNODALITY AT THE
SERVICE OF FRATERNITY**

Through the dynamics of association, the Church is like a sacrament of the unity of all humanity (cf. LG1). These constitute testimonial signs and practical mediations so that among people we grow in the awareness and experience of being one humanity. The Second Vatican Council reminds us that we are called to treat others as brothers and sisters, and not as mere individuals, and to do so with a responsibility so personal, deep and constant that it shapes us personally.¹²

To this end, we propose to consider three aspects that make synodality cross-cutting in the dynamics of association. Firstly, the expression of multiple leaderships, articulated by responsible trust and compassionate mercy. Secondly, participatory processes of co-responsibility, in reciprocity and security. Thirdly, multiple, diverse and flexible networks at the service of universal fraternity. The associative dimension offers the condition of possibility for these dynamics to emerge, to be expressed and consolidated in the long term through the institutional vision and mission.

2.1. Multiple leaderships articulated by responsible trust and compassionate mercy

Some theologian men and women have found in the category of leadership a suitable concept to mediate reflection on meaningful participation in ecclesial communities.¹³ The diversity of different resonances and connotations that the expression may have in different cultures points to the need to clarify its understanding.¹⁴

12 Cf. Pedro Trigo, “Caminar juntos hacia la fraternidad de hijas e hijos de Dios por el camino que es Jesús de Nazareth”. *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología*, 114 (2021), 231-265, 258.

13 Cf. Sandra Arenas, “Sin exclusiones: catolicismo, mujeres y liderazgo distribuido”, *Teología y vida*, 61(4) (2020): 537-553; Cf. Silvia Martínez Cano (Dir.), *Mujeres, espiritualidad y liderazgo. De la mística a la acción* (San Pablo: 2019); Cf. Juan Mena Hernández, “Discernimiento pastoral y Teoría U: Creando ecosistemas de innovación en la Iglesia”, *Salmanticensis* 67 (2020) 419-446; Cf. Anselm Grün; Friedrich Aszländer, *Liderazgo. Un enfoque espiritual* (Lumen: Buenos Aires 2009).

14 Cf. XVI Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris* for the first section (October 2023). Synod 2021-2024: For a Synodal Church: Communion, Mission and Participation, no. 12.

Leadership can be understood as an individual trait, as a developed behaviour, or as a type of social interaction. Some perspectives have emphasised processes of perception, others have emphasised processes of influence. Leadership is now understood as a process of influencing others, occurring in a group context, and involving the achievement of goals and objectives.¹⁵ In other words, leadership is inscribed in a web of multiple interactions that have the capacity to influence each other reciprocally, and which implies certain functions that the subjects assume in a social framework, both in the structuring of the task and in the consideration of the needs of the members of the group.¹⁶

In associations there are such multiple influences, but it is always necessary to grow in the reciprocity between baptised people with various services and ministries in order to experience themselves as vital and meaningful Christian communities for the evangelising mission, especially through the institutionally shared vision and mission.

One aspect that I consider particularly useful is that leadership theories allow us to distinguish the exercise of leadership from the exercise of authority, since one person can have authority and not have leadership, that is, not exercise influence. On the other hand, another person can have influence and not have authority in the organisation, constituting an informal leader. The authors agree on the importance for an organisation of assigning institutional authority to those who exercise informal leadership.¹⁷

The associations originate around leaderships that articulate with each other and with others, but their horizon and impact exceed them. They are instances in which these dynamics of influence as a form of Christian witness and mediation of service and evangelisation are evident. And, as such, they constitute an invitation to be recognised, not only canonically but also in the pastoral dynamics, and to promote their articulation in the local pastoral fabric. For this, not only the processes and the organic dimension of pastoral ministry have to be taken into account, but also the inner dimension

15 Cf. Alejandro Castro Solano, *Teoría y Evaluación del liderazgo* (Paidós: Buenos Aires, 2007), 18.

16 Cf. Anthony D' Souza, SJ. *Descubre tu liderazgo* (Sal Terrae: Maliaño 1997), 31-32.

17 Cf. Alejandro Castro Solano, *Teoría y Evaluación del liderazgo*, 19.

of pastoral formation has to be considered. What pastoral attitudes are required for this dynamic of constitution and recognition of associations and leadership in the service of their mission and evangelising vision?

We propose to consider that both responsible trust and compassionate mercy need to be intensified.

Responsible trust

Responsible trust between Christians is based on anthropological trust. The human being has a general trust that is pre-reflexive, i.e., it is assumed from childhood without being thematised and is lived day by day as a good. This trust consists of a basic abandonment to the world that never completely disappears: we all accept, in some sense, to depend on nature, on the objects we need, on people, on language, on ourselves, on a transcendent being. But this general trust is broken either because our expectations were wrong and self-deception occurs, or because *the other* - a person, a group or an institution - deceives us. A person with broken trust can react in three different ways: a) the person renounces all trust and assumes a principle of systematic distrust in his/her relationships; b) the person clings to certain attitudes, emotions and reasoning to stubbornly sustain it; c) the person discerns in each circumstance whether s/he trusts or distrusts, opting for a principle of trust as a presumption, i.e. s/he trusts until s/he has reason to doubt.¹⁸ After the rupture of the original trust and through considered discernment, second and singular trusts emerge, which sometimes move towards an institutionalised and legal trust.¹⁹ Hence, one can speak of a multiplicity of interrelated trusts: interpersonal, institutional, communicative, self-confidence, natural trust.²⁰ Their relationship is complex and enables doubt and, therefore, discernment. Doubt is installed from the gaps of mistrust that call for discernment. Questions are asked and answered, in such a way that these answers lead to argument and responsibility for weighing up.²¹ The trust that emerges after discernment

18 *Ibid.*, 43-44.

19 Cf. *ibid.* 55.

20 *Ibid.*, 111-112.

21 *Ibid.*, 282-283.

can be indicated as a trust that is responsible for the joint care of one's own life and that of others.

Theologically, Christian trust is anchored in a faith that “ does not merely gaze at Jesus, but sees things as Jesus himself sees them, with his own eyes: it is a participation in his way of seeing.” (LF 18). Without this gaze in the manner of Jesus, trust between human beings would be weakened, since the presence of God among us gives consistency to human relationships (cf. LF 55). From what Jesus is and from what he says and does, “God manifests himself in the faith in the human”.²² Jesus trusts in his Father, in himself and in human beings:

*“Jesus had such confidence in himself that he dared to speak and act with authority. The presence that gave him such confidence was called ‘his Father’, and it was clearly a way of representing God. Jesus himself, inhabited by the encouragement he had received, felt invested with a mission: to work so that all might have life and joy in abundance. I think it is these criteria, and not law or dogma, that are at the heart of what is called “Christian mission”. This mission leads people to take action – relational, social, political, cultural and economic – to liberate human beings from all forms of oppression and to give them a confidence in existence similar to that which Jesus lived.”*²³

That presence of the Father which originated Jesus' trust in himself and in others, since the resurrection becomes the real presence of Jesus in the Christians, especially in the poor and the suffering and, in a certain way, in all human beings.²⁴ His presence through the Spirit in each pastoral subject shapes his being, his speaking and his trusting action in the People of God

22 Fernando Ortega, “Prólogo”, in: BELLET, Maurice *Nuestra fe en lo humano*, Buenos Aires, Ágape, 2017, 9-14, 13.

23 Gerald Fourez, *La fe como confianza. Aliento para construir una historia nueva*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 2002, 41-42.

24 Carlos M. Galli, “Cristo, por su Espíritu, en su Iglesia y en el hombre. Centralidad de Cristo y nexos entre sus diversas presencias según el Concilio Vaticano II”, in: FERNÁNDEZ VÍCTOR M.; C. M. GALLI (dirs.) *Presencia de Jesús. Caminos para el encuentro*, San Pablo, Buenos Aires, 2007, 9-63, 57-63.

and towards all humanity, so that all may have the possibility of living in trust in God, in themselves and in others.

This trust in others is not realised as a naive trust: “faith in mankind knows that there is something deviant and terrible in mankind. But it believes in the possibility of overcoming these miseries”.²⁵ This human vulnerability and sin open up gaps of mistrust that generate questions. On the basis of discernment, answers are elaborated for which each Christian and each community take responsibility, enabling a responsible inter-trust. In this way the pastoral subject moves away from a pre-reflective trust which entails great risks in order to carry out tasks and, above all, to care for other persons and communities. S/he also moves away from a systematic mistrust - of which s/he may or may not be aware - which creates distances, ignores the gifts that others have received, and takes away responsibilities which are, at the same time as his/her own duties, the rights of other Christians. In the words of Pedro Trigo: “it is important to insist that individuals become persons when they receive horizontal, free and open relationships of self-giving, and when they respond to them with the same kind of relationships”.²⁶

Some reflections from the disciplines that reflect on management converge and give concrete expression to this perspective. Various studies refer to the relationship between people’s expectations and the behaviour of others. D. Mc Gregor typified two styles of management based on the assumptions of those in charge: theory X and theory Y. Among various indicators, theory X considers that people do not deserve trust and cannot be depended on, while theory Y considers that when people are trusted and depended on, they do not fail.²⁷ Beyond the simplification of any typology and the consideration of other assumptions, it is relevant to point out that the attitudes and imaginaries that underpin pastoral interrelationships have a real impact on pastoral dynamics. In this way, responsible trust

25 BELLET, *Nuestra fe en lo humano*, 22.

26 Pedro Trigo, “Caminar juntos hacia la fraternidad de hijas e hijos de Dios por el camino que es Jesús de Nazareth”. *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología*, 114 (2021), 231-265, 242.

27 A. D'SOUZA, *Descubre tu liderazgo. Manual del Líder I*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 1996, 40-52.

becomes a condition of possibility to deploy leaderships, to strengthen their articulation, and to consolidate their validation.

John Paul II proposed something similar at the beginning of the third millennium,

“A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a “gift for me”. A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to “make room” for our brothers and sisters, bearing “each other’s burdens” (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy.” (NMI 43).

Compassionate mercy

Each person and each community not only express a dynamic of gifts and contributions to the Church and to humanity, but also make present the vulnerability that remains and is manifested in wounded humanity. By his incarnation, the Son of God became in solidarity with all people and identified himself especially with the poor who suffer to this day, while at the same time he also identifies himself with the one who exercises mercy²⁸. God is merciful and his mercy lasts forever (cf. Ps 136), from generation to generation and embraces every person who entrusts himself to him and becomes transformed, giving the person his very life. The preaching and the life of Jesus decisively mark the history of the Christian community in this respect: mission as a response to Christ’s command is configured as an instrument of his consolation and forgiveness in the face of all human misery.

28 Cf. C. M. Galli, *Dios vive en la ciudad...*, 142.

The experience of mercy concerns not only individual Christians but the Christian community as such, and allows us to relate and integrate a dynamic understanding of the permanent components of the Church.²⁹ By its very nature, mercy concretises charity through an inclusive dynamism that calls for a compassionate, endearing and cordial love that animates our pastoral service and fosters a spirit of communion, dialogue and solidarity in the Church and the world.³⁰

In associative experiences, this vulnerable and wounded dimension of each person is manifested and, at times, their sustained interrelationship comes to configure violent and excluding structures. This calls, on the one hand, for a *linkage* that gives priority to practices of mercy and, at the same time, implements processes that propose transformation for some and care for others.

The associative networks make it possible to structurally mainstream and operationalise responsible trust and compassionate mercy in management, the administration of economic resources, strategic and operational planning, training projects, and the competencies of functions and tasks, among other aspects.

2.2. Mutual and secure participatory co-responsibility processes

If there is one expression that has become almost synonymous with synodality, it is participation, so much so that the International Theological Commission says,

“A more attentive discernment of the instances proposed by modern conscience with regard to the participation of all citizens in the management of public affairs, the impulse is felt towards a renewed

29 Cf. A. M. Grande, “Anunciar con alegría el evangelio de la misericordia”, in: C. O. Albado; C. Bacher Martínez; C. M. Galli; F. Tavelli, *La teología argentina y el Papa Francisco. Una ida y vuelta en la reflexión teológico-pastoral*, Buenos Aires 2022, 149-172, 168.

30 Cf. C. M. Galli, *God lives in the city...*, 286.

*and deepened experience and presentation of the mystery of the Church in its intrinsic synodal dimension”.*³¹

Associations are ways of realising this participation in a simultaneously autonomous and organic way. But how do we understand ecclesial participation? A first approach indicates that participation is understood as a social relationship between people and societies, which is why Ana Ferrullo de Parajón, from social psychology, affirms that it is not possible not to participate,³² and that the novelty that emerges in the 20th century is its diverse conceptualisation:

*“The historical novelty in relation to our subject does not lie in the concrete social processes of participation, which have always been present as enablers of the survival and construction of subjects. What is new has been the achievement of its visibility, the power to think about the subject and to produce knowledge which has been expressing ways of conceiving and valuing it, constructing proposals about its forms”.*³³

The emergence of the concept of participation in social reflection has been possible since the emergence of the concept of the individual in modernity, because it allowed us to think in a new way about the relationship between human beings and society. It is true that this emerging reflection is contextually and constitutively framed in the social processes of the 1960s, which have highlighted participation as a tool for building, sustaining and deepening democratic culture, bringing to the fore a new awareness of the distribution of power and the capacity of citizens to influence decision-making and control the actions of governments.³⁴

31 COMISIÓN TEOLÓGICA INTERNACIONAL, *Sinodalidad en la vida y misión de la iglesia*, Buenos Aires, Ágape, 2018, 38.

32 Cf. FERULLO DE PARAJÓN, *El triángulo de las tres “P”*, 32-33.

33 *Ibid.*, 33.

34 Cf. *ibid.*, 35; Cf. F. MOOG, *La participation à l'exercice de la charge pastorale de la paroisse. Évaluation Théologique du c. 517 § 2 / CIE 1983*, 2009, [online] at: <https://corpus.ulaval.ca>jspuibitstream>, [accessed: 24 September 2019], 396.

However, the notion of participation cannot be restricted to reflections on political organisation, as it is present and diversified when considering the perspective of different modern disciplines. In the political perspective, it is understood as a way to achieve power or to exercise democracy. On the communicational level, it refers to informing and being informed, listening and being listened to. The economic dimension will emphasise having a share in the commons. All these dimensions will be present in associative networks.

From the perspective of community psychology, Maritza Montero defines participation as “an organised, collective, free, inclusive process, in which there is a variety of agents, activities and degrees of commitment, which is guided by shared values and objectives, in the achievement of which communitarian and individual transformations are produced”.³⁵

Some social psychologists agree that participation is called upon to unfold in three interrelated dimensions: “being part (a search for identity, for belonging to the subjects), having part (referring to the awareness of one’s duties and rights...) and taking part (referring to the achievement of concrete accomplishments)”.³⁶

Participation can also be considered from the point of view of the object which emphasises the social effects (power to do) or from the point of view of the subject which emphasises more the personal effects (power to be), so that participation is a tool which constitutes the agent subject in a process of interaction with repercussions in relation to the exercise of the subjects’ power.³⁷ From 1970 onwards, there was a shift in the understanding of the participatory process:

“From the informative alternative on the subject’s own issues (needs, preferences, opinions) that do not imply the possibility of any influence on his/her part... to alternatives that conceive

35 Maritza Montero, *Introducción a la psicología comunitaria. Desarrollo, conceptos y procesos*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2004, 109.

36 *Ibid.*, 42.

37 Cf. *ibid.*, 73.

participation as exchanges between subjects that can lead to modifications of what is originally given".³⁸

However, this social dynamic is also present in the ecclesial community. According to the theologian Lucio Gera, God participates and generates participation in his Church:

"God, by calling men to participate in Himself, as supreme, transcendent Good, unifies them on the basis of the same aspiration and intercommunicated possession and raises them to a deeper fraternity (...) The possessed, inhabiting God is lived and inter-participated in the Church".³⁹

This inter-participation of God constitutes ecclesial co-responsibility in community life and in its mission: "responsibility is not a matter of separated individuals, but of sisters and brothers, who thus make it a co-responsibility".⁴⁰

As Raphael Luciani rightly underlines, the novelty brought to us by the Second Vatican Council is not reduced to the description or definition of each ecclesial subject in itself because each one "is being co-constituted in the reciprocal giving and completing of itself".⁴¹

The constitution of an association and the service developed through it is a form of participation in the ecclesial community. It involves both the awareness of being part and the management of taking part. It is a response to a call from God to participate in his life and in the project of the Reign of God in a way that is at the same time self-managed, organic, and inculcated in the process of the emergence of civil society that has been consolidating in the 20th century. Although it facilitates a distributed

38 Cf. *ibid.*, 35.

39 L. GERA, "Reflexiones teológicas sobre la Iglesia", in: AZCUY; GALLI; GONZÁLEZ, *Escritos teológico-pastorales de Lucio Gera. 1*, 345-399, 361.

40 Pedro Trigo, "Caminar juntos hacia la fraternidad de hijas e hijos de Dios por el camino que es Jesús de Nazareth". *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología*, 114 (2021), 231-265, 261.

41 Rafael Luciani, "Hacia una vinculación co-constituyente de todos los christifideles. Nuevos caminos en la ecclesiología del Pueblo de Dios", *Seminarios sobre los ministerios en la Iglesia*, Vol. 67, N° 231 (2022): 155-177, 158.

exercise of leadership in the ecclesial scene and the co-constitution of personal and community profiles, it also runs the risk of configuring identities that nullify the meaningful participation of all. To avoid this, it is necessary to grow in an associative culture of cordial and safe reciprocity for all, especially for those in vulnerable situations.

Friendly and safe reciprocity

This shared co-responsibility can be assumed as cordial and secure reciprocity. Reciprocity implies a mutual recognition of each other's dignity and capacities for the fulfilment of the objectives they have set themselves.⁴² This reciprocal recognition is expressed in the associations through interpersonal links, institutional communication, the articulated management of various instances: shared prayer, the evangelising mission of the community, and the critical evaluation of the contributions of each other in a shared discernment.

The practice of reciprocal recognition shapes secure associative networks for all those who participate in it and with all those with whom they interact:

*“The Church has traditionally been involved in educational, academic, social and health institutions and, in most such institutions, works with young and vulnerable people. The safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults is not a matter only for certain specialists; it is the responsibility of all and certainly of all Christians, not only of Church leaders, but of all ‘disciples of Christ’ (GSI)”.*⁴³

Serena Noceti underlines that communication not only expresses the articulation between instances, but also constitutes a shaping dimension of the organisations, and specifies that we have to pay attention to the relationship

42 Cf. P. Calvo, “Ética de la reciprocidad: la dimensión comunicativa y afectiva de la cooperación humana”, in *Revista de Filosofía* 77 (2020), 67-82, 75.

43 Hans Zollner, “La responsabilidad de la Iglesia Católica en la creación de una cultura de la savaguardia”, in: R. Meana Peón; C. Martínez García (dirs.), *Abuso y sociedad contemporánea: reflexiones multidisciplinares*, Navarra, 2020, 307-324, 321.

between communicating and organising relationships in ecclesial life.⁴⁴ The transparency of reciprocal communication in and between associations is a way of shaping healthy and safe associative networks for everyone, especially for the safeguarding of minors and the most vulnerable people.

2.3. Multiple, diverse and flexible networks at the service of universal fraternity

The option to live Christianity through associative networks has sometimes entailed the risk of experiencing itself as a community closed in on itself, on its charism and its specific service. It is necessary to recover the universal dynamic of Christian fraternity: “it is a question of moving towards a true family of peoples, in which we are all authentically brothers and sisters and help each other as such in a constant synergy, transcended by emulation. Synodality, therefore, presupposes synergy, the confluence of efforts”.⁴⁵

These confluences set networks of articulation and coordination between various community and grassroots bodies. In this way, their commitment is mediated by the establishment of connections, both face-to-face and technological. According to Juan Carlos Scannone,

*“The current metaphor is no longer the pyramid (which subordinates) but the postmodern one of the network, which coordinates flexibly, respecting the autonomy of each organisation, but uniting their forces. In this way, two fundamental principles of the Church’s social doctrine – subsidiarity and solidarity – are put into practice, often unknowingly.”*⁴⁶

44 Cf. Serena Noceti, “En comunicación generativa. Convesación, consensus, conspiratio”, in Rafael Luciani; Serena Noceti; Carlos Schickendantz coords, *Sinodalidad y reforma. Un desafío eclesial* (Madrid: PPC, 2022): 323-349, 331.

45 Pedro Trigo, “Caminar juntos hacia la fraternidad de hijas e hijos de Dios por el camino que es Jesús de Nazareth”. *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología*, 114 (2021), 231-265, 245.

46 Juan Carlos Scannone, “La nueva cuestión social y la crisis argentina”, in Sociedad Argentina de Teología (ed.), *Religión, Justicia y Paz. La Argentina y el mundo*, Buenos Aires, San Benito, 2003, 121- 133.

Subsidiarity and solidarity are two components of associative synodal practice, which need to be deployed in each experience, among themselves and with other ecclesial and socio-political practices.

The differences between people, communities and cultures are really uncomfortable (cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* no. 131). The philosopher Adela Cortina warns about *aporophobia*, i.e., a certain unease and hostility towards the poor or the forsaken.⁴⁷

It is necessary to ask ourselves which links and networks are difficult for us and which we are rejecting. Often in everyday life we have reservations about approaching and allowing those we consider different from us to approach us. People and groups who we find it difficult to accept and make room for in our daily lives and in our communities are installed in our minds. We are convinced that no person who is so different, who makes choices of life, faith and citizenship so different from those we make, could really be pleasing to God and a good Christian. St. Paul came to the crossroads of some similar communal tensions and put on the table the communal consequences of baptism: “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male nor female...” (Gal 3:28). As Pope Francis rightly reminded us,

“Social peace demands hard work, craftsmanship and is not achieved: “by recourse only to those who are pure, because “even people who can be considered questionable on account of their errors have something to offer which must not be overlooked”. Nor does it consist of a peace that emerges by silencing social demands or preventing them from making a mess, since it is not “a desk consensus or an ephemeral peace for a happy minority”. What is important is to generate processes of encounter, processes that build a people that knows how to overcome differences. Let us arm our children with the weapons of dialogue! Let us teach them the good fight of encounter” (cf. Fratelli Tutti, 217).

Is it possible to recognise some of these keys in contemporary ecclesial associative experiences?

47 Cf. Adela Cortina, *Aporophobia. El rechazo al pobre*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2017, 24.

**3. AN EXAMPLE OF
ASSOCIATIVE EXPERIENCE
AS A CONDITION FOR THE
POSSIBILITY OF SYNODAL
EXPERIENCE**

An interesting experience to share is that of the District of Argentina-Paraguay of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who have John Baptist de La Salle as their inspiration. John Baptist de La Salle proposed a stable association to sustain together and by association schools at the service of the poor. In each part of the world, the association took on particular faces.

Since 1975, in the former Lasallian District of Argentina, there was awareness that association was the way for the growth of many lay educators called to share positions of responsibility. Years of sharing life and spirituality, responsibility and animation, led to the understanding that shared mission could not be understood as a *shared* mission.

For this reason, in 1999 it was decided to incorporate lay educators (men and women) as members of the *Asociación Educacionista Argentina*, the civil association that represents La Salle in Argentina. And, thus, equality in participation became fuller.

However, so that participation would not be restricted to a small or large nucleus of male and female partners, they decided to create a structure that, inserted in the canonical chapter processes, would give voice and vote to the laity: the District Assembly. Delegates from all the educational works and legal entities that make up our Education Network in Argentina and Paraguay participate in it on an equal footing. Together they make the necessary decisions for each three-year period in all areas of life. The document produced is accepted by the Chapter, adding some more articles for the internal life of the Brothers' communities or of the general organisation. It is an experience under construction:

"This is an open story. Our own path teaches us that we do not usually put the cart before the horses. It is experience that leads us to the construction of structures, an institutionalisation that seeks to safeguard the values we have achieved and to free the instituting force that will lead us to the next step. In this, any remaining rigidity always seeks to be questioned from the basic inspiration

*of the Association for the educational service of the poor, as we understand it in our District Horizon”.*⁴⁸

I consider that this has been a way of concretising the synodal dimension in co-responsibility and reciprocity. It has meant a responsible trust from the Brothers towards the laity in order to include them in decision-making processes. And from the laity towards the Brothers in order to assume co-responsibility in discernment, decision-making and animation of implementation. An associative form that was open to interaction with other Christian communities, working in a network with educational and diocesan pastoral bodies, and which emphasised articulation and service with communities in situations of poverty and exclusion.⁴⁹

*“From the Foundation we know that synodality, social friendship, is not only promoted within the La Salle Education Network and the Lasallian District of Argentina-Paraguay. That is why, in addition to our work with the works of the Network (fundamentally, with those of insertion in contexts of greater vulnerability), we build dialogues...”.*⁵⁰

Open conclusion

Synodality on the way at the service of universal fraternity is the way in which the Conciliar ecclesiality is given tangible form in the 21st century. Its characteristic features can be traced throughout the history of the Church and it finds in the 20th century signs of both its conceptualisation and its practice.

Associations of the faithful are a matrix that anticipates such a configuration. At the same time, they have the capacity to deepen synodal horizons if they are open to new ways of concretising leadership and

48 Santiago Rodríguez Mancini, “Las asambleas y nuestra historia”, *Revista Asociados* Year 9 No. 35 (2022), 12-17, 17.

49 Cf. Bacher Martínez, Carolina, *Entrevista a Santiago Rodríguez Mancini*, Buenos Aires 2022.

50 Cf. Mariano Walenten, “Editorial”, *Revista Asociados* Year 9 N° 35 (2022), 1.

deepen the dynamics of responsible trust and compassionate mercy in the multidimensionality of the associative model. It means opting for training in a co-responsible reciprocity that creates safe environments for all. And whose efforts are also focused on creating flexible networks in *glocal* horizons at the service of an increasingly fraternal and inclusive humanity.

This programme is both a call of the Spirit and a task, for every person, for every small community and association that seeks to remain faithful to God's dream for humanity.

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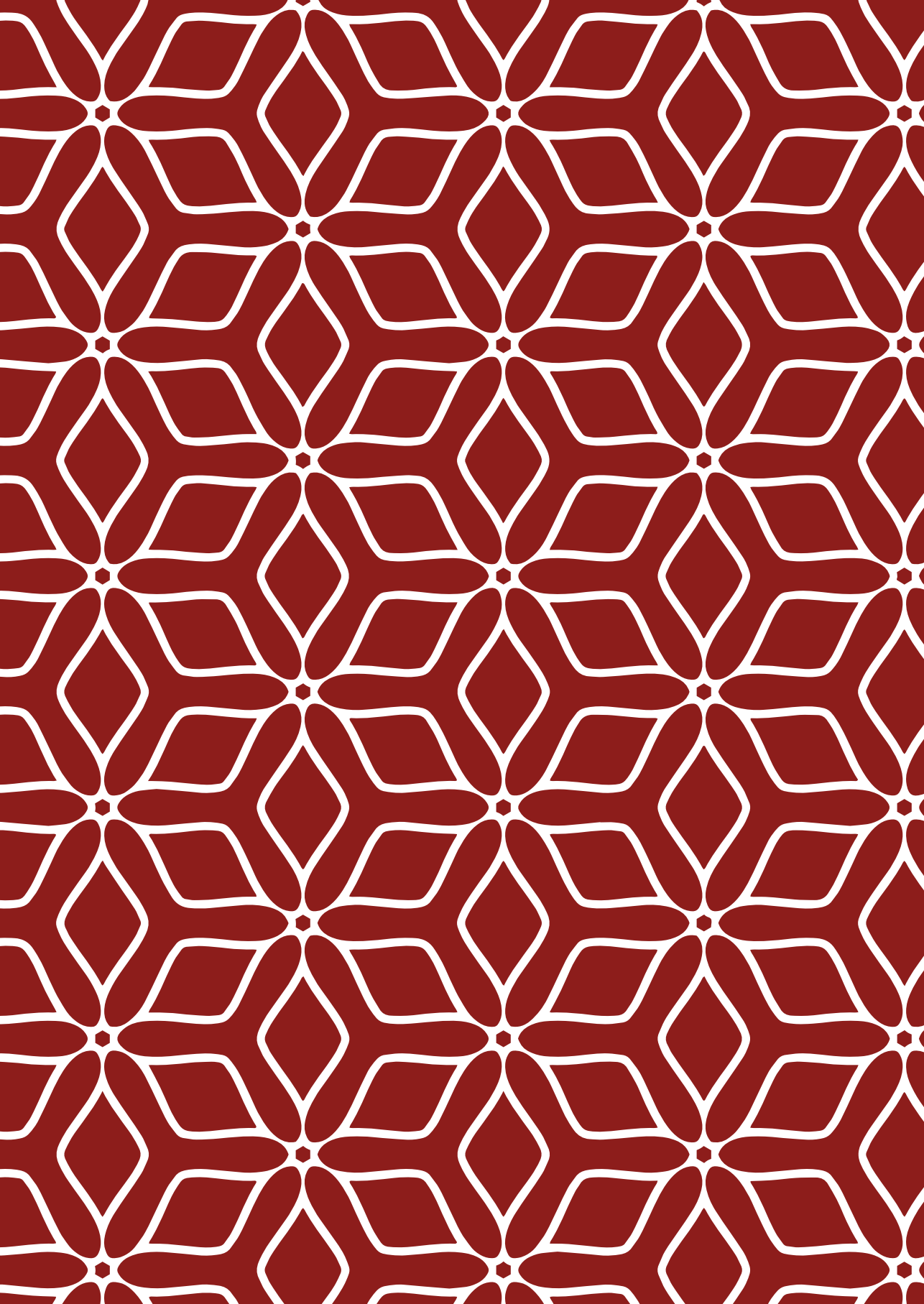
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