

Synod or synodality is not an event. It is a journey of the People of God who listen to each other and the Holy Spirit with the aim of discerning the movement of the Spirit in the life and mission of the Church. One of the characteristics of a journey (by foot, airplane, motor vehicle, or ship) is the element of surprise. The synod journey is no different. It is the element of surprise that makes this synod journey a bitter pill for some to swallow. In this article, I rely on insights from Estelle Frankel's book, *The Wisdom of Not Knowing*, to understand the synod journey.

The term "divine uncertainty principle" is used by Jewish contemporary thinkers to describe God. It is used to understand Moses' encounter with Yahweh in the story of the burning bush. When Moses asks to know God's name, he receives the response, "*Eheyeh Asher Eheyeh* (I am Becoming as I am Becoming – Exodus 3:14). This response suggests the free choice and unhindered power of God. While the root meaning of the name "Yahweh" is disputed, most scholars accept that it is a form of the verb "to be" and probably the causative form – causes to be, create. In a word, Yahweh's response suggests an indeterminate God, a Divine becoming that will redeem the Israelites. This answer suggests that Yahweh can neither be boxed in nor clearly defined as a noun. If the root name for God is a verb and not a noun, then the Israelites are about to embark on a journey with a "becoming God" who will surprise them, as they were at the Sea of Reed, in the desert, and on Mount Sinai.

Like all humans, Israel faced the temptation to make Yahweh into a noun or an idol. An idol, as the molten calf (Exodus 32) is, "can be fully known in all its dimensions for it is finite and measurable, while the living God and Source of all being and becoming can never be known in its entirety" (Estelle Frankel). Because we have a tendency to seek certainty and to reduce what is infinite to finite, we tend to reduce God and God's activities. "Instead of standing in the presence of mystery that is in a constant state of flux, ever changing and becoming, moment to moment, we seek to reduce God to a concept or ideas we can understand" (Estelle Frankel). On their journey to Jerusalem, for example, Jesus takes Peter, James and John to the mountain where there was a theophany, a revelation of God. Jesus is transfigured (Luke 9:28-36). Peter's creative suggestion of erecting three tents is an attempt to capture or gift wrap the "Becoming God" rather than stand in awe and wonder of God's revelation. Frankel reminds us that the biblical metaphor for clinging to certainty, fixating on the past, and trying to control everything is idolatry – the reduction of that which is infinite to that which is finite. It manifests in our extreme admiration and reverence for something, someone or some idea.

Frankel also points out that "our most authentic spiritual experiences can be turned into routinized religious ritual." A scriptural example is the Jewish Christians' attempt to subject Gentile converts to Jewish rituals such as circumcision. This is a typical case of what Rav Kook (Jewish mystic and theologian) calls "turning the living God into an idol" when we replace our direct experiential knowledge of God with our conceptual knowledge of God.

This occurs more frequently “in moments of anxiety or uncertainty, when we tend to seek comfort in old patterns and familiar habits, like the addict who reaches for his substance of choice when faced with stress or uncertainty” (Frankel). Can we now understand why Pope Francis’ synodal journey is a hard pill for some to swallow?

If the synod journey is being guided by the Spirit of the God of surprise, then we must be open to changes and new possibilities. To listen, discuss and pay attention to what the Spirit is saying requires conversion of heart and mind, that is, unlearning routine ways of sharing, listening and discerning, and then relearning new ways. Pope Francis presents the metaphor of a pilgrim to demonstrate the importance of conversion in the synod journey. He says that a pilgrim is one who “goes out from herself, opens herself to a new horizon, and when she comes home, she is no longer the same, and so her home won’t be the same” (*Let us Dream*).

Those who refuse to relinquish their idols – routine ways of seeing God, thinking and listening - will find the synod pill hard to swallow. Those who are open to encountering the “becoming God” of surprise revealed in Jesus Christ, will witness the fruits of the Holy Spirit in the “Promised Land.”