

A Church that Accompanies

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1. Synodality, catholicity and ecumenicity

1.1. Between the first and second sessions of the synod, new tasks and challenges emerge. Greater attention needs to be paid to the wider context of the synodal renewal, to the preconditions and consequences of this process. If the synodal reform of the Church is to bear good fruit, it must be understood and implemented in *a broader context*, as part of a much *deeper process of transformation* than simply transforming a rigid clerical system within the Catholic Church into a net of flexible communication.

1.2. Synodality, the *common way* (syn hodos), is designed to renew, revive and deepen not only not only communication *within* the Church, but the Church's ability to communicate *with other systems in society*, with other cultures and religions, with the whole human family.

1.3. The synodality is to be an inspiring response to the question of how to overcome the crisis of globalization, how to transform a civilization which is technologically and economically interconnected and, at the same time, dangerously divided, into a culture of coexistence in peace and justice.

1.4. Synodality is a way of *developing the catholicity* (universality) of Christianity. Catholicity, as well as unity, holiness and apostolic character, was given to the Church as a gift and at the same time as a task for the journey through history to its eschatological goal.

1.5. The Second Vatican Council emphasized that the mission of catholicity includes ecumenical and interreligious cooperation. Pope Francis enriches the understanding of catholicity and ecumenicity with an emphasis on *ecological responsibility*: care must be taken to ensure that the whole planet returns to being an "oikumene", a habitable space, a home for the whole human family and all life on earth.

1.5. Ecumenicity includes openness, welcoming, hospitality and inclusiveness. This openness is not a naive and uncritical conformity to the external world. It means an openness and receptivity to the *dynamics of the Holy Spirit*.

1.6. The God we confess speaks in the polyphony of Scripture and tradition, through the teaching authority of pastors and theologians, through the mystics and through the nonconforming and often unwelcome voices of prophets. He speaks through the daily practice of the people of God ("consensus fidelium") and through the "signs of the times" - through events in history, society and culture. The seeds of his Word are richly scattered in the fields of different cultures, and are found in philosophies, religions and artistic creations all over the planet. To embark on the path of synodal renewal requires the courage to be led across many boundaries by the dynamics of the Spirit, of whom Jesus says that "we do not know where he comes from or where he goes."

1.7. At the same time, the synodal journey must be a journey of *spiritual discernment*. One must carefully discern *the Zeitgeist* (spirit of time) which is the superficial "language of the world" (public opinion, advertisements, ideologies and the entertainment industry) from the *signs of the times*, which are the language of God through events in the world, through profound changes in society and culture.

1.8. In the epoch of modernity, Christianity has lost its cultural-political role as a religion (*religio*) in the sense of integrating the whole of society (*religio* in the sense of *religare* to bind together).

Synodal reform can prepare the Church for the role of *religion in another sense*, in the sense of the verb *re-legere* (to re-read or read anew). The Church can be a *school of "new reading"*, of a new hermeneutic, of a new, deeper interpretation of God's speech, of God's self-sharing.

1.9. The art of spiritual discernment is the fruit of a contemplative approach to reality, of contemplative prayer. This is one of the indispensable tasks of the Church of our time, and therefore of the synodal renewal: to be a school of *a contemplative approach to reality*. We need Church as a school of Christian wisdom, of mature faith – a healing alternative to the superficial populist approach to our complicated world.

2. *The Church as the ongoing event of the resurrection*

2.1. A contemplative approach to reality allows us to perceive the constant presence of God: to perceive our relationship with the natural environment as our relationship of cooperation and responsibility for the "creatio continua" (ongoing process of creation).

2.2. To understand the *missionary* task of the Church as a participation in the "incarnatio continua", in the *inculturation* of the Gospel into the ways of thinking and living of people (or as a responsibility for the "ex-culturation" of Christianity). (Mission without inculturation leads to superficial indoctrination and discreditation of religion).

2.3. To consider the *pains* of the world and the church, of individuals and nations, as a "*passio continua*", as participation in the cry of the Crucified and in the difficult silence of the Holy Saturday. The church participates in the drama of Easter not only through the liturgical celebration but also through the events of its history.

We can consider the death and extinction of many forms of the church (institutional, doctrinal and spiritual) and many individual and collective "dark nights of faith" as participation in Christ's cross, suffering and death. The mystery of the cross cannot be cheaply emptied; without death there is no resurrection.

2.4. Just as Christ's resurrection was not a mere resuscitation, a return to a past form, but a startling *transformation*, so it is with every awakening of the Church to new life. The Church is "ever renewing" (*semper reformanda*), but this "semper" (continually) has its own dynamics. The history of the Church is not a one-way "progress" but an open drama.

2.5. The ongoing event of the Resurrection (*ressurrectio continua*) happens in the stories of conversion, and not only in conversion in the lives of individuals. The present synodal renewal called for by Pope Francis is also a *kairos*, a time of opportunity - an opportunity for transformation, for renewal, for another of the many great *conversions of the Church*.

3. *Synodal renewal and its obstacles*

3.1. The Second Vatican Council declared its readiness to change the strategy of confrontation against modernity to a strategy of dialogue. I am afraid to say that *this offer has not been appreciated and accepted by 'modern man' or 'the world of our time'*; it has not been met with

the expected *reciprocity*. It came to late- in time, when modernity was ending. We challenge to new signs of times.

3.2. Synodal reform must be more than a mere continuation of the line of the Second Vatican Council. It is to open up space for the mission of the Church in a postmodern age of radical plurality.

3.3. Pope Francis identifies synodal reform as a program for the entire third millennium. Synodality is to be the permanent form of the Church throughout its future history - to its final eschatological consummation. It is a journey through history into the arms of God.

3.4. To regard any particular state of society and of the Church, of theological or scientific knowledge, as final, perfect and unchangeable is to succumb to the temptation of triumphalism.

Triumphalism consists in mistaking the present imperfect state of the Church in history (*ecclesia militans*) for its eschatological form, the perfect Church of the saints in heaven (*ecclesia triumphans*). *The heresy of triumphalism is often accompanied by paternalism, clericalism, fundamentalism and traditionalism.*

3.5. *Paternalism* forgets that the teaching Church must always also be a *learning Church*; that in the Church there is one Father and one Teacher, Christ - and we are all brothers and disciples.

3.6. *Clericalism* is a manifestation of "worldliness" - it understands authority in the church as worldly power, not ministry. The bearers of this ministry then behave like a "ruling class" or upper caste, separated in many of their actions and lifestyles from the whole of God's people.

3.7. *Fundamentalism* forgets that here we see and understand "only in part, as in a mirror and in riddles" (1 Cor 13:12). The fundamentalist does not understand the images presented to us by Scripture and Tradition as *icons for meditation*, as means of adoration of the Mystery, but takes them as idols, idols that need no further interpretation. Fundamentalism is guilty of *idolatry*, of objectifying and flattening the mystery of faith, of binding it into the shape of a closed ideological system.

3.8. *Traditionalism* is a denial of the meaning of tradition as a living, creative transmission of faith. It is a *heresy* in the original sense of the word, an arbitrary selection - it takes a certain historically conditioned form of the Church or its doctrine out of context and absolutizes it. Faithfulness to the content of the faith is a commitment to courageously, creatively, and responsibly revive and *transform the forms* of its expression so as to enable the *content* to be communicated in an intelligible and credible way.

3.9. Both the abundance of responsible theological reflection and the variety of practical examples of living the faith reveals the inexhaustible richness of the "treasure of faith" and the inexhaustible variety of its authentic interpretations. The synodal development of the Church will show, in the words of Pope Francis, *many new ways of being Christian*, new - now unexpected - *ways of being the Church in the world*.

All attempts to shackle the freedom of the Spirit of God, to reduce the richness of his self-expression and to enclose it in a rigid, closed ideological system run the risk of the gravest sin: the sin against the Holy Spirit.

4. *Spiritual accompaniment*

4.1. The synodal reform of the Church is a long run; unrealistic expectations of major institutional changes immediately after the two synodal sessions in Rome must be tempered. The *Instrumentum Laboris* suggests that some specific proposals that have appeared in a number of conclusions of national and continental synods (like the ordination of women) will not be the subject of synodal action in October 2024. (The ordination of married men (*viriprobat*) is not mentioned in IL)

At the same time, however, this document adds that the theological reflection on these issues “should continue, on an appropriate timescale and in the appropriate ways“ (IL 17).

4.1. Nevertheless, *the Instrumentum Laboris* provides important suggestions that are already ripe for implementation. In addition to the already established ministry of *acolytes and catechists*, the establishment of other ministries that do not require ordination is proposed.

4.2. One of these is certainly the *ministry of spiritual accompaniment*, which includes all the main elements of synodality - listening, openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, spiritual discernment and a common search for the right choice.

This ministry cannot be substituted by the sacrament of penance or by psychotherapy (although we may find some similarities or even partial overlaps). It is a way of discovering God's presence in people's lives, even in the lives of "non-religious people" - to whom this ministry can also be offered. It presupposes both the personal charisma, experience and appropriate personal qualities of the accompanying persons, as well as their competence in several theological disciplines and in the social sciences.

4.3. In addition to parishes, it will be necessary to *establish centres of spirituality*, retreats, spiritual accompaniment and pastoral counselling. It is also in these centres *that synodal groups should continue to meet on a permanent basis*, sharing their experiences in an atmosphere of prayer and contemplation and seeking solutions to problems in their personal lives and in the Church.

5. *Accompaniment as a political task of the Church*

5.1. However, the ministry of spiritual accompaniment is not only about accompanying individuals. The Church also has a "political", therapeutic and prophetic mission in the world. The relationship between the Church and the world has been changing throughout history, and theology must constantly reflect this.

5.2. The synodal reform of the Church presupposes a reform of theological thinking: *a shift from static thinking in terms of unchanging natures to an emphasis on the dynamics of relationships*, on the need for their constant renewal and deepening. The shift from thinking in terms of static, unchanging natures to an emphasis on the quality of relationships involves a renewal of both the understanding of the Church (ecclesiology) and of Christian ethics, including sexual and political ethics. In doing so, the findings of the natural and social sciences cannot be ignored.

5.3. The Church is to be a community of pilgrims (*communio viatorum*) in order to contribute to the transformation of the world, of the whole human family, into a community of journey, to help deepen the dynamics of sharing.

5.4. The Church is a sacrament, a symbol and an instrument of the unity of all humanity. This unity is also to be synodal, not totalitarian. This unity is also an eschatological goal - it cannot

be fully realized during history, but it is necessary to work for its realization, to remove boundaries.

5.5. The process of globalization is necessarily incomplete. It is in crisis mainly because technological, economic and informational interconnection has not been able to (and could not itself) create a consciousness of belonging and co-responsibility on a global scale. No political regime, no ideology, no religion or theocratic state can offer an external framework for the coexistence of a multitude of such different cultures and civilisations, all clamouring for their own free development.

5.6. The political role of Christianity is not to offer or even impose Christianity in the form of an ideology or a theocratic state (the Russian Orthodox Church is a warning example), but through its synodal reform to inspire the quest for a new quality of relationship between people, cultures, religions and states.

5.7. The vision of the Second Vatican Council was *dialogue* - dialogue between the Church and the world, between churches, religions, cultures, peoples and civilizations. But today, dialogue as a relationship between separate entities is *no longer enough*. The Church and the world can no longer be seen as separate entities; the world is the internal structure of human existence, and the Church is always already thrown into the world before it is able to reflect on its relationship to the world. Civilizations and religions, states and nations can no longer be seen as separate entities. We are interconnected - and we need to understand, develop and cultivate the way of this interconnection. It is a challenge to and for all (*per tutti*) and all must be invited.

5.8. The synodal renewal of the Church is not meant to be a replication of the democratic system in the sense of majority rule, nor a replication of the type and state of democracy as we see it in today's political arena. Rather, the principle of synodality could inspire a *renewal of political democracy*, a nurturing of what today's democracy lacks and why it is so vulnerable to populism and the attraction of authoritarian systems.

5.9. At the center of the Christian understanding of God is the Trinity - God as relationship, God's being as life in relationship. God created human beings in his image: the "human nature" is therefore a life in relationships, being with and for others, sharing in a common way (*syn hodos*).

The Church must bring more than dialogue into the world today - namely, inspiration by the life of the Trinity. Synodality, as a common journey, moves towards a deeper mutuality - that which the theology of the Trinity calls *perichoresis*, a mutual interpenetration that does not mean the destruction but the fulfillment of the identity of each of the participants in the process. By cultivating relationships with one another, by overcoming mental boundaries, we contribute - whether we are aware of it or not - to deepening our relationship to a common ground: to God, who is all in all.

This text was presented as a theological and spiritual introduction to the working meeting of the European delegates of the second session of the World Synod on Synodality in Rome. The working meeting took place in August 2024 at the Catholic University of Linz with the participation of representatives of the General Secretariat of the Synod, CCEE (Council of European Bishops' Conferences) and COMECE (Council of Bishops' Conferences of the EU countries), bishops, theologians, representatives of religious orders and lay initiatives and movements. Mons. Halík was entrusted (similarly to the European Continental Synod in Prague and the World Synod of Pastors in Rome) with the introduction and spiritual accompaniment of these synodal meetings.

