

Part 7: The Output of the Survey on Synodalisation

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In this final part, eight points serve to summarise the main findings of the survey in a concise way.

Broad interest

1. "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission": this theme, proclaimed by Pope Francis for the upcoming World Synod of Bishops, motivated many people around the world to take part in this online survey. Almost twenty thousand people worldwide visited the online questionnaire. 11,270 questionnaires were answered to such an extent that they could be included in the statistical evaluation. The rest were at least interested in the online project. In addition to the responses to a series of closed questions (with predetermined answer options) on synodalisation, those texts in which respondents answered the two open questions, "What do you expect from the coming World Synod of Bishops?" and "What obstacles do you see?" deserve attention.

Synodalise, but how?

2. Not surprisingly, the majority of respondents to the survey were in favour of synodalising the universal Catholic Church. However, among the large number of participants there are enough concerned people so that pros and cons, resistances and concerns, become visible. It was possible to elicit argumentation profiles of the synodically as well as the a(n)ti-synodically attuned respondents. The respondents turned out to be polarised. Many comments suggest that this will be no different among the invited bishops and additional participants in the Synod. This promises committed debates in the area of tension between spirit and power.

The Church is a Spirit-led synodal process

3. Not only Pope Francis, but also most of the respondents view synodality as the Holy-Ghost-led nature of the Church as a community in which all are on the Way together serving the World of today. Synodality is therefore first and foremost an understanding of the Church in which there is a fundamental equality of dignity and vocation: "Now to each one the revelation of the Spirit is given for the common good." (1 Cor 12:7). Synodal logic therefore means listening to the Spirit who speaks through all. And this in an orderly and respectful way. And because human discernment in all church members can be shadowed by interest, power, but also fears and comfort, the synodal process needs the gift of discernment of spirits. The goal of all these processes is Spirit-led symphonic unanimity. The majority of respondents agree with these spiritual and theological aspects.

De- and re-synodalisation

4. The respondents showed a high knowledge of the history of synodality in the long story of Christianity. If for them the young church was synodal above all in the form of the communities founded by S. Paul, the Church in the Western area in particular suffered a kind of de-synodalisation in the course of its implementation in the Roman Empire. The charismatic church form mutated into a clerical priestly church in affinity with its environment: the church of the people became a church for the people. An inner state-like division occurred, which some interviewees with experts in pastoral history call the "pastoral basic-schism". The historically informed comments in the survey not only perceive this schism but trace the increasing consolidation of a monarchical-absolutist image of the Church at the First Vatican Council: with its Papal dogmas, it took de-synodalisation to extremes. The Second Vatican Council then opened a process of re-synodalisation. According to the opinion and personal experience of some older interviewees, the post-conciliar national Synods (Würzburg, Rottenburg are expressly acknowledged) showed how far this can go. The 1983 canon law, however, administratively reduced the ecclesiological synodalisation that had already been

achieved or did not exhaust the possibilities that had been opened up by the Second Vatican Council. From now on, only bishops (clergy) could participate in synods. For lay people, who could even decide for a short time (1965-1983), (in principle) (un)binding consultation remained. Many see the Pope's upcoming Synod of Bishops as a committed attempt to give new impetus to the process of re-synodalisation of the Catholic Church, which was begun at the Council and (noticeably) impaired by canon law.

Orders of synodality

5. For this advancement of the synodalisation opened up by the Council, some substantial proposals are made by the interviewees. Underlying these is the conviction that the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church needs order, structures and law. "The Holy Spirit and we have decided" is how the Acts of the Apostles formulates this interrelationship. (Acts 15:28) Structures, which become independent, can extinguish the Spirit: then synodalisation degenerates into a clerical power struggle. Good structures (such as the Apostles' Council) can in turn create the ecclesial space for the Spirit to work peacefully and creatively. Without this interplay of spirit and structures, the insistence on the spiritual dimension of synodalisation can be misused as an unintended justification form an unsynodal church form. Many commentaries wrestle with precisely this interplay of spirit and order/structures/law.

a) Such reflections on orders of synodality start with a walk through church history. In the course of the centuries, in many texts there has been an dynamic development of synodality, as has already been related. But what has developed can develop again today. Two driving forces for such a development are mentioned: the biblically supported tradition on the one hand, and the affinity to the respective culture on the other. Here, the connection between synodalisation and inculturation becomes evident: By inculturation the church inspires, using the Gospel, the respective culture from within; at the same time, the cultural experiences (which in their positive aspects are spirit-led, such as human dignity, de-discrimination, etc.) enrich the evangelising Church and its respective form, thus also its inner processes. The result is not an adaptation of the processes practised in the church, but rather a spiritually "cultural affinity" arises. If this affinity is suppressed, quite a few church members, who are also citizens of the respective culture, suffer a kind of "cultural martyrdom". The hard data prove such a gap between the Catholic and the professional or respective social participation-profiles. (This gap, from the respondents' point of view, is smaller in the churches of the Reformation, but even larger in the Orthodox Churches).

b) The Catholic Church has a great need for development from the perspective of its founding documents as well as from the "cultural affinity" that is crucial for its work. Ecclesiologically, in respect of the coming World Synod of Bishops many criticise the fact that, strictly speaking, it is not really a synod of the Church, but at best a collegial meeting among bishops. In order to deserve the honorary title of Synod, not only bishops should be participants in a world church synodal process, but there must be an adequate representation of all church members in an orderly form. From the point of view of the majority of those questioned, it is an untenable state of affairs if half of the church members are not present at all or only marginally present in a synod of the universal Catholic church: namely women. Pope Francis has encouraged local churches in this direction to include lay people (women as well as men) in synodal processes and has already given signals in this direction, anticipating a reform of canon law, with papal authority.

c) The interviewees give a lot of thought to how this inclusion of all in the deeply synodal event called church can be developed in practice. Here, above all, the knowledge of the necessity for a "cultural affinity" comes into play. It is not only for a mission, understood as inculturation, that culture needs to be shaped by the Gospel. Rather, it is also necessary to form the shape of the church through

culture. Because of the different cultures, this cannot happen everywhere in the same way and at the same speed. But in the democratic cultures this means an adoption of democratic rules in the procedures of synodal decision-making processes. Such an implementation of democratic rules of procedure does not make the church a democracy. As the people created by God, the church uses the rules of a democratic culture, which most church members value in their profession and society. From this, many respondents conclude that everyone must be involved in decision-taking, and not only in decision-making as advisers. They deduce that there should be elections of candidates for church leadership positions (ordained as well as non-ordained; pastors, bishops, pope). Last but not least, the church also needs separation of powers, as experienced secular lawyers among the interviewees demand.

d) As much as synodality is a spiritual process: the respondents are overwhelmingly of the opinion that there must be a developed canon law to secure its orderly course. The ecclesiology of Vatican II must determine canon law. It is not acceptable that canon law should interpret the Council.

Ecumenism: Does Synodality Need Authority?

6. Considerations on the significance of synodalisation for ecumenism, which is currently stagnating in the view of many respondents, take up a lot of space. The majority supported the offer of the recent popes to the separated churches to reorganise the shape of the papal office in the course of synodalisation. This would give a boost to the ecumenical movement. Opinions differ as to which of the Christian sister churches is more likely to succeed in synodality. Respondents from the countries of the Reformation (Germany, Switzerland) have high hopes for a rapprochement between the Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church (although precisely such a rapprochement is castigated by opponents of synodalisation as heretical "Protestantisation"); others believe that rapprochement to the Orthodox Church is easier because of their strong synodality: The Catholic Church can learn synodality from the latter, although still others think that the synodality practised in Orthodoxy without a decision-making authority in weighty matters can lead to a fatal stalemate in church politics. So, does the solution lie in a balance between synodalisation and a renewed papacy?

If synodalisation of the Church succeeds and thus members of the Church and their communities/parishes have a decisive say, the grass-roots ecumenism described in many commentaries can carry more weight. The communities in the Catholic Church practise more ecumenism in diaconal projects, also in the Lord's Supper, than church leaders currently consider possible. They could become the vanguard of a coming reconciled diversity, in which most respondents see the realistic goal of the impatiently longed-for church unification.

Limits of theological-spiritual argumentation

7. In the discussion about synodalisation of the Catholic Church, arguments are usually made at a high theological level. According to the analysis of the rich data of the survey, it is easily overlooked that with regard to the appreciation or rejection of synodalisation, theological positions have much less measurable influence than the personality trait of authoritarianism. This is a person's lifelong learned attitude towards freedom and authority. Authoritarian people have an exaggerated appreciation of power and authority: to such they gladly submit, but, if possible, they also strive for (spiritual) power. Authoritarian personalities, according to the study, militantly reject synodalisation and are, if at all, at best available for a non-binding form of consultation that does not restrict the authority's freedom to act. Those who are less authoritarian, on the other hand, demand the participation of all in questions that concern themselves and also want to play a decisive role in their solution. The logic of the *Decretum Gratiani* from 1040 finds unrestricted approval among a large majority of respondents: "What concerns everyone must be decided by everyone."

As in secular studies, the synodality survey also shows that it is the “Vatican II generation Council” which demands (more) participation and decision-making, arguing with the ecclesiology of the Council. Among the younger respondents in the survey, on the other hand, a development is mirrored which has also been evident in secular society since the mid-nineties of the last century: The number of those who want to get rid of the burdensome burden of freedom (of participation, of decision-making) is also increasing among the younger generation. As long as the “generation Council” (i.e. people who are the age of Pope Francis) can still shape the development of the Church, there is has a favourable window of opportunity for a synodalisation of the Catholic Church.

Such correlations, secured by the survey data, warn against thinking that opponents of synodalisation can be won over by theological arguments, no matter how good they may be. Because their resistance is rooted not (so much) in ecclesiology but in their personalities, theological argumentation or spiritual exercises will have little effect against this resistance. Authoritarian personalities tend to have a different theology and understanding of the church than non-authoritarian church members. They are more concerned with power than with spirituality.

Between Mistrust and Confidence

8. The respondents disagree about the foreseeable success of the upcoming World Synod of Bishops. Many had high hopes for synodal processes under Pope Francis (Synod on the Family, Synod on Youth, Synod on Amazonia). They evaluated these in a fair way and now feel disappointed. If the upcoming World Synod of Bishops only declares fine words which do not result in any (structurally and legally secured) action - which is precisely what many respondents do not want - the tender little plant of hope will quickly wither.