

INTRODUCTION: SYNODALITY



The Winter 2021 issue of *Communio* takes as its theme “Synodality,” the topic around which the 2023 Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will revolve. The focus of that upcoming event provokes reflection on the rightful way in which responsibility is distributed and shared within the Church. How, for instance, is the Church’s governance different from that of a state, even if a genuine analogy abides between these two orders? To what extent is the idea of synodality rooted in both the Church’s tradition and her very nature? How can the episcopacy rightly receive from the laity, and how should the *sensus fidei* be recognized and revered? In identifying perils that face the Church at this juncture, the authors included here call for a return to foundations that can nourish the Church’s current discernment.

In “Synodality, the Magisterium, and the Faith of the People of God,” **Roch Kereszty** exhorts the present-day movement of synodality to draw its inspiration from the Church’s vital participation in the life of the Trinity. “[T]he Holy Spirit . . . assists the hierarchy in teaching, as well as the entire people of God, both bishops and laity, in receiving, deepening, applying, and living the teachings of the Church, which ultimately come from Christ.” This remembrance of the Church’s perennial origin in the bestowal of the Spirit can relieve the temptation to democratize the Church’s activity even while upholding concern for the riches that can well up within her “from below.”

Nicholas J. Healy Jr., in “Communion, Sacramental Authority, and the Limits of Synodality,” evaluates whether the synodal approach, as envisioned by its chief advocates, is true to the reality of the Church as first a *corpus mysticum* rather than a body politic. If it is not acknowledged that participation in the Church is principally sacramental, then deliberation over doctrinal matters devolves into the mere negotiation of competing interests. “Genuine authority is distinct from the modern idea of arbitrary power. The nature and purpose of authority is to augment the life of the members of the community.” By bearing in mind such a sense of authority, the Church’s hierarchy, understood as an essential feature of her communion, can justly benefit from the distinctive genius and contribution of the laity.

In “Synodality, Sociologism, and the Judgment of History,” **Michael Hanby** scrutinizes the ontological presuppositions of historicism, which rest on falsely severing power from and exalting it over the good. This counter-metaphysics, Hanby argues, is operative in influential strands of Catholic thought but is fundamentally impotent to do justice to the mystery that the Church is, thereby also falling short of the doctrinal ecclesiology at the heart of the Second Vatican Council. “The Church is only the people of God because she is first a sacrament, and she is only a sacrament because God in Christ has chosen to share the intra-trinitarian *communio* with us.”

Hans Feichtinger, in “Synodality: Then and Now—in Rome and in Germany,” discusses how the petrocentric approach of the fifth-century Pope St. Leo the Great fostered synods that were oriented to a faithful reception of doctrine. “Leo knew that there is no such thing as an undirected and unstructured synod led directly by the Spirit. Instead, the one who presides in the deepest sense has to be the Savior himself.” Against the model presented by Leo, Feichtinger goes on to elucidate the standpoint, prospects, and limits of the contemporary “Synodal Way” that has arisen in Germany. Thus, he sheds further light on what is at stake in the Church’s contemporary debate over the meaning of synodality.

Thomas Esposito uncovers how the activity of passing on the ecclesial tradition is embodied in St. Paul’s writings in “‘Paul in Every Letter Remembers You’: The Holy Spirit and the Unity of the Church in the Post-Apostolic Letters.” The

personal character of Paul's witness and address, Esposito shows, belongs essentially to the reason why his epistles bear on the lives of all Christians. "[T]he transmission of the letters in the New Testament canon showcases the apostolic foundation on which the particular churches are incorporated into the structure of the universal Church." This transmission displays the unifying power of the Holy Spirit through whom Paul's teaching takes root in the recipients of his letters.

In "Catholic Politics and the Analogy of Authority," **D.C. Schindler** considers the loss of an understanding of authority as one of the root crises of politics in modernity. Authority, Schindler argues, connects its bearer representatively both with its divine source and with its historical forebears. For this reason, it "communicates the origin to what it originates, thus mediating its life-giving generativity and so causing growth, *augere*." When this deep purpose has been eclipsed or impeded, we not only forget the sacred character of the political order but also lose sight of how the Church informs the activity of the world first by testifying to the goodness of God that has been generatively imparted in Christ.

In "*Why We Need. . .*," **David W. Fagerberg** reflects on Alexander Schmemmann's view of the liturgy as the perfect expression and enactment of the *lex credendi*. As it is in this mystical accomplishment of the union between God and man that the truth of both partners is fully manifested, theology can be said to spring from and be consummated in the liturgy. The denial of this in practice is, Schmemmann holds, a sign of secularism's intrusion into the Church. "Theology is not thinking with an earthly mind about heavenly subjects; it is thinking in communion with the mind of Christ about all things, earthly and heavenly, which is why theology is ontologically dependent upon liturgical communion with Christ."

Finally, in *Retrieving the Tradition* we reprint **Joseph Ratzinger's** "Questions about the Structure and Duties of the Synod of Bishops." In this short piece, Ratzinger clarifies how the Synod of Bishops is ordered to the service of the papal office through the obedient rediscovery and fresh unfolding of the Church's faith. Only so can its deliberations be undertaken for the sake of building up all those who are under each bishop's care. "[T]he synod serves the right relation of unity and catholicity in

the Church and, thus, promotes that living unity which corresponds to the vitality of this living organism, which lives and grows as a unity in the many cells of the local Church.” □

—The Editors