

THE SYNODAL CHURCH

(Some ideas)

The Synodal Church is a movement of the Holy Spirit leading us forward from a top heavy clerical church to a church which is owned by everyone laity, clergy and religious. Synodal means that 'we, laity religious and clergy walk together in which everyone, especially those on the periphery has a vital part to play in the process. Listening to each other in a non-judgemental way is at the heart of the process because the Spirit 'breathes where he will'. (Jn) We have to discern in what direction is the Spirit pointing us.

It's not about church leaders getting together coming up with a formula for the church of the future. The Spirit speaks through everyone, not just those in authority. What matters is that we express ourselves openly and honestly (*parrhesia*). It's not about demolishing another's point of view but listening to the other without prejudice or bias. It's a unique moment for the Church. It's understanding in a new way how the church may have to change its way of being governed. The Synodal church is not meant to be a clericalised church with a 'command and control centre'. Vatican 11 rejected that model but we've been slow on the uptake. The Holy Spirit is giving us another chance. Its thumbs down to a clergy dominated church which gave short shrift to the charisms of the laity. It involves a consultation with the lay people in every aspect of church life.

However, it is not lamenting and condemning with a grim faced defensiveness. It's not a programme. It's not demolishing anyone who is opposed to our vision but listening with genuine openness to everyone's view without prejudice and especially to those of the margins of church life whose opinions up to this have rarely been taken seriously.

At present the German Church has its own Synod going on but it is frowned upon by Pope Francis. It's the antithesis of the

Synodal church. It is led by intellectuals, pushing their own agenda with little listening or consultation of the rank and file laity especially those on the margins of church life. Anything which doesn't fit in with their pre-conceived liberalised agenda is not taken seriously. It's what these intellectuals are saying and not what the Holy Spirit may be saying which comes out on top.

The Synodal process is not a debating chamber like in parliament where the majority view wins. The Anglican Synod is a bit like that. The main aim is to find arguments to defeat your opponents with majority voting winning the day. The Anglican Synod is an elegant version of the House of Commons. We can walk together despite our differences or overall sticking points. We can move forward together with our different points of view. With genuine openness to the Spirit there is plenty of scope for convergence. However the final decision on where the Spirit is leading us will be with the Holy Father. He's not just the Successor of St Peter but Francis has vast experience of the Synodal Pathway from his work in South America where most of his ideas were first nourished.

The bishops, however will have to step down from their pedestals. Their episcopal conferences are a closed shop discussing stuff which the lay people of God had little or no input. The Synodal Church is not about conservatives versus progressives. It's not about a debating chamber. What the world needs is a process where we listen to each other without rubbishing the other's point of view. The Synodal process needs patience. Our church is so divided today. There is deep division and polarization on so many issues among clergy and laity. But the Spirit can unite us in our differences and allow opposites to co-exist. Uniformity of approach is not necessarily the work of the Spirit but neither is indifference. The secular Media is trying to paint a black image of the church by exaggerating divisions within its ranks. It's up to us as a community of believers to prove them wrong.

