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Interview with the Superior General of the Priestly Society of Saint Pius X

The latest orientations of Pope Francis' pontificate

*Interview conducted by FSSPX.Actualités in Menzingen
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FSSPX.Actualités: *Rev. Father General, His Holiness Pope Francis recently celebrated ten years of his pontificate. What, in your opinion, is the most significant point of these last few years?*

Don Davide Pagliarani: After his two central and innovating ideas of mercy, understood as a “universal amnesty”, and the new morality based on the respect for the earth as the “common home of all humanity”, it is undeniable that recent years have been characterised by the idea of synodality. This is not an absolutely new idea¹, but Pope Francis has made it the priority axis of his pontificate.

¹ The synodal movement began immediately after the Second Vatican Council, and since which, more than one thousand diocesan synods have been held – with the frequent presence of the laity, which is very much a novelty. Pope Francis clarified the elements of his conception of synodality from the beginning of his pontificate. Firstly through his interpretation of the *sensus fidei* and popular piety as a source of revelation (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, n° 119-120). Then by addressing the question of synodality more frankly in his *Address to the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops* (17th October 2015). On the basis of this, the International Theological Commission produced a text that gave shape to the notion: *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church* (2018), theorising the process we see at work today.

The synod on synodality thus appears to be the practical application, on the scale of the whole Church, of notions that, exposed and theologically explored throughout this pontificate, had been widely experimented with since the Council.



This idea is so omnipresent that many have, to a certain point, lost interest in it, even though it represents the quintessence of a mature and perfected modernism. From an ecclesiological point of view, the synodal revolution is supposed to impact and profoundly transform the Church in its hierarchical structure, in its functioning, and above all, in its teaching of the faith.

Why have people become weary of this synodality?

It is possible that it has been overly perceived as a German-speaking problem, or perhaps – while keeping all things in proportion – that it is basically a Belgian problem, and its universal dimension has been lost over time. It is certain that the Germans have played a particular role in the synodal process, but the problem itself is a Roman problem – and therefore universal – and thus, it concerns the Catholic Church as a whole.

How would you define this synodal process?

First of all, this process is a concrete reality, rather than a predefined doctrine. It is a confused method, or better still “a praxis”, which has been launched without knowing in advance all the possible outcomes. In concrete terms, it is a determined desire to turn the Church upside-down. The teaching-Church no longer sees itself as the custodian of a Revelation coming from God, and of which it is the guardian, but as a group of bishops associated with the Pope, who listen to the faithful, and in particular to all the peripheries, i.e. with particular attention paid to anything that the most alienated souls might suggest. It is a Church where the shepherds become the sheep and the sheep become the shepherds.

The underlying idea is that God does not reveal Himself through the traditional channels of Holy Scripture and Tradition, which are safeguarded by the hierarchy, but through the “experience of the people of God”. This is why the synodal process began with a consultation of the faithful in all the dioceses throughout the world. On the basis of this data, summaries were drawn up, at the level of the bishops’ conferences, leading to a first Roman synthesis published a few months ago.

What is the significance of the idea that God reveals Himself, and makes His will known, through the experiences of the people of God?

This idea is at the very basis of the whole modernist edifice. Saint Pius X built his entire encyclical *Pascendi* on the denunciation of this false idea of Revelation. If, instead of referring to Sacred Scripture and Tradition, faith is reduced to an experience – individual at first, then communal when shared – then the content of the faith, and consequently the constitution of the Church, is open to all sorts of possible evolutions. By definition, an experience is linked to a moment or to a period in time. It is a reality that occurs in time and in history, and which is therefore, by essence, evolutionary. In the same way, the life of each of us contains a movement, and therefore evolves.

“Synodality represents the quintessence of a mature and perfected modernism.”

Such a faith-experience, necessarily destined to evolve according to the awareness and the needs of the different moments in history, is constantly “enriched” with new contents, and at the same time leaves aside that which is no longer current. In this way, faith becomes a rather human reality, linked like the history of humanity to ever new and changing contingencies. In the long term, there is not much left of the eternal, the transcendent or the immutable. If we still speak of God and the Catholic Church, these two realities end up being the projection of what an experience can feel *hic et nunc*. These two terms, along with all the other dogmatic elements of



our faith, are irretrievably altered in their true meaning and scope. They are gradually reabsorbed into the blur of what is merely worldly and changeable. Their meaning evolves with humanity and with its experience of God. This idea is not new, but the synodal process represents a new culmination of its breadth and depth.

What can you tell us about this “Roman synthesis” you mentioned?

This Roman synthesis is a document published in October 2022, and entitled “Enlarge the space of your tent”. It is the working document drawn up for the reflection of the bishops, in the continental stage of the synodal journey, i.e. for the bishops meeting together in their respective continents.² It is presented as an expression of the *sensus fidei* of the faithful, and the bishops are recommended to read it prayerfully, “with the eyes of the disciple, who recognises it as a testimony to the path of conversion towards a synodal Church, [...] a Church that learns from listening how to renew its evangelizing mission”³. It is therefore from this presumed expression of the *sensus fidei* of the faithful that the bishops are expected to draw the consequences and make their final decisions.

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Now the content of this text and the suggestions it contains are a disaster from start to finish. There is practically nothing that can be considered as an expression of the Catholic faith. On the contrary, most of the suggestions advocate a dissolution of the Church into a completely new reality. It is perhaps understandable that some of the faithful, (and even some priests – especially today), could say strange things, but it is absolutely inconceivable that such statements were retained in the synthesis produced by the Vatican’s General Secretariat of the Synod.

Are there any passages in this synthesis that stand out as particularly dangerous?

Unfortunately, most of the passages are frightening! However, there are two in particular that seem to me to summarise the intent of the whole document, and in particular, the desire to change the very essence of the Catholic Church, through the synodal process. First of all, in relation to authority, there is an explicit desire to recognise a Church that functions in reverse, and in which the teaching-Church no longer has anything to teach: “It is important to build a synodal institutional model as an ecclesial paradigm of deconstructing pyramidal power that privileges unipersonal managements. The only legitimate authority in the Church must be that of love and service, following the example of the Lord.”⁴

Here we wonder whether we are in the presence of a heresy or, quite simply, of a “nothingness” that we cannot even describe. A heretic, in fact, still “believes” in something, and may still have an idea of the Church, even if his idea is distorted. However, here we are dealing with an idea of the Church that is not only fuzzy but also ‘liquid’, to use a modern expression. Here they advocate a Church without doctrine, without dogma, without faith, and in which there is no longer any need for an authority to teach anything. Everything is dissolved into a spirit of “love and service”, without really knowing what this means – if it means anything at all – and to where it leads.

² There are seven separate continental groups. South America and North America are two different entities, and the Middle East is separate from Asia.

³ *Enlarge the space of your tent*, n° 13.

⁴ *Ibidem* n° 57.



You also mentioned a second passage that is of particular concern?

Definitely. There is this second passage that seems to me to sum up the spirit of the whole text, and at the same time, the real feeling of these last few years of Pope Francis' pontificate: "The world needs a 'Church that goes forth', that rejects the division between believers and non-believers, that looks at humanity and offers it more than a doctrine or a strategy, an experience of salvation, a 'coup of gift' that responds to the cry of humanity and nature"⁵. I am convinced that this short passage contains a much deeper meaning and significance than might at first appear.

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To reject the distinction between believers and non-believers is certainly crazy, albeit logical in the present context. If faith is no longer an authentically supernatural reality, the Church itself, which is supposed to preserve and preach it, alters its *raison d'être* and its mission among men. Indeed, if faith is only one experience among others, how can it be portrayed as being better, and why should it be imposed universally? Quite simply, a feeling-experience cannot correspond to an absolute truth – its value is that of a particular opinion, which can no longer be the truth in the traditional sense of the word. This leads logically to the refusal of the distinction between believers and non-believers. The only thing that remains is humanity, with its expectations, opinions and cries, and which, as such, do not claim anything supernatural.

Thus the Church offers humanity a teaching that no longer corresponds to the transmission of a transcendent Revelation. The Church is reduced to proposing a diminished and naturalised "gospel", which becomes a simple book of reflection and comfort, adapted to all without distinction. In this perspective, we understand how the new theology and the new ecological morality proposed by *Laudato si'* are offered to a humanity that no longer needs to be converted, and in which there is no longer a distinction between believers and non-believers.

In the media, the attention that the Synod is giving to same-sex unions is particularly noticeable. How do you see this problem?

It is undeniable that the worldwide pressure in this area is echoed in the synodal process. The Church is being asked to be more welcoming and attentive to the affective needs of these people, especially after the doors were opened to them by the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Lætitia*. This is one of the subjects on which expectations are the highest. We get the impression that we see, on the one hand, the Church's authority reiterating the principle that such couples cannot be blessed – take for example the reply of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith in March 2021 – and on the other hand, on several occasions, such couples being blessed – with some coming to the church to receive a blessing after a civil marriage at the town hall.

A few months ago, the Flemish-Belgian bishops even published an official ritual to bless these couples. To this new initiative, the Vatican has so far not yet reacted. According to the bishop of Antwerp, the Holy Father knew about it, but decided to simply let it happen. Along the same lines, the German bishops are proposing major and openly revolutionary steps forward in this area. All this inevitably provokes reactions from some bishops and from some of the faithful. However, many others are content to observe things passively.

⁵ *Ibidem* n° 42.



“Traditional moral principles are transformed into optional opinions.”

Thus, a dialectic and confused situation is created – in this field as also in others – and in which everyone naturally ends up waiting for the competent authority to pronounce itself... This authority is then free to put a brake on when things seem to be too premature, but can also concede and let things go ahead so that, little by little, things become part of various customs and habits. Sometimes the Church’s traditional doctrine is reiterated and even defined as immutable, which reassures the conservatives. But the pastoral needs of particular cases are equally put forward, applying a “miraculous” mercy that reconciles the irreconcilable. In reality, traditional moral principles, as well as the faith, are thus transformed into optional opinions. This is the characteristic of a way of exercising authority that is no longer guided by transcendent principles, but shows itself sensitive to the expectations of the moment – and determined to satisfy them, according to an opportunity evaluated in a purely pragmatic way.

However, it is important to understand that all this does not stop at any given point. This way of exercising authority undergoes the same mechanism that governs modern democracies: something that cannot be approved today will be approved tomorrow, when, through the same dialectic and through new pressures and new precedents, the situation will be sufficiently mature and minds sufficiently prepared. This is a brief description of the mechanism triggered by the synodality, and this is why we find ourselves faced with the most accomplished example of modernism.

Most recently, a rescript from Pope Francis restated that any new priest who wishes to celebrate the Tridentine Mass must obtain the express permission of the Holy See. Furthermore, for a Traditional Mass to be permitted in a parish church, permission from the Holy See is also required. How do you evaluate these measures?

I don’t think you need to be a very experienced expert to see the clear desire to do away with the Traditional Mass. This rescript, published in February 2023, as well as the apostolic letter *Desiderio desideravi*, of June 2022, are both intended to restrict the use of the traditional missal as much as possible, and also to frighten off anyone who wants to use it. Under such conditions, I can hardly see any young priest having the courage to approach the Holy See to seek permission to celebrate the Tridentine Mass. Whether we like it or not, since the Motu Proprio *Traditionis Custodes*, this Mass has been practically forbidden in the Church. As Cardinal Roche reminded us just recently: with the Council, “the theology of the Church has changed”⁶ and consequently so has its liturgy, since the liturgy is the expression of the Church’s theology.

In this context, the various members of the Ecclesia Dei Institutes are experiencing a moment of uncertainty and apprehension. We hear that a new pontifical document concerning them could appear soon. What can you tell us about this?

I don’t know anything about such a document. However, I do think that a priest cannot live his priesthood in a fulfilling way if he accepts a sword of Damocles hanging over his head all the time. Likewise, he cannot live serenely if he is constantly on the lookout for the slightest rumour. A priest should live united to his Mass, without having to wonder if he will still be allowed by his

⁶ Cardinal Roche argued that “The theology of the Church has changed. Whereas before the priest represented, at a distance, all the people. They were channelled, as it were, through this person who alone was celebrating the Mass. [However, today], it is not only the priest who celebrates the liturgy, but also those who are baptised with him. And that is an enormous statement to make” (BBC Radio 4 broadcast, 19th March 2023).



superiors to celebrate it tomorrow. He is supposed to be concerned with sharing, with other souls, the great treasure that he dispenses, without constantly living in fear of being deprived of it himself, or having to live with the hope of a miracle that will enable him to escape the precarious situation in which he finds himself. I sincerely do not think that Divine Providence wants this kind of situation.

Moreover, unfortunately, the members of these institutes, like many other priests who wish to celebrate the Tridentine Rite, live in such fear that they condemn themselves to silence in the face of current events in the life of the Church. Alas, they know very well that the day they begin to express reservations about what is happening in the Church today, the very same day, the sword of Damocles could fall upon them – and Cardinal Roche is ready to remind them of this at any time! I say this in all charity: this situation provokes a permanent dichotomy between the liturgical sphere and the doctrinal sphere, which risks making these priests live in a permanent state of deception, paralysing them irremediably, when faced with the necessary public profession of their faith. This is why today, especially in some countries, the reaction against the insanity of the synodal movement, paradoxically, is coming more from circles that are not attached to the use of the traditional missal.

How do you see the future of the Society of Saint Pius X?

Quite simply, I see it in a perfect continuity with what it has represented until now. The Society must be concerned with the Church's current affairs, but without being interested in rumours, nor in what *this* cardinal said in confidence to *that* seminarian, or in what *could* happen in the Church, or even what *might* happen to us... We need to live above all that.

“We must be aware that the traditional liturgy in the Catholic Church also corresponds to a morality that we have no right to alter in its principles.”

For the good of the Catholic Church, the Society must maintain and guarantee to its priests and the faithful the full freedom to celebrate the traditional liturgy. At the same time, the Society must continue to ensure the preservation of the traditional Catholic theology that accompanies and sustains this same liturgy. A Catholic who is still lucid cannot renounce this doctrine. To paraphrase Cardinal Roche, the change in doctrine, done through the Council, is indeed what has inspired the New Mass! It is our duty to maintain both the Mass and Catholic doctrine, retaining the full freedom to challenge the errors and those who teach them. After all, if the liturgy is by definition public, so is the profession of faith associated with it.

Today more than ever, we must be aware that the traditional liturgy in the Catholic Church also corresponds to a morality that we have no right to alter in its principles. At the centre of our religion, Almighty God has planted the Cross and the True Sacrifice. No one can be saved without the Cross and without this Sacrifice. No one can be saved by accepting, in the name of a false love and a false sense of mercy, all kinds of abominations. There is only one kind of love that saves – because there is only one true love that purifies: it is the love of the Cross, the love of Divine Redemption, the love that Our Blessed Lord has shown us and that He communicates to us, and that He called “charity”. However, this love cannot exist without faith, nor without those who teach it.