



Presentation  
of the Synodal Committee  
for the Second Reading  
at the Third Synodal Assembly (3 - 5 February 2022)  
for the orientation text

---

On the path of conversion and renewal

Theological foundations of the Synodal Path-----

(1) Listening is at the beginning of the story of the escape of God's chosen people from slavery in Egypt: "I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers" (Exodus 3:7). God listens in order to relieve people's need - this is the Gospel. Today too, listening to the Word of God begins with listening to the wounded and marginalised, those who have been silenced, and the adjudged, to the members of the people of God who have fallen silent and yet rebel. Pope Francis writes with regard to the poor: "They have much to teach us. (...) We are called (...) to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them" (Francis, *Evangelii gaudium* 198). They undoubtedly include the victims and survivors of sexualised and spiritual violence in the Church.

(2) Listening to the Word of God and to one another is a fundamental implementation of all synodality. We need to seek, together, God's counsel for His Church and for His world to be able to go the necessary steps. Dialogue is indispensable to a Church that is seeking the truth. As Pope Paul VI put it in his inaugural encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* "For it becomes obvious in a dialogue that there are various ways of coming to the light of faith and it is possible to make them all converge on the same goal. (...) It will be a slow process of thought, but it will result in the discovery of elements of truth in the opinion of others." (Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam* 83). In dialogue the claim to truth will have to be argued and not be accepted out of pure authority. A dialogue lives by different assessments and points of view which are expressed. And it renounces them when, influenced by good arguments and new insights, they are no longer tenable. Dialogues usually lead to new, jointly-shared insights - even though they may reinforce what is

tried-and-tested with fresh plausibility. But dialogues also teach us to live with what is foreign and incomprehensible and to endure a dissent that cannot be resolved (cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*/GS 43, 10, also 75,5). Last but not least: Genuine dialogue does not stop at talking - it leads to decisions and to action that takes account of the new insights.

## I. Finding our way along the Synodal Path

(3) The Synodal Path is a dialogue carried out in an attitude of faith, leading to listening and seeing, to judging and acting. It starts during the crisis of the Church, which has been analysed by the MHG study. It must especially listen to the voice of those who are affected by abuse of power and sexualised violence. It develops from the assessments and points of view of all members of the Synodal Assembly. It needs a readiness to open up to new insights and to permit itself to be defined by them. It also lives from regularly seeking dialogue with new people and groups, within and outside the Church. The bishops are important participants in the discourse. They exercise the ministry of unity within their diverse local churches but they also constitute an essential link to the universal Church and to the Bishop of Rome. Their task is to listen to what "the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:7 and frequent other mentions). This makes it all the more important that everyone on the Synodal Path has a say and can take part in decisions, not only those who hold a senior office in the Church.

(4) The Synodal Path needs a reliable orientation. The Church must face up to her history and open up to the future. She needs new impulses to rediscover the Gospel. She needs new forces and alliances to help her draw practical conclusions. Without God's help, the Church is lost. It is in God's strength that she knows herself to be challenged not to suppress systemic abuses of spiritual power, but to fight against them, and not to squander the resources of faith, but to use them in a sustainable manner.

(5) Listening to the Word of God together demands that answers should be found to the pressing questions of the time, to pressing questions of faith, and to pressing questions of the Church. There are conflicts as to which are the right questions and answers; but there is a way and a possibility to dispute in fairness, to seek truth in the position taken up by one's opponent, and to work together to find a convincing solution which does not divide but unifies, and which leads not to the past, but to the future.

(6) The search for orientation requires theological clarity. The task of theology is to open up the sources of faith from which motivations emerge for the conversion and renewal of the Church. It is essential for the voice of the entire people of God to be heard; in particular there is an "option for the poor", which in turn is derived from the Gospel itself (Pope Francis, *Congresso internazionale per 40A° anniversario Conferenza Episcopato Latinoamericano a Puebla* on 3 October 2019).

(7) The task of the orientation text consists in clarifying the theological foundation for successful work in the Forums, and it serves the entire Synodal Path of evangelisation. The Forums deal with "Power and separation of powers", "Priestly existence", "Women in ministries and offices in the Church", as well as "Life in succeeding relationships". The orientation text cannot pre-empt each topic, regulate each conflict, or cover all the details that need to be addressed in the four main fields of the work of the Synodal Path. But it can make clear the fundamental

situations in the understanding of revelation, in the Church's mission, and in the quality of theological debate, so that these can be built on later.

(8) The Synodal Path needs spiritual guidance as well as theological discussion. There is no Synodal Path without worship and prayer. There is also none without deliberation and decision-making. The arguments for and against must be exchanged fairly. As long as human rights are respected, there should be no prohibitions of thought and speech, no fear of sanctions or discrimination. Decisions must be well-founded. They must be followed by actions.

## II. Rediscovering and reconnecting the places and times of theology

(9) Theology feeds from sources that are formative for the life of the whole Church. These sources are "places" of theology (*loci theologici*), but they are also "times" of theology, which always make it possible to discover the "today" of the voice of God (Psalm 95:7; Hebrews 3:7). It can be recognised at these places and in these times what God wishes to say to people by human means, and what people hear in faith as the Word of God. It is important to precisely define these places and times, to differentiate and determine their status, and to precisely clarify their interrelationships. They are found in the celebration of faith, in the proclamation of the Gospel, and in serving one's neighbours in the midst of the world. The Church applies the principle *Lex orandi - lex credendi*: She believes what she celebrates in worship. The Church knows of the internal link between the content of faith and the manner of faith (*fides quae* and *fides qua*). She also knows in faith that works of grace and justice are the touchstones of her acts: "Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves" (James 1:22).

(10) The most important "places" of theology include Holy Scriptures and tradition, the signs of the time, and the sense of faith of the people of God, as well as the Magisterium and theology. No place can substitute the other places; they all need the mutual distinction and association, mutual affirmation and restriction, mutual opening up and discussion. All these "places" need to be rediscovered and relinked in each time anew so that God's faithfulness to His promise has the power to renew the Church's faith from one generation to the next. Each of these places has a surplus of promise at each time which cannot be reduced by other "places" and other "times", but indeed strengthened. No place can substitute or dominate the other places; no time can substitute or dominate another time. On the contrary, there is a need to interlink the "places" and the "times" of faith in order to find an orientation and to grow in faith.

(11) The orientation text starts with "Scripture and tradition" in order to describe the basic, seminal testimonies of faith. It speaks of the "signs of the time", making it possible to recognise the "Kairos", the opportunity of the present, (Luke 16:9), and of the "sense of faith of the people of God", which "cannot err in matters of belief" under the promise of the Spirit (Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium* 12). The orientation text places the "Magisterium" and "theology" in a mutual context in order to designate their different responsibilities and at the same time their joint mission, namely to serve the truth of faith which lies in God's salvific word.

(12) Discovering and linking the places and times of theology here and today is an expression of faith which unifies and liberates the entire Church in listening to the Word of God. This is the Biblical experience of God, rooted in the hope of Israel: "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Ps 119:105).

## Opening up scripture and tradition

(13) The witness of Holy Scripture as the highest guiding principle (Second Vatican Council, *Dei verbum*/DV 21) and of living tradition are fundamental and landmark for the Church. The Synodal Path also takes its measure from them. Everyone taking this Path permits themselves to be approached by this witness in order to hear the Word of God, read the signs of the time, and participate in the sense of faith of the people of God. The Bible provides orientation for the life of today. Asking for the guidance of God's Spirit to carry on the tradition of faith in the unity of the Church overarches the entire Synodal Path.

(14) Scripture and tradition are much more than standards to be observed; they enable a belief in God's love for all His creatures. The Bible tells the story of how people discovered God's love, justice and grace in the history of Israel, in the mission of Jesus, and on the paths of the young Church. Tradition makes it clear that God's journey with people is continued in each generation because the people of God can trust in him "at all times" (Psalm 62:9): He says "Yes" to all his "promises" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

(15) It is essential that the Catholic Church not play Scripture and tradition off against one another, but that she communicate them together, and be open to all the different voices speaking as human witnesses of the Word of God. On the one hand, Scripture itself is a tradition because it has been formed in the living tradition of the Church, which is rooted in Judaism. On the other hand, tradition only transmits the Word of God when it forms itself "in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The meaning of Scripture reveals itself in tradition, and the meaning of tradition reveals itself in Scripture. It is therefore necessary to read and interpret the Holy Scripture in the light of tradition, and tradition in the light of the Holy Scripture. This can only succeed in the community of the faithful, and in connection with all people of good will.

*The Holy Scripture fundamentally testifies to the living God who creates, sustains and redeems people.*

(16) The Bible testifies to the formative "beginning" that God makes by saying his word again and again (Hebrews 2:3). Therefore it takes on a special significance with and towards the tradition as a fundamental witness to the Word of God. Greek Church Father Gregory of Nyssa describes the Holy Scripture as "a sure truth criterion for each teaching" (*Contra eunomium* 1:315). Read in the spirit of God, the Holy Scripture is the "guide" that lends orientation to the life and mission of the entire Church, also today and tomorrow (DV 21).

(17) The Holy Scripture is a constantly bubbling source of renewal in faith, a criticism of wrongdoing, an encouragement to attain freedom, a hope for redemption, and an invitation to love and to seek justice. The Bible is a living organism, inspired by God and written to give a voice to the poor, to comfort all who mourn, to free the captives and to make space for God's grace - always "today" (Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-19). The Bible stands for faith in God, love for one's neighbour, and hope of renewal which imparts a foretaste of redemption.

(18) The Bible is however also a book that many people find difficult to access. It is written in the language of a bygone age. It reflects a worldview that has perished. It contains a wealth of scriptures whose significance and context trigger questions and attract criticism. It is misused again and again to exercise dominion over others. This makes good explanations all the more

important. Whoever believes never remains stuck to the letter of the Bible, but seeks to breathe the "Spirit" that "gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6).

(19) The Holy Scripture fundamentally reveals how faith comes into being and reveals itself. The Christian Bible reaches from Creation through to the end of the world. It starts with God, who speaks (Genesis 1), and ends with a blessing for all (Revelation 22:21). The rainbow becomes the sign of a Covenant which God establishes with all of humankind (Genesis 9:13). The Bible calls to mind the lasting mission of Israel, the flight from Egypt (Exodus 12-15), God's revelation at Sinai (Exodus 19-40). It lends a voice to wisdom and prophecy. According to Luke, Mary testifies that God is on the side of poor: "He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly" (1:52). The New Testament sharpens the memory of Jesus, who in His birth, life and death, as well as in his resurrection, reveals God's unending nearness to people (Mark 1:15), His court ruling over sin (Matthew 25), His seeking for "what was lost" (Luke 19:10) and His imparting life "more abundantly" (John 10:10). The New Testament shows the awakening of the young Church which will gather people for faith among all the peoples: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28). The Bible brings together all who believe in Jesus Christ, with their Jewish brothers and sisters in faith. It promotes friendship with Jesus (John 15:12-17). It communicates the promise of Jesus Christ to remain on the path in the midst of His Church "until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

(20) The Bible is the record of God's revelation. The faith of the Church entails a conviction that the books of the Bible teach the "truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation" (*Dei verbum* 11). In this declaration, the Second Vatican Council invokes the New Testament: "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

(21) The Bible reveals in a variety of ways the unity of faith without which there is no diversity, and the diversity of faith without which there is no unity (Romans 12:1-8). The Canon brings together a chorus of voices lending expression to the search for God in different languages, with different tones, and in far-reaching visions of the future, expressing joy in God and questions about God, but also doubt about God, struggling with God, and again and again astonishment about God. The multifaceted nature of the texts creates a vociferous choir singing the melody of the Gospel in all its highs and lows: with all the harmonies and dissonances which belong to people's lives "through all eternity" (1 Chronicles 16:36), in the fundamental attitude of the God-given "hope of being restored to life by him" (2 Maccabees 7:14).

(22) People use human words in the Bible in order to give witness to the Word of God. They heard it and wrote it down in their times and at their place in order to enable people in all times and in all places who read, meditated and studied the Holy Scripture to hear God's comforting, liberating word. Saint Augustine put it as follows: "God speaks through people in a human manner by speaking thus, by seeking us" (Augustine, *De civitate Dei* XVII 6:2). This suspense between God's Word and human words ensures that the meaning of the Holy Scripture can never be exhausted, but always newly discovered.

(23) The Bible does not dictate the worldview, the gender roles, the values of Antiquity in which it arose. Rather, it penetrates and changes the prevailing conventions in order to create space for God. The Bible is also tied to an epoch in these processes of change. But it leads along the path towards opening up the freedom to be filled with life in faith, in each time (Galatians 5:1-13). The Bible has thus lost none of its topicality and relevance. Its witness for the Gospel must however be defended again and again against attempts to use the Bible to hamper, dominate and discriminate against people who believe and live differently than according to the norms of the Church or to fundamentalist ideas, which claim to be guided by the Bible.

(24) Any reform of the Church worthy of its name is measured against the Holy Scripture. The Bible does not provide a pattern that one only needs to copy, but gives impulses and sets criteria when it comes to walking along new paths and mastering new challenges. The Holy Scripture is not a wall into which we collide; it is a compass to take new paths with God's help. It encourages us to engage in creativity and criticism, to discover the old and explore the new. As Pope John XXIII put it: "It is not the Gospel that changes, but we who begin to understand it better" (*Apoftegma*, 24 May 1963).

(25) The Bible must be interpreted in such a way that the salvific power of the Gospel can be proclaimed. This salvific power is faith (Romans 1:16-17). The fact that interpretation is possible and necessary is based on the Bible itself: The Torah must be applied, wisdom lived, prophecy embraced. "Let the reader understand" (Mark 13:14). The history of the Church is also a history of interpretation of Scripture which is to impart the literal, spiritual and historical with an up-to-date meaning. The goal of interpreting Scripture is to always hear God's voice and permit it to enter our hearts "today" (Psalm 95:7; Hebrews 3:7).

(26) The interpretation of the Bible is not arbitrary, but is open to the truth of faith. That is why criteria are needed. They refer not only to the reconstruction of original meanings; they also refer to the discovery of contemporary scriptural meanings. The interpretation must be reasonable in both perspectives; it results from the critique of prevailing views, from the search for alternatives, and from agreeing on common convictions. Especially when it comes to the question of what orientation the Holy Scripture gives today, the interpretation must be open to insights from nature, and from the humanities and social sciences. It is essential to pay attention to the context of Scripture as a whole, and to the connection with the tradition of the Church, but also to the particular perspectives of individual texts (*Dei verbum* 12). It is above all the task of the Church's interpretation of Scripture to make God's Word audible in the many words of the Bible. Holy Scripture does not communicate a conviction that God's Spirit is stuck in letter of the text; rather, Scripture opens itself up as the witness of faith in the breadth of the Spirit which gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6).

(27) The interpretation of the Bible is a concern for all who read the Bible in order to discover God's story in the story of their own lives. It is a concern for the whole Church to find in the Bible the initial, fundamental witness of faith which moves each generation anew. It is a major task for the sermon, for catechesis, and for religious instruction, not only to inform people about the Bible, but to open it up for them for today as God's Word in human language. Interpretation is a matter for theology, the "soul" of which is the study of Holy Scripture (DV 24); theology can provide a scholarly explanation of the Bible from the time of its genesis; and it can recognise how it has been re-read and re-understood, again and again, as time has passed.



The interpretation of the Bible is not lastly a matter for the Magisterium, which however must respect freedom of theological research and put it to use. Its task after the Second Vatican Council is to explain the written Word of God that has been handed down “bindingly (*authentice*)”, whereby it is “not above the Word of God”, but “serves it” (DV 10). The Magisterium is not the final authority in matters of detail regarding exegesis, or in questions of doubt as to application; its task is rather to testify to the binding nature of the Holy Scripture by ensuring that the “table of [...] the word” (DV 21) is richly laid for the faithful, and that God’s Word comes to the fore in the interpretation of the Holy Scripture, which is “near” to all those who believe (Deuteronomy 30:14 - Romans 10:8).

*Tradition testifies to the creativity of the Spirit of God, which leads the Church of all times and places on the path of conversion and renewal.*

(28) God’s Spirit leads the Church on her path through time. Tradition is based on the Apostolic proclamation of the Gospel. Irenaeus of Lyon succinctly summed up this certainty of faith in the 2nd century A.D.: “The Lord taught, the Apostles handed it down” (Adversus haereses 4,37,7). The Apostolic tradition hands down the Word of God which is fundamentally given to us in the Holy Scripture in such a way that the Word of God can be perceived in each time and in all places in the human witness to faith: in celebration, in teaching, and in the ministry of faith. As faith is passed on, the successors of the Apostles have a fundamental task to perform: Their ministry consists of recognising and witnessing to the liberating truth of the Gospel so that all members of the Church can grow in faith (Ephesians 4:11-21).

(29) Tradition is not inflexible, it is a living thing. Traditionalism is wrong to only recognise the penultimate phase of church history as binding in most cases, thus curtailing the richness of tradition or forcing it into the corset of a system. As a living value, tradition brings about the unity of the Church, of faith and of baptism (Ephesians 4:4-5), under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as times change, and in the face of a diversity of cultures. Tradition is founded in the Holy Scripture, and new strength needs to be gathered from the sources, again and again. This should however not be understood in a Biblicistic manner. Tradition develops in the fellowship of the faithful, who celebrate God’s mystery, acknowledge God’s greatness, and follow God’s will. French author Madeleine Delbr el writes: “We are ready for each upheaval because our time has shaped us in this way, and because Christ must advance at today’s pace in order to remain among people” (Frei f ur Gott, Einsiedeln 1976, 71).

(30) Reforms are an integral part of tradition: Worship changes; doctrine develops; Caritas unfolds. In its dynamism, tradition is the process of repeatedly questioning anew the form of the Church and of faith today in order to always receive and shape her anew as God’s gift. The tradition of the Church is open to new discoveries, new insights and new experiences which challenge the traditional faith and demand new answers which serve the growth of the Church, the proclamation of the Gospel, and communion with all people to whom God’s grace applies. The philosophy and wisdom of the peoples, science and the arts, were and are inspiring factors for further development and for the ever-new unfolding of tradition. Prophetic voices are found not only within but also outside the Church. People’s living conditions and attitudes change over time; these changes are shaped by tradition, and also help to shape tradition.

(31) The tradition of the Church is polyphonic and diverse. It develops in the course of time. With regard to the worldwide Church, there is a wealth of forms in the East, in the South, in the West and in the North that lend expression to a catholic faith in different ways: through languages and rites, through liturgies and through the law via forms of community life, and through initiatives to see to it that poor are put first. The Catholic Church is gaining depth and breadth through ecumenical dialogue.

(32) In amongst the abundance of phenomena, in the contradictions of the times, and in the controversies regarding the right path, criteria are needed in order to recognise the tradition which is able to faithfully hand down and continually rediscover the Word of God. These criteria cannot be reduced to particular manifestations, rites or structures. Rather, it is God's Word itself that constitutes the tradition. No human being may claim to possess this Word of God, but all the faithful are called upon to hear it and to bear witness to it (Romans 10:17). It is crucial to promote love for God (Dt 6:4-5), which is shown in love for the neighbour (Mk 12:28-34). Wherever the "philanthropy" of God is shown in the lives of people (Tit 3:4), the tradition is alive.

(33) With regard to the Second Vatican Council, a distinction can be made between tradition and the traditions which are very important and helpful in faith for people of a specific time and culture, but are not generally widespread, are not passed on from one generation to the next, but can certainly also be recognised as a narrowing, as an exaggeration or fixation on a particular constellation. Tradition per se does not exist without *the* many traditions, but only within them; but a critique of tradition per se is required so that tradition per se can be recognised in traditions and from traditions. This forms part of the constant reorientation of the Church towards witnessing the Holy Scripture in light of the signs of the time.

(34) The subject of tradition is the people of God itself, which Jesus brings together in His name. The people of God is made up of different members and gifts. The decisive thing is the community formed in faith, from generation to generation, and from place to place. Tradition is therefore inseparable from the sense of faith of the people of God (*sensus fidei fidelium*): The 'sense of faith' of God's people lends expression to Scripture and tradition: They are recognised and visualised. The sense of faith in turn extends the tradition of the Church in each present time by taking the witness for the Holy Scripture as a yardstick, and interpreting the signs of the time. The promise applies that God's Spirit holds and guides His people in and to the whole truth of the Gospel (John 16:13).

(35) Distinguishing tradition in the multiplicity of human traditions is a task that is already set in the Bible in a different context (Mark 7:8). The Holy Scriptures provide the criteria for evaluation because, read in God's Spirit, they reveal the Word of God in its original meaning, which must be determined anew in any given time. The "signs of the times" indicate the direction in which the tradition must be further developed. In their intuition, the people of God recognise by virtue of the Spirit where the paths of faith run: what to preserve from the past, and what to discard, what to develop further, and what new things to integrate. The Magisterium has the task, in its charism of service, to continually re-open tradition as the source of a living faith, and to protect it from misinterpretation. Theology reflects what tradition is, what has been considered tradition, and what may be considered tradition.



(36) The Word of God does not constrain the Church, it liberates her. This is the witness of the Holy Scriptures, which is passed on in tradition. This liberating power must come into effect in the interpretation of the Scripture and of tradition, in the face of all tendencies to attempt to exert power over other people by referring to Scripture and tradition. Thanks to the Spirit of God, Scripture and tradition flow from the written word into the midst of life, and from the past into the present and the future. Scripture and tradition are decisive milestones for the path of conversion and renewal on the Synodal Path which the Church is taking. They make it visible for all who are seeking a meaning, happiness, comfort and strength, as well as solidarity and hope on the paths of their lives.

### **Exploring the signs of the time and the sense of faith of the faithful**

*The Church is instructed to interpret the signs of the time in her respective present as places of the salvific and liberating presence of God.*

(37) The Church is tasked with giving witness to the truth of God. She can only do so if, in addition to Scripture and tradition, she also carefully examines and interprets the signs of the time for traces of God's salvific and liberating presence. For the signs of the time open up an important gateway to discover God in the people's history and present. This will enable the Church to adequately answer the pressing questions about the meaning of human life for the present and for the future.

(38) The Second Vatican Council again raised awareness of the importance attaching to the 'signs of the time' in its pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*. The Council mentions such signs of the time by name (GS 4): the epochal changes in all areas of people's lives, and in all parts of the world; the crisis of growth, which on the one hand helps some people to attain high levels of prosperity, whilst keeping others trapped in "hunger and poverty"; "Never before has man had so keen an understanding of freedom", whilst at the same time "new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance." Pope John XXIII also identified hopeful signs at the time of the Council, namely "improvement in the economic and social condition of working men"; people growing together to form a "human family" which will soon no longer know foreign domination; and not least the growing participation of "women in public life". In these and similar 'signs of the time', people discover what is actually meant by truth, justice, charity and freedom. What is more, they attain "a better knowledge of the true God - a personal God transcending human nature" (John XXIII, *Pacem in terris* 40-45). The 'signs of the time' are places and occasions where God is newly present on each occasion and communicates His counsel (*Gaudium et spes* 11).

(39) The signs of the time stand for moments in which something significant reveals itself and forces one to make a decision. They stand for a *window*, a *momentum*, a *Kairos*. This places all of the signs of the present time on a Biblical foundation (Lk 12:56): The time fulfils itself with the coming of Jesus of Nazareth: The "kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk 1:15). The life and destiny of Jesus are *the* incarnate signs of God's salvific and liberating nearness in the past, present and future of humankind. Such signs of the time must therefore never remain without consequences. Jesus Christ already calls to conversion and discipleship in the face of the fulfilled time. Today's signs of the time must therefore at least make us reflect; at least interrupt our

habitual thinking and actions; at least make us consider new beginnings, also in the life of the Church.

(40) All the signs of the time admittedly still have to be interpreted in order to discover God's presence in them and to decipher His counsel. They must be distinguished in the abundance of historical and societal phenomena, and determined in terms of their significance for faith and the Church. Only in this way can orientations be gained for personal and societal life, or indeed for the life of the Church. The light of hope might be visible at the end of the tunnel for the "improvement in the economic and social condition of working men", or the participation of "women in public life". The crisis of growth, or the simultaneity of freedom and new forms of slavery, on the other hand, undoubtedly make the ambiguity of many signs of the time just as obvious. At the same time, they can point to both the salvific and to the unholy. The signs of the time must therefore be identified. What is the salvific in which God's will is made known? And what is the unholy which must be overcome in the light of the Gospel, that is in the light of the salvific and liberating nearness of God?

(41) This distinction is not new. The Scriptures of the Bible also call for the "discernment of spirits" (1 Cor 12:10), and warn against "false prophets" (1 John 4:1) who lead astray. The signs of the time must be interpreted and discerned in the spirit in which God's presence became flesh, became incarnate in the midst of humanity: in the life and work of Jesus Christ. His physical departure from the circle of His disciples does not by any means signify that He is absent. On the contrary, He himself sends the assistance of His Spirit (John 16:7-8). His spirit helps to distinguish and recognise the sinful from the righteous, the unholy from the holy, and the "authentic signs of God's presence and purpose" (*Gaudium et spes* 11). If this is successful, the 'signs of the time' also prove to be instances in which faith becomes known and is witnessed.

(42) Recognising the signs of the time in the power of God's Spirit, and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, requires an interplay between all further places and sources of faith. The Holy Scripture opens up a view of criteria which result from the distinction between true and false prophecy. Tradition proves that the discernment of spirits has always been a task for the faithful and for the Church - under changing conditions, and with varying success. The sense of faith of the faithful displays a high level of expertise through their nearness to people's everyday world. The Magisterium pays attention to consistency and connectivity to the confession of faith. And theology ensures the connection to the insights that must flow into the discourse of the sciences in the interpretation of all the signs of the time.

(43) The outcry of the victims of sexualised violence is a true sign of the time. The outcry draws attention to a terrible evil - namely, decades of violence in which priests, religious and other employees abused their spiritual and administrative power over children and juveniles as well as over adults, and especially women. The outcry of the victims is however also a sign of salvation: the protest of the survivors opposes the system of sexualised violence. It forces the Church into a salutary crisis of purification. It forces her as a whole to engage in conversion (*Lumen gentium* 9). Listening to this outcry and following it up by taking action through the courageous renewal of the Church's life can itself become a sign of the time. It becomes a place to give witness to the Christian faith. The sign of the time making the outcry of the victims of sexualised violence effective is not inconsequential. It brings into focus other questions of the life of the Church that in some cases have been open for a long time: the question of power and the desire

for the separation of powers; the sustainability of priestly ways of life; the desire for equal access to the ministries and offices of the Church for all genders; the lack of reception of the Church's sexual morals today. They too could prove themselves to be signs of the times. They too call to be interpreted on the trail of God's presence and God's counsel. The following also applies to them: "Do not quench the Spirit! Do not despise prophetic utterances! Test everything; retain what is good." (1 Thess 5:19-21)

*In the intuition of their faith, the members of the Christian people of God assure themselves of the truth of the Gospel.*

(44) The call of the Apostle Paul not to quench the Spirit of God was first addressed to the church in Thessalonica. As part of the canonical Scripture, it is handed down for the Church into the present day. It is therefore a reminder to all the people of God. The people of God, in all its members, is gathered into a community in order to discover the abiding presence of God in the manifold signs, and to explore His counsel: in the Scriptures of the Bible, in the traditions of the Church, and not least in the signs of the time. And it is in God's counsel itself that the whole people of God discovers and explores Him. Only all the members of the Church together compact the sense of faith necessary for this. Only in this way does the sense of faith of the faithful (*sensus fidei fidelium*) develop; only in this way does it become an open ear, a seeing eye or the sensitive touch of God. Mary, the Mother of the Lord, puts this sense of faith into words that come to life in the prayer of the Church: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my saviour" (Luke 1:46-47).

(45) The sense of faith of the faithful must itself contribute to shaping their life through faith. It must not merely hear what the Church's teaching conveys as messages of faith. And it is far more than the intuitions of the faithful who are able to sense the truth of the Scripture, tradition or the Church's teaching, as it were instinctively. The sense of faith of the faithful must also examine everything itself in the Spirit of God in order to find out what is good and right. The Spirit of God inwardly directs the faithful towards what determines everyone and everything: towards the spiritually-interwoven thread of personal conduct in life, the Church as God's community of discovery and exploration - in constant conversion, and on the path of discipleship of Jesus Christ. God thus communicates again and again in the sense of faith of the faithful. In this spiritual act, the faithful adopt the truth contained in Scripture, tradition or the signs of the time, out of an inner conviction. The role models are the Saints, who themselves frequently struggled with their Church in their time, but in the midst of all adversities gave authentic witness to and inspired the faith of God's people, irrespective of their gender, of their origin, and of any office in the Church.

(46) The sense of faith of the faithful is rooted in the common priesthood of all who are baptised and confirmed. The common priesthood fundamentally allows active participation in the three-fold ministry of Christ, the ministry of leading, the ministry of sanctifying, and the ministry of teaching (LG 12 and 36). For the dogmatic constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the nature of the Church, this common priesthood has very far-reaching consequences for the teaching of the Church. The common priesthood means that the people of God in its entirety "cannot err (...) They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when "from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" [Augustine] they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals" (LG 12). The

sacramental ministry of the ordained priesthood represents Christ as Head of the Church and ensures the unity of the Church - in all places and through all times. In this it serves the common priesthood of all who are baptised and confirmed. This ministry is indispensable. The unity of the Church lies not in the uniformity of her members and their individual views. The unity of the Church consists in the unambiguity of her mission and of its many-voiced expressions.

(47) This unambiguity must be struggled for again and again. It is on the test bench when there is long-lasting disagreement on central questions of faith within the people of God. This becomes particularly evident when a church doctrine is not taken on board by a major section of the people of God despite many clarifications and explanations. Here too, the sense of faith of the faithful can emerge. Of course, ongoing dissent by no means automatically negates the truth of a theological insight or of a doctrine that is presented. But it does indicate that it must be examined, and if necessary further developed. It is the better arguments and more profound insights that count, and certainly not the number of loud voices or the forcefulness of power-conscious positions. Scripture and tradition never tell a tale of simple majority decisions, but much more of the striving to seek out the truth together. After such a joint quest, there are certainly also numerical votes that lead to majority decisions, for example at councils, including those where unanimity was not established. The involvement of the sense of faith of all the faithful in the other places and sources of faith prevents it being simply equated with a prevailing opinion in a present place. The sense of faith feeds on the sources of Scripture and tradition; it interprets the signs of the time, and sees itself strengthened by the Magisterium. The Magisterium, in turn, does not dictate any rules to it, but inspiredly follows its intuition. Theology encourages it through analysis and critical reflection.

(48) The common sense of faith of all the faithful is collected in the conscience of each individual faithful. This opens up the view to true and good moral acts. The sense of faith of the faithful expresses itself - guided by the Spirit of God - in particular in the "truth of conscience" (John Paul II, *Dominum et vivicantem* 31). Conscience confronts each person individually with God's direct call. He calls on him or her to unconditionally direct conduct in life towards the love of God, and of his or her neighbour. Love of God and of one's neighbour points to the conscientious insight of each one of the faithful into the common quest of all the faithful, indeed of all people of good will (GS 16). No personal judgment of conscience could have permanence if it were to close itself to the pros and cons of common considerations with others. It must allow itself to be critically questioned in cases of doubt. It is quite possible that an idiosyncratically-accentuated decision of conscience could pass its acid test in this respect. It is no coincidence that the word conscience refers to knowing together, to *con-scientia*, to *syn-eidesis* (1 Cor 10:28). But in the end, it always appeals to the individual's own insight, to his or her own judgment, to his or her own decision. The deeply-personal, conscientious final decision about one's own way of life is binding - even if it should turn out that it was made in error. To ignore conscience, to control it from outside, to eliminate it, or even to neglect it, would be to negate the personal centre of people and their dignity that was created by God.

(49) In the "truth of conscience", the sense of faith of the faithful is an independent faculty of knowledge and judgment. The sense of faith establishes no exclusive claim of ownership of a single faithful. The sense of faith of the faithful pushes for a consensus to be reached, for a jointly-shared sense - even if such a consensus is not always reached and the community of the

faithful then has to live with dissent over a period of time. The Church is not only a community of remembrance, but also a community of dialogue. She fundamentally involves all who are baptised and confirmed. The bishops in particular are responsible for ensuring that a dialogue may take place in alignment on the essentials, and does not end in a confusion of voices. As leaders of the local churches, they are advocates of unity, and bridge-builders within the world-spanning community of dialogue. They thus serve the “truth of conscience” - the formation of conscience in the community, as well as for each individual. These special advocates and bridge-builders can however never take their place (*Amoris laetitia* 37).

### **Taking the Magisterium and theology seriously**

(50) In common with the other witnessing instances of faith, the Magisterium and theology are dynamic variables. They are represented by people who are called in various ways to testify to and teach God’s Word. The Magisterium and theology belong together from the beginning. For the Word of God is also the foundation of the magisterial proclamation. Theology is not only represented here by the scholarly discipline of that name, but ultimately by all those who are baptised who testify to their faith in various contexts, speak of their experiences with God, and pray to Him. The Magisterium and theology, as the entire body of the faithful, are bound to the revelation of God’s Word, to Holy Scripture, tradition, the signs of the time, and the consensus of the whole people of God. This consensus is articulated in terms of the faith of all who are baptised. Like every other place of faith, it is founded in the Holy Spirit. *Lumen gentium* 12 stresses that the entire body of the faithful shares in Christ’s prophetic office and in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and that an inerrancy of doctrinal authority is inherent in their consensus. The inadmissibility of the personal and dialogical exercise of the Magisterium is also the foundation for the struggle of the Synodal Path for the course to be steered by the Church in our time.

(51) Tradition speaks with regard to the individual faithful of a “*sentire cum ecclesiam*”, of a feeling and breathing with the Church, to express that there is not only an outward, but also an inward relationship with the people of God. This connection can be perceived as a successful, joyful experience, or as a burdened, sorrowful one. Suffering under or in the Church is prevalent today in many, but especially among those who have fallen foul of abuse. This makes it difficult to live the joy of the Gospel and to experience the salvific dimension of the sacramentality of the Church. The Magisterium and theology need to take feeling with the Church and the *sensus fidei* seriously, given that any talk of a consensus in the Church would remain abstract without these two dimensions. Church educator Catherine of Siena showed with her letters to the Pope that the “*sentire cum ecclesiam*” also does not rule out constructive criticism of the conduct of the Magisterium.

*The most important task of the episcopal and Papal Magisterium is the authentic proclamation of God’s Word.*

(52) The leadership ministry in the people of God, which itself is in a serious crisis, is founded in this ministry of proclamation. Through baptism and confirmation all members of the Church receive a share in the priestly, royal, prophetic ministry of Jesus Christ, and are thus called in different ways to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. The ordained ministry is oriented towards and intended to serve the common priesthood of all the baptised. The bishops have been understood as vicars and ambassadors of Christ (LG 27) since the Second Vatican Council; the preaching of

the Gospel occupies an eminent place among their principal duties (LG 25). They are in collegial communion with one another, and with the Petrine office of the Bishop of Rome, and are appointed to the ministry of sanctification, teaching and leadership.

(53) Universality and regionality make up the living diversity and unity of catholicity. The form of faith changes diachronically over the epochs, and synchronously distinguishes itself due to the different manifestations of the local church. A bishop, as representative of the faith of the apostles and at the same time of the respective local church, has to give voice to this faith in the universal community of bishops. The universal Magisterium of the Church is exercised not only by the Pope, but by the whole body of bishops, under his direction and in a collegial and conciliar manner. Infallible decisions of the extraordinary Magisterium are subject to special conditions, and for good reasons form the absolute exception in the Catholic Church. The ordinary Magisterium of the Pope and the individual bishops are also required to trust in the working of the Spirit of God. It is however not exempt from possible errors, unless everyone agrees in a consensus.

(54) These forms of the exercise of the Magisterium have been supplemented by the synodal tradition at universal Church and regional level since time immemorial, and Pope Francis has declared that he wishes to enhance this. An ancient principle of the Church goes as follows: "that which affects all as individuals must be approved by all" (CIC ca. 119, 3) There is therefore a need to consider how participation of the common priesthood in future councils and at universal synodal level can be guaranteed. Unity in the Catholic understanding is no static concept. It takes place in concrete terms between ourselves and the triune God, in the diversity of the people, local churches and cultures. Unity is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and our task at the same time, for it cannot be taken for granted. We also notice this in the controversial debates within the Church, which show how lively and diverse the unity of the Church is. "It is not easy to grasp the truth that we have received from the Lord. And it is even more difficult to express it. So we cannot claim that our way of understanding this truth authorizes us to exercise a strict supervision over others' lives. Here I would note that in the Church there legitimately coexist different ways of interpreting many aspects of doctrine and Christian life; in their variety, they "help to express more clearly the immense riches of God's word". (Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate* 43).

(55) The Magisterium is called to unlock the immense riches of God's Word; thus it is not a body monitoring the Church's uniformity. In connection with the preservation of unity, the Magisterium is thus entrusted with the task of enabling and protecting the legitimate diversity of faith and doctrine that has always belonged to the life of the Church and to the working of the Spirit of God. The Church's development in the 19th Century led to a strengthening of the Papacy, but also to a centralism the consequences of which are still felt today. The Magisterium had previously rather held back in theological disputes beyond conciliar decisions, and left the clarification of central questions to the theological debates that were shaped in the Middle Ages by the great traditions of the religious orders. Thomas of Aquinas spoke of the Magisterium of the bishops and the Magisterium of theology. The consequence of the First Vatican Council was that the Papal Magisterium, for apologetic reasons, increasingly claimed the task of and competence for theology for itself, and understood itself as a faith-defining defensive instance in the face of a modernity which it perceived as a threat to faith. This hindered the reception of knowledge



from the humanities and natural sciences, and thus also prevented attempts by theology to open up new paths of faith in dialogue with contemporary thinking, and to make faith in God understandable to the people of that time.

(56) A new epoch started in the Church with the Second Vatican Council. The deliberations that took place at this Council led to a constructive dialogue within the Church and with the world, and to a new attitude towards other denominations and religions, as well as towards philosophy and atheism. The Papal Magisterium increasingly sought to establish a dialogue with theology and with the other sciences, the insights of which were now also positively received. This also led to a new flourishing of theology, the independence and specific Magisterium of which were acknowledged. The Second Vatican Council chose a clearly different language than the councils before it: no longer excluding and pronouncing condemnations, but accepting the world into God's love, and admitting of the possibility of salvation outside the Church. Thus, the language of the Magisterium today should also take into account how its words affect people.

(57) The tension between specific stipulations of the Magisterium and their reception by the faithful cannot be denied, and requires synodal clarification. The Popes and the Curia often reacted to reform-orientated synodal developments in the local churches with reserve or rejection, or did not even respond to pressing questions and urgent requests, such as the Würzburg Synod. This led to fresh disappointments and tensions. The Synodal Path notes that the Roman Magisterium also intervenes in our time in ongoing clarification processes and discussions, and insists on doctrinal positions that many faithful, including deacons, priests and bishops, far beyond Germany, no longer find comprehensible. The alienation between the Church's teachings and people's ever more complex lives that was noted by Pope Francis and the Family Synod is also becoming a massive problem in the proclamation of the Gospel for the local churches in Germany. Particular significance attaches here to adherence to the meaning of the Scriptures, to the living tradition, to the signs of the time, to research into theology, and especially to the *sensus fidei*.

(58) The specifications of the Church's doctrine are also to be critically examined by theology. If the Magisterium points out in certain questions that the Church does not have the authority to change anything, then it is necessary to examine what is at issue: Is it really a doctrinal position of the highest binding force in these cases, or a doctrine that is to be located at the top of the hierarchy of truths, or must we presume that it is a *ius divinum*, that is a divine law? Are the factual arguments put forward convincing? The authority argument alone cannot suffice here. The Synodal Path is therefore seeking new perspectives out of a pressing pastoral need. Moreover, it should be noted that even the authentic ordinary Magisterium may err where there is doubt as to whether it expresses the consensus of all in faith. This question assumes particular importance when we see that lay people and ministers worldwide are questioning a not inconsiderable number of the Church's doctrinal positions. Theology has a duty to also support the Magisterium through constructive criticism. We call to mind that Thomas Aquinas for example was by no means born as a teacher of the Church, but in fact was himself regarded extremely critically in his time because of the strength of his innovation. It is repeatedly revealed how necessary dialogue is in order to reach a consensus in our time. "Such a mission requires in the first place that we foster within the Church herself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony, through the full recognition of lawful diversity. Thus, all those who compose the one People of

God, both pastors and the general faithful, can engage in dialogue with ever abounding fruitfulness. For the bonds which unite the faithful are mightier than anything dividing them. (GS 92).

*Theology is included in cooperation and dialogue between all places of faith.*

(59) We recall that John Paul II rehabilitated Galileo Galilei after centuries, and called for the Holy Scripture not to be understood literally and for dialogue with the sciences to be taken seriously. The crux here is formed by the interpretation of the world from the point of view of faith, and the question of people's salvation and lives. It follows from this that the historicity and temporality of the Church's doctrinal statements are also to be taken into account. The Synodal Path therefore attempts to present theological arguments in a differentiated way. This is also to aid the Magisterium in examining previous statements in the light of scientific findings and reflections, whose inherent lawfulness is to be appreciated, and to reflect on necessary changes in teaching positions. This is at the same time a contribution to the discernment of spirits. Theology reflects faith in God in a plural way, and is tasked with permitting faith and rationality to come into their own as equals. In the same way as the Holy Scripture and tradition, theology as a science - in its exegetical, historical, systematic and practical manifestation - belongs to the witnessing instances and places of identification of the faith of the Church, along with the sense of faith of all the faithful and the Magisterium. It relies here on engaging in a dialogue with the other sciences, with which it seeks together to find the truth and its significance for people. There are different hermeneutical approaches in theology, and these themselves are open to the many schools of thought in an increasingly complex world, in order to be able to enter into a fruitful dialogue with them. Theology itself takes place in this rich plurality.

(60) "Sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation. By scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ, theology is most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word." (DV 24). So just as the Church as a whole must reinterpret the text of the Holy Scripture again and again, because this text is not unambiguous, so too the soul of theology, that is the study of the Holy Scripture (DV 24), must lend a voice to the one truth founded in the mystery of God, equally in its diversity and multiplicity of meaning.

(61) In the dogmas of the Church, truths revealed by God are expressed in a historical and binding manner; they aim to illuminate and strengthen our faith. Nevertheless they are also texts with multiple meanings, and in the course of history they have to be questioned again in terms of their meaning. Council texts are often compromise texts, given that they aim to achieve consensual unanimity. This is also taught by the Second Vatican Council, the reception of which is still underway in different and conflicting paths. If its texts were not so full of suspense, we would have long since agreed on their meaning. Theology is aware of the tension of unity and diversity of such texts, of their binding nature, but also of their historicity and contextuality, which gives us food for thought. Pope Francis reminds us in this context that God has surprises in store for us again and again: There are no easy solutions when we ask in a differentiated manner for the meaning of God's Word for people in our time. "When somebody has an answer for every question, it is a sign that they are not on the right road. They may well be false prophets, who use religion for their own purposes, to promote their own psychological or intellectual theories. God infinitely transcends us; he is full of surprises. We are not the ones

to determine when and how we will encounter him; the exact times and places of that encounter are not up to us. Someone who wants everything to be clear and sure presumes to control God's transcendence." (Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate* 41).

(62) In common with the other sciences, theology must accept that each answer gives rise to new questions, and that the search for the truth does not end, even if the truth has been found, until God brings time to an end. "At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully" (1 Cor 13:12). God's mystery is a lasting challenge for theology and for the Church as a whole. It leads to a properly understood self-critical attitude of humility in which one's own interpretations and convictions are placed into perspective again and again, i.e. they are referred back to the mystery of God's boundless love. Even if He is infinitely close to all people, He at the same time transcends all human thinking capacities. Theology is thus also tasked with countering fundamentalist temptations where positions of individuals or groups are to be made absolute and not subject to debate in such a way as to make it incapable of dialogue. A self-correction emerges in the scientific community of theology via the critical scholarly discourse. A critical counterpart is also needed in dialogue with the Magisterium, that is for both partners in the dialogue.

### III. Deliberating and deciding in the power of the Spirit

(63) Theological criteria have been identified in this text which guide the work of the Forums of the Synodal Path and the drafting of their resolutions. They aim to open up spaces for new paths, and show that there may be changes in the Church, indeed that there must be changes in times of crisis. How else could one speak of a serious conversion?

(64) The concept of transformation is of central significance not only in the celebration of baptism and Holy Mass. It is the guiding concept for a Christian life: All are called by God to be constantly changed and transformed by His love. How does this happen? Is there really change, or do we ultimately cling to the same familiar patterns, structures and attitudes? Does the Synodal Path really bring about change? If there is no transformation, the Church becomes rigid; she betrays the living God and the people who are seeking God today.

(65) The Church is a royal priesthood, a holy nation under God, so that they may announce the great acts of God in the name of Jesus Christ (Ex 19:3; 1 Peter 2:9). She is "in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (*Lumen gentium* 1). Because of her holy origin, from which she can constantly draw strength, the Church can be called holy in spite of all her shortcomings. She lives by the promise so that she cannot be destroyed by the forces of evil (Matthew 16:18-19).

(66) The reference to the holiness of the Church, which can only be founded in God alone, is connected with the reference to her sinfulness. The knowledge of the Church's sinfulness must not be used in today's crisis as an argument to simply carry on as before because sin and guilt have always been part of her. On the contrary: If the Church takes her own theology of repentance seriously, radical self-criticism, honest repentance, open confession of guilt and a genuine change of direction in her attitude, her actions and, where necessary, also in the change of

structures are indispensable. Only in this way can a path of reconciliation also be taken which the Church hopes for and which only God in His mercy can open up for her.

(67) Pope Francis paints a new picture of the Church today, which he sees as a "field hospital" (*Evangelii Gaudium* 49). The Church is to help heal the people's wounds, and not to open up new ones. She should speak a language that people understand, which does not wound and discriminate, but allows people to recognise God's kindness. The Church is called upon, trusting in God's mercy, not to persist in her sins, but to resolutely combat the causes of abuse and to courageously pursue new paths of the common mission. To respond to this call is the mandate of all members of the Church. All are called upon to assume their responsibility; all must also have the right to be involved in the processes of consultation and decision-making.

(68) The model of a self-renewing synodal Church, which Pope Francis resolutely promotes, is also the model of the Synodal Assembly, which seeks to involve itself in the worldwide Synodal Path. This universal process deliberately embraces the participation of the common priesthood of all who are baptised. The question of the appropriate participation of the whole of God's people in the deliberations and decisions in the Church arises worldwide, and demands new answers. Above all, the victims and survivors of abuse must be heard. Their experiences, their indignation, and their complaints, must find an echo in the teaching and in the practice of the Church. The experiences of people and the proclamation of God's Word are already inseparable for the Holy Scriptures. No one may tear them apart.

(69) Because of the systemic abuse in the Catholic Church, the four themes of the synodal forums are indications of the first steps to be taken on the Church's path of conversion and renewal. They are prerequisites for evangelisation that accompanies people's lives, which is the mission of the Church, and draw consequences from the fact that the Church has to permit herself to be evangelised in order to bear credible witness to God's Gospel. The theological clarifications needed to promote participation and the separation of powers, to shape priestly life today, to strengthen women in ministries and offices in the Church, and to mediate between the sexual morals of the Church and the lives of people today, are dealt with in the texts of the Forums, and lead to concrete options for action.

(70) The synodal experience "allows us to walk together not just in spite of our differences, but seeking the truth and taking on the richness of the polar tensions at stake." (Pope Francis, *Let us dream*, 108). Pope Francis speaks of a diverse Church in which the image of unity is not a pyramid or a circle, but a solid polyhedron, i.e. a three-dimensional polygon. This is an exciting image that combines diversity and unity.

(71) Gathered and united by the Holy Spirit, the Synodal Assembly lives and experiences the rich diversity of the Church, united in the common faith. All members of the Synodal Assembly are called to pray to God, celebrate the liturgy together, and live the diaconal mission of the Church in service to all people. This unity does not rule out different positions also being taken up on certain questions of the Church's life and doctrine in the future, and in mutual respect. Everyone involved in the Synodal Path will thus struggle together for the path of the Church in the future, and will continue to seek a synodal understanding: The Synodal Path has not come to an end, but is to continue!