



Introduction: A Question That Is Shaping the Present of the Church

Few issues have generated as much debate in recent years within the Catholic world as the so-called synodal process and, in particular, the proposals concerning greater participation of the lay faithful in discernment, governance, and certain processes of ecclesial decision-making.

The Synod on Synodality has brought profound questions to the forefront regarding the very nature of the Church: What is the role of the laity? How far can their participation go? Is there a risk of transforming the structure of the Church into something resembling a parliamentary democracy? Can the co-responsibility of all the baptized be strengthened without weakening the sacramental authority established by Christ?

These questions are not merely administrative. They touch the very heart of Catholic ecclesiology, that is, the understanding of what the Church is and how Christ intended it to be governed.

From a traditional Catholic perspective, many faithful, priests, and theologians view certain formulations present in some synodal documents with concern—not because they reject the participation of the laity, but because they fear that the essential distinction between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful may become blurred.

The fundamental question is simple but decisive:

Can the Church adopt structures proper to modern parliaments without altering her divine identity?

To answer properly, it is necessary to return to the sources: Sacred Scripture, Apostolic Tradition, the Fathers of the Church, the Magisterium, and the two-thousand-year history of Catholicism.



The Church Was Not Born as a Democracy

One of the first affirmations made by traditional Catholic theology is that the Church is not a human creation.

She was not born from a constitutional assembly.

She did not emerge from a vote.

She was not the result of popular consensus.

The Church arises directly from the will of Christ.

Our Lord did not gather His disciples to ask them which model of government they preferred.

It was He who chose the Apostles.

It was He who established a hierarchy.

It was He who conferred authority.

When Christ says to Peter:

| *“You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church” (Mt 16:18),*

He is not submitting that decision to consultation.

Authority comes from Christ Himself.

Likewise, after the Resurrection, the Lord entrusts a specific mission to the Apostles:

| *“As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn 20:21).*

The apostolic mission does not arise from the community.



Rather, the community receives those whom Christ has sent.

This reality constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of traditional Catholic ecclesiology.

Authority in the Church is descending, not ascending.

It proceeds from God to the legitimately constituted shepherds.

It does not proceed from the base upward as it does in modern political systems.

The Authentic Meaning of Synodality

It is important to avoid caricatures.

Catholic tradition has always known forms of synodality.

The word “synod” literally means “walking together.”

From the earliest centuries there existed synods, local councils, and episcopal gatherings.

However, historically these bodies possessed an essential characteristic:

they were presided over by those who held apostolic authority.

The faithful could be heard.

Theologians could offer counsel.

Religious could provide discernment.

But doctrinal and disciplinary decisions belonged to the bishops.

This structure was never considered an injustice.

On the contrary.

It was understood as part of the order willed by God.



The problem arises when some interpret synodality using contemporary political categories.

Then concepts appear such as:

- representation;
- majority rule;
- binding consensus;
- decisive voting;
- balance of powers.

And it is here that many traditional Catholics raise concerns.

Because these categories belong to the political sphere, not necessarily to the ecclesial one.

What Is the “Parliamentarization” of the Church?

When critics speak of “parliamentarization,” they are not criticizing the participation of the laity.

They are pointing to another phenomenon.

Parliamentarization consists of transferring to the Church the logic proper to civil parliaments.

In a parliament:

- authority proceeds from the voters;
- the majority decides;
- political truth can change;
- laws can be modified through voting.

But the Church functions differently.

Revealed truth does not depend on majorities.

The commandments cannot be altered by suffrage.



The sacraments are not the property of an assembly.

The Catholic faith is not the result of negotiation.

The Church receives a revealed deposit that she must faithfully guard.

Saint Paul writes to Timothy:

“Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us” (2 Tim 1:14).

Notice that Paul does not speak of reinventing the deposit.

He speaks of safeguarding it.

The Common Priesthood and the Ministerial Priesthood

One of the most delicate points in this debate consists in properly understanding the difference between two complementary realities.

On the one hand, there is the common priesthood of all the baptized.

On the other, the ministerial priesthood conferred through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

The Second Vatican Council clearly taught this distinction.

All the faithful participate in the mission of Christ.

All are called to holiness.

All possess baptismal dignity.



All can actively collaborate in the life of the Church.

But this does not mean that all possess the same function.

The priest receives a sacramental configuration to Christ the Head.

The bishop receives the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Pastoral authority is linked precisely to this sacramental reality.

For this reason, traditional theology insists that equality in dignity does not imply identity of functions.

Just as in a family all possess equal human dignity but fulfill different roles, so within the Church there are diverse vocations and responsibilities.

The Risk of Confusing Consultation with Deliberation

Here we encounter a central issue.

The Church has always practiced consultation.

Pastors must listen.

Bishops must know the needs of the faithful.

Priests must attend to the experiences of their communities.

No one disputes this.

The concern arises when consultation becomes binding deliberation.

The difference is enormous.

To consult means to seek advice.



To deliberate means to participate formally in decision-making.

From the traditional perspective, authority can and should listen broadly.

However, ultimate responsibility belongs to the legitimately constituted pastor.

Christ did not say to Peter:

“Consult and then let the majority decide.”

He said:

| *“Feed my sheep” (Jn 21:17).*

Pastoral responsibility remains upon Peter and his successors.

The Experience of Some Separated Christian Communities

Many traditional observers also point to certain historical lessons.

Numerous ecclesial communities that emerged from the Protestant Reformation gradually adopted increasingly democratic structures.

Over the centuries, some of them began to modify fundamental doctrinal matters through internal voting.

What one generation considered immutable truth could be revised by the next.

The consequence was, in many cases, growing doctrinal fragmentation.

The Catholic Church has always held that revealed truth is not subject to such processes.

The faith received from the Apostles constitutes a sacred inheritance.



It does not belong to a particular generation.

It belongs to Christ.

For this reason, traditionalists view with concern any structure that could open the door to a parliamentary mentality.

The Vision of the Fathers of the Church

The earliest Christian writers display an extraordinarily clear vision of ecclesial authority.

At the beginning of the second century, Saint Ignatius of Antioch repeatedly insisted on the necessity of remaining united to the bishop.

For him, communion with the bishop guaranteed communion with the universal Church.

He could not conceive of a community governed by autonomous assemblies.

Episcopal authority was regarded as an extension of the apostolic mission.

This vision would remain constant for centuries.

Not because the Church despised the faithful.

On the contrary.

Because she understood apostolic authority as a gift of Christ intended to protect unity and truth.

Does This Mean That the Laity Should Remain



Passive?

Not at all.

This is one of the most common misunderstandings.

Catholic tradition has never reduced the laity to spectators.

The great lay saints transformed the history of the Church.

Let us think of:

- Saint Catherine of Siena;
- Saint Louis IX;
- Saint Thomas More;
- Blessed Carlo Acutis.

None of them needed deliberative power to change the world.

Their influence was born of holiness.

The Church is renewed primarily through saints, not through structures.

History demonstrates that authentic reforms arose from profound conversions, not from administrative modifications.

True Co-Responsibility in the Church

The word co-responsibility can be understood correctly or ambiguously.

Correctly understood, it means that every baptized person has a mission.

Parents evangelize their children.

Catechists transmit the faith.



Professionals bear witness in the world.

Religious consecrate their lives to God.

Priests sanctify through the sacraments.

Bishops govern their dioceses.

Everyone collaborates.

But not everyone performs the same function.

Unity does not require uniformity.

Communion does not eliminate hierarchy.

Authentic co-responsibility consists in each member of the Body of Christ fully living his or her vocation.

The Challenge of Our Time

We live in a deeply democratic culture.

This has positive aspects.

It has fostered citizen participation.

It has promoted the defense of many legitimate rights.

However, there is a risk in assuming that every institution must be organized according to the same principles.

The Church is not a State.

She is not a corporation.

She is not a labor union.



She is not a political association.

She is the Mystical Body of Christ.

Her structure does not arise from sociological theories but from a divine institution.

Therefore, any reform must respect what belongs to the constitution willed by Christ.

Participation can grow.

Consultation can be expanded.

Listening can be deepened.

But always while preserving the essential distinction between those who have received the apostolic mission of governing and those who actively collaborate in the life of the Church.

A Pastoral Perspective: Listening Without Altering the Church’s Nature

From a pastoral perspective, the challenge is to avoid two extremes.

The first extreme would be clericalism.

That is, unjustly ignoring the spiritual and human richness of the lay faithful.

The second extreme would be ecclesial egalitarianism.

That is, diluting the sacramental nature of authority.

The traditional Catholic solution has always sought a balance.

Listen broadly.

Discern prudently.



Respect the structure willed by Christ.

Strengthen the mission of the laity without transforming the Church into a parliamentary democracy.

Conclusion: The Church Walks Together, but Not Like a Parliament

The question of deliberative power for the laity constitutes one of the most important debates in contemporary Catholicism.

From the traditional perspective, the principal concern is not the participation of the faithful—which the Church has always valued—but the possible confusion between participation and authority.

The Church is synodal because she walks together.

But she is also hierarchical because Christ founded her that way.

The Church listens to everyone.

But she does not receive her authority from everyone.

The Church consults.

But ultimate responsibility belongs to those who have received Holy Orders and apostolic succession.

In a world accustomed to measuring all authority according to democratic criteria, Catholics are called to remember a fundamental truth: the Church does not belong to a majority, nor to a particular generation, nor to an ideological movement.

The Church belongs to Christ.

And precisely because she belongs to Christ, she must faithfully preserve the form that He Himself willed to give her.



As Saint Paul reminds us:

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb
13:8).

The authentic renewal of the Church will never consist in becoming more like the world, but in becoming more like Christ. And that renewal always begins with holiness, fidelity to Apostolic Tradition, and loving obedience to revealed truth.