

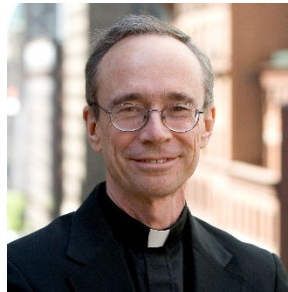


Welcome to the
ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM
 HOME PAGE
 DISCUSSING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DISCUSSED



Thurs., Nov. 9, 2023, 1pm
 St. Blase, 1215 Fifteen Mile Road
 Sterling Heights, MI

Fr. Tom Reese, sj
 "The Synod: What Happened; What Didn't; What's Next?"



INTRODUCTION

BISHOP TOM GUMBLETON

Good afternoon.

We're in for a great talk today from an exceptional speaker, Fr. Tom Reese; and he is going to talk to us today about the Synod: What happened? What didn't Happen, and What's Next? Fr. Reese is particularly qualified to give this presentation.



He has a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley. He is the former editor-in-chief of *America* magazine (1998-2005). He is a visiting scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC (1994-95) and at Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, California (2005-06). His former Woodstock senior fellow (1985-98), working on various research projects on topics ranging from episcopal conferences to the Catechism for the Universal Church. Author of a trilogy examining church organization and politics on the local, national, and international levels: *Archbishop: Inside the Power Structure of the American Catholic Church* (Harper & Row, 1989),

A Flock of Shepherds: The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (Sheed & Ward, 1992), and *Inside the Vatican: The Politics and Organization of the Catholic Church* (Harvard University Press, 1997).

Fr. Tom Reese is a widely known analyst and commentator on what's happening in the Catholic Church. His insightful articles regularly appear in *America Magazine* and *The National Catholic Reporter*.

We've invited him to share his reflections on what happened (and what didn't happen) at the recent October Synod gathering in Rome as well as offer a look ahead "at what's next" in the Synod process. Fr. Tom Reese (applause)

The Synod on Synodality

Fr. Tom Reese, SJ

What happened? What Didn't Happen? What's Next?



Synod on Synodality

Thomas Reese, SJ
ReligionNewsService.com

What is Synodality?

In its broadest sense, synodality can be understood as Christians walking in communion with Christ toward the Kingdom along with the whole of humanity.

Its orientation is towards mission, and its practice involves gathering in assembly at each level of ecclesial life.

It involves reciprocal listening, dialogue, community discernment, and creation of consensus as an expression that renders Christ present in the Holy Spirit, each taking decisions in accordance with their responsibilities.

Synodality involves listening, and it involves listening dialogue, and trying to reach consensus as a community on who we are and what we want to do. That last one's tough, reaching consensus, as we will see. They certainly did not do that all the time at the Synod; and that's, you know, that's who we are; and that's where we are.

So, this is what we mean when they use the word synodality. It's walking together with Christ. It's oriented towards a mission, which is preaching the gospel of the Father's love and compassion towards us, and all of creation; and it's work, you know, it's listening dialogue, community discernment together.

What happened prior to the Synod?

- **On March 7, 2020, Pope Francis announced the Synod on Synodality.**
- **In September 2021, the Synod Secretariat released a preparatory document and “handbook” to dioceses around the world to help them prepare for the Synod.**
 - **How does this ‘Journeying together,’ which takes place today on different levels – from the local level to the universal one – allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to her?**
 - **What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a Synodal Church?**

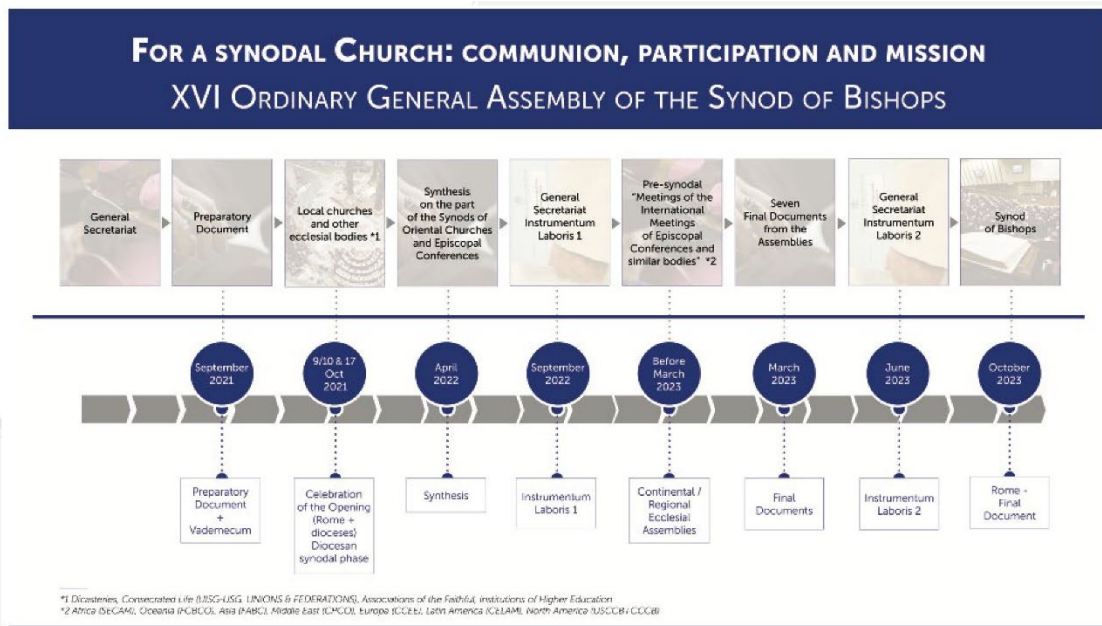
You've got to remember that this whole thing started back in March 2020, when the pope announced that we were going to have a synod. That's more than three years ago that this whole party started.

And the secretary to the Synod worked on preparing documents that could be used in local churches in dioceses and parishes in preparation for the Synod to have a wide consultation in the Church.

In the United States it's estimated that 1% of the Catholic population participated in these consultations. That doesn't seem like a lot of people; but 1% is a lot of people, you know. Now, in some places they were very – it was enthusiastically supported by the local hierarchy and priests; and in other places it was not.

I won't comment in this side, (laughter) but what they wanted then, what they wanted all these groups to do was to ask, "How does this journey together allow the Church to proclaim the gospel; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?"

And I think it was that second question that really impelled people to get excited about, okay? Where do you think the Spirit is leading us? What should the Church be doing differently from what it's doing right now? For many people this was the first time anybody ever allowed them to talk about that or ask them; and to be able to come together and talk about these things was a revolutionary experience for many Catholics who participated in this process.



I won't go into all this (organization chart), but it was a humongous project, starting with preparatory documents, consultation in diocese. Then each diocese had to do a consultation; and of all these consultations, they went up to national conferences of bishops, where they had a national consultation,

and did another report. Then it went up to a continental consultation. We even got together with the Canadians and came up with a continental report. That all went to Rome to develop an instrument of *laboris*, a working document, that was then used by the Synod.

And all these documents were available to anybody who was a member of the Synod. In fact, they are all available to anybody, period. They were all, very much, made public, and broadcast, and finally, you know, they get together in October for this meeting.

So, the point I want to make is that before the bishops, before the Synod even opened, there was a process going on; and, I think, for Francis that process was just as important as, you know, what happened at the Synod.

How is this synod different from earlier synods?

- There are 364 voting members: some elected, some appointed.
 - 21% are not bishops.
 - There are more than 50 women.
- A three-day retreat was conducted by Fr. Timothy Radcliff
- The synod fostered open discussions.
- There were few speeches.
 - Prayer
 - Conversation in Spirit

How is this Synod different from other synods? Some asked, “How is this night different from any other night?” Anyhow, how is this Synod different from earlier synods? Well, first of all, is the makeup of the members of the Synod.

There were 364 voting members. Some of the bishops were elected by their bishops’ conferences, and some were appointed by the pope; but there were also non-bishop members. 21% of the Synod was non-bishops. So, they were lay people and priests; and there were about 50 women who were members of the voting members of the Synod. (applause) They’ve always had observers before; but they, you know, they had an equal vote with a cardinal at the Synod. This caused quite a controversy, “How can this be a mission Synod if there are lay people here?” Well, you know, that was a revolutionary thing that Pope Francis did at this Synod.

The second thing that was revolutionary about this was Pope Francis insisted this be a prayerful experience; and in order to do that, before they even had the Synod, he had everybody participate in a three-day retreat that was given by Dominican Timothy Radcliff; and his talks are also available. They're wonderful talks describing the Synod. I did a column; the best part of the column was the headline. (laughter) It takes a Dominican preacher to explain a Jesuit pope. (laughter)

He did a fabulous job, you know, explaining what the Synod was going to be all about, and what Pope Francis wanted out of it. So, he gave this retreat; and all were supposed to participate. Most of them, practically all of them did; a few bishops felt that they did not need it. But anyway, so that's the prayer side of the experience.

The other thing is – and this started under Pope Francis – a totally open discussion, you know, when an archbishop in charge of one of the synods, a bunch, you know the Vatican, cardinals would come and tell him what topics could not be discussed; and if they were discussed, they couldn't go into any of the written rhetorics.

Pope Francis did not like this at all. So, when he became pope and had his first synod, he gave this very short presentation at the beginning, in which he basically said, "Speak boldly; don't be afraid of what anybody thinks. Don't worry about if you contradict me, or whatever. He used the same Greek word, speak, that is used in the Acts of the Apostle when St. Paul takes on St. Peter in the Council of Jerusalem, where they're arguing about whether the Gentiles have to follow the whole law, the Jewish Law; and Peter was being wishy-washy and Paul takes him on; and so, the rest is history. But he's basically telling them: "OK, treat me like St. Paul treated St. Peter."

In the old school, most of the talks, the bishops would get up and give a seven-minute talk; and most of it was quoting the pope himself, "As just so wisely said." And, you know, they quote some previous papal documents. This is not what Pope Francis wanted. He knows what he's written; he knows what he said. "You're here to advise, to say something.

So, it was a much more open discussion than we've seen historically in the old synods. As I said, each bishop would get up and give a seven-minute talk; and they were all written before they got to Rome. So, you would get up and deliver a talk; then, you would get up and give a talk; and they had absolutely nothing, no connection, it was not a response. There was no dialogue, because you had written your talks before you got there.

Often, they said the same thing, over and over, over and over. Even some of the bishops got warlike; and so, some of the meeting was through small group discussions.

And in every synod, the bishops said that this was the best part of it; and then the small groups, even in those small groups, in the old days late observers and the ecumenical observers would be able to participate. They couldn't vote, but they could at least talk in the small groups.

Sell, what's different here is that it was practically all small group discussion, no long speeches. There were opportunities for intervention, what they called them; but they, I think, they still had to keep to the three minutes in their interventions. So that was a lot of these speeches than had occurred in previous synods.



I don't know how that picture is coming out, but in the old school synod, you were seated in a kind of a theater or classroom auditorium with seats going up; and up in the front was the pope and senior cardinals from the curia. In the first couple of rows were the rest of the cardinals; then, there were the archbishops and bishops; and way in the back were the lay observers and ecumenical observers.

Here, they had none of that. Everybody was at these small tables. Now, in the picture there was, I think, the first day of the Synod. So, you see them all dressed up; and they're funny, their formal clothes; by the second and third day they were all in suits, except for those who like those things. You always have some, the little red caps and things, were left back in their rooms.

But this was the kind of situation where they were in these small groups; and there was at least one woman at each table; (laughter) and there were lay people there. There were a couple of college kids that were participating; so, it was young and old. It was quite a mix of people.

Conversation in Spirit

- **There were 36 tables of 10 delegates, plus a facilitator.**
- **In the first round of discussions, each delegate had 3 minutes to share/respond to a particular question.**
 - **Some bishops tried to disregard the 3 minutes.**
 - **They were reminded by the facilitator of the three-minute rule.**
 - **The violators were not happy with this rule.**
- **In the second round of discussions, each delegate was asked to share what he or she heard.**
 - **Some of the bishops tried to interrupt or correct the responding delegate.**
 - **Once again, the moderator interrupted the bishop reminding that bishop that he could respond when his turn came about.**
 - **The violators were not happy with this constraint.**
- **In the third round, there were freer discussions:**
 - **The delegates could answer questions.**
 - **They could share experiences.**
 - **They could challenge one another.**
- **This led to a draft report for the plenary session, including:**
 - **Convergences,**
 - **Divergences,**
 - **Tensions, and**
 - **Questions.**
- **Then, a final report for the synthesis committee.**

There were 36 tables; and there were 10 delegates at each table, plus a facilitator, plus an ecumenical observer from various Christian Churches that were there. The facilitator was the person who kind of made sure everybody stayed on track.

The first round, what they would do is, whatever the topic was, they would go around the table and each person had three minutes. So, "You've got three minutes, then you, then you, then you, and you;" and go around the table for three minutes each. Well, you try and cut off a bishop after three minutes, (laughter) or a cardinal, or worse yet, a patriarch; but that's what they did. They cut them off after three minutes. Some were a little more nervous about this; but you had a woman facilitating, "Bishop, your time is up; (louder) bishop, your time is up; (even louder) bishop, your time is up." They were not use to this; they were not used to being told, "Your time is up." And so, this is the way the tables were run.

In the second round you would say, "Well, I was moved by what I heard said by (someone I know). And you would go around; and it was about what you heard. It wasn't, "You were so stupid and now I'm going to answer you." No, the attempt was to emphasize the importance of listening; because, if you didn't listen in the first round, how are you going to respond in the second round and say, "Okay, this is what I heard in the presence, in the people, when the people spoke? What moved me? What resonated with me? What did I hear?" And so, they go around the table again.

Then, the third round was a more open exchange, freewheeling, going back and forth, answering questions, challenges, and then, mixing it up. Sometimes they have agreements; sometimes there'd be disagreements. Again, the facilitator would sometimes intervene, because somebody would be talking and a bishop would intervene with, "I'm going to answer that;" and the facilitator would say, "Bishop, she hasn't finished talking; let her finish."

Again, there was a real attempt to treat everybody equally; and the lay participants raved about this, how they were listened to, respected, and treated as equals in the synod process.

Then, what they're supposed to do is, what ever the topic is on, write a report on what were the convergences, what were the agreements, what were the divergences, what disagreements, tensions; and then, what questions are there that came up that still needed to be answered.

So, this is the report that they were supposed to do; and then, they have to agree, “I feel I was represented,” or, “No, I want this.” And all of this goes into the report. And then they make each table of a plenary meeting and will make a report on what happened in their small group.

And then, after listening to all those reports, they came back together and do a final report on that topic, which then goes to the committee of the delegates who’s responsible for the final report, the synthesis find. Yeah! (laughter)

So, tis may seem very programmed and artificial; but it seems to work, because it forced people to be very concise, “You’ve got three minutes;” and it also forced people to listen to one another. And so, I would say, that 90% of the participants thought this, that it was a good experience; and they liked it very much. And that’s pretty good, I think. There’s always some that don’t like it.

Instrumentum Laboris (Working Document)

The working document was made up of four modules:

- Synodality
- Communion
- Mission
- Participation.

Now, what did they actually discuss? Well, they had the instrumentum laboris: that’s the working paper— they love those Latin phrases—we still have the Latin phrases, basically the agenda, the working document, and the agenda, the working document; and unlike previous synods, it would be kind of, the conclusions were in the working document.

These were all questions; it was really questions that were there, like in the first. Then they called them modules, topics, I don’t know, questions, anyway.

The first one was on synodality; and that was kind of: “Well, what was your experience of the Preparatory Phase of this?” because all of them had been involved in the Preparatory Phase of this. So, “What was your experience,” or, “What has been your experience of synodality in the Church so far?” And they shared and talked about that. Then, they got into discussions; and that was kind of a practice run, teaching people how this process worked.

Then, they got into the meat of the discussion, which was on communion, mission and participation. And each of those was broken down into subtopics and questions; and they actually asked people, of those subgroups here, which one you would like to participate in. So, when they shuffled the groups, you weren't with the same group all the time. they shuffled the groups, and you might say, "Well, I want on, or I want to be involved in the discussion about LGBT, a few people; and they try to get a table of people who, that was their primary issue that they wanted to discuss.

And so, they would do that kind of thing, shuffling and getting together, so that they could get in more depth on some of those things; but ultimately, they were allowed to say anything they wanted at any time.

And during the plenumr assembly, they were allowed to make interventions on any topic they wanted. It was an interesting system too that, I think, the bishops misunderstood at first; and that was: you first came to serve for an intervention; however, if you had made an intervention in the past and somebody else wanted to make an intervention who had not made one yet, that person had priorities. So, some of the bishops who jumped to get in, suddenly found themselves in the back of the line when it came to other things.

So, the women were, of course, much more focused on those things; and so, they targeted the topics they wanted to talk about, and made sure they were going to be called on those issues at those times.

Synod report

- The Synod report was written in the last week of the Synod under time pressure.
- It was written by experts for the synthesis committee who had been elected by the Synod.
- The first draft received over 1000 proposed amendments.
- The first draft was 40 pages, in Italian and in English.
- On the last day, it was read in Italian.
- A two-thirds vote was required for each paragraph.

But anyway, this is the kind of topic in the Synod and in the report. It was all written under time pressure; a 40-page report written by 364 people – good luck! Now, they had experts and theologians that were actually drafting the report; but then, it had to be read, reviewed by a committee, the Synthesis Committee, that was actually elected by the Synod.

The first draft got over a thousand amendments proposed to it. Can you imagine? I mean, some of them were typos, corrections, and grammatical corrections, and silly things like that; but some of them were quite substantive. So then, they had to deal with all those.

The final draft, which they got on, I think, Friday, and then on Saturday, which was the last day, was 40 pages long; and it was only available in Italian and English.

The English one sounded like it had been put through Google translation. (laughter) The Italian was the official document. In the old days, you had lots of Jesuits who were multilingual; or even you had some seminarians and priests and Romans, who worked in Rome, who were able to do all these languages. We don't have these anymore who do simultaneous translations; and the Vatican is very cheap. (laughter) they won't pay. So, you end up with just Italian and English. You know Spanish if you're only Spanish-speaking – —good luck—or you know French, German.

So, what they finally had to do was on the last day, they read the entire document, all 40 pages, can you imagine? all 40 pages in Italian, with simultaneous translators working their way through it; and then, after they read their way through it, each delegate had to vote on each paragraph. You had to vote on it. You had to vote “yes” or “no.” You could not move on the program; the software would not allow you to move onto the next paragraph unless you voted “yes” or “no” on the paragraph you were reading.

So, 40 pages of paragraphs. I don't know how many votes that had to be. I don't know; 300 paragraphs, 200 paragraphs, I don't know what it was; I never bothered to count them. But anyway, with a hell of a lot of paragraphs that they had to vote on.

Every one of them passed by a two-thirds vote. Some of them got more negative votes; a few, I think, the most negative votes were like 40 mor 50; and it was the LGBTQ, and on women deacons (laughter), an issue, you know.

And when you see what they voted against, you wonder why they did; why they voted against it; because it was the most benign “no” decision, “no” decision that was made. So, that’s how the Synod voted.

Francis: the Synod was not about hot-button issues

- For Francis, it was more about the process than the report.
- Francis wants to overcome the polarization in the Church so that it can be a true sign and instrument of communion with God and with humanity.
- Francis wants the people of God to take up the mission of Jesus in announcing to the world the Good News of the Gospel, the love and mercy of God toward all humanity, and indeed all creation.
- Francis wants the entire Church to participate, to become a synodal Church.

The thing to remember, although we were all Americans, we were all focused on these hot-button issues; and we focused on that’s the result of the Synod. Everybody, okay? What happened? What’s the result? When Americans come to a meeting, they say, “What’s the agenda? What do we do? I’m looking at my watch; I’m out of here. Let’s get our business done.”

That is not where Francis is coming from; that’s not what synodality is about for him. The process is much more important than the product. It’s for him; it’s over one of the purposes of all this is to overcome polarization in the Church, so that we can be a sign and instrument of communion with God and with humanity. That’s what instead of the old things; they will know we are Christians by our love, not that we are Catholics by our fights. I think you know what he wants is not a series of decisions; he wants a cultural change in the Church, which is much more. It’s not for him; it’s not about structures; it’s about the culture of the Church. He wants the Church to be synodal, and all the things we said about synodality at the beginning.

He wants the people of God to take on the mission of Jesus. That’s what the product is really, taking on the mission of announcing to the world the good news of the gospel, the love and mercy of God towards humanity and all of creation.

This is what the Church is supposed to be about. It’s communion that leads to mission; and everybody is to participate. It’s not, okay, we make these decisions, and now the clergy carries them out; or the clergy make decisions and they carry them out.

The clergy are no longer running the Church is basically what this is about, that the people of God are the Church, as the Second Vatican Council said. And so, it has to take on the mission of Jesus. It has to be a participatory, a synodal Church. And he would just go bananas; he hated the Western media because it was only focused on gay blessings, women deacons, married clergy. They can never cover more than three issues at a time. That was about it. That's not what his agenda was about.

LGBTQ issues absent from the Synod report

- **Words, such as LGBTQ, gay, or homosexual were not in the text.**
- **Fr. James Martin, SJ, reported: “The discussions we had, which were passionate on both sides, were not reflected in the final document.”**

Well, what did happen on these hot-button issues? Well, the words LGBT, gay are not even in the text. They were in the first draft; but when those thousand amendments came in, they got dropped; even the pope uses these terms. The Vatican now uses these terms; but for the Synod, that was a bridge too far for some members of the Synod.

Jim Martin said, “The discussions we had, which were passionate on both sides, were not reflected in the final report. You just don't get a feel in the final report of how the discussions went; like there was a young woman who got up and talked about her sister who was gay; and the pastor told he she was not welcome in his church. She committed suicide.”

Now that reaction and the Synod's was much the same as yours. I really heard these guys; but they don't hear the stories. A lot of them don't hear these kinds of stories; and that's why it was so important to have some of my story heard in the Synod speaking about real experiences, because in these small groups, the emphasis was not on theological argument, the emphasis was on sharing your experience of synodality, sharing your experience of community, sharing your experience of participating in the Church.

That was really what they wanted to do, instead of just getting into those theological arguments that tended to go nowhere.

Response from African and Eastern European bishops

- **The African and Eastern European bishops opposed LGBTQ ideology.**
 - **They believed it was being imposed by conditions on foreign aid.**
 - **They believed it was a form of neocolonialism.**
- **Archbishop Andrew Fuanya of Bamenda, Cameroon stated: “In Africa, we understand marriage as a union between a man and a woman; and anything short of that is witchcraft.”**
- **The Syrian patriarch walked out.**
- **Question: “Have they ever knowingly met and had a conversation with a gay person?”**

Why was there nothing in the Synod report? Basically, it was the African joined by European bishops. The Africans are just curious about what they call LGBTQ ideology, which they feel is being forced down their throats by Western governments, who say, “If you want our aid, if you want our foreign aid, you have to do X, Y and Z.” So, they see this as neo-colonialism, and are very opposed to it. But some of the language they use is incredibly homophobic.

One of the bishops in Africa stated, “We understand marriage is the union between and a man and a woman; and anything short of that is witchcraft.” So, I mean, this is not just a minor, little bishop; this was a guy who was actually in a high position in the Synod. So, you wonder.

And then, there’s the Syrian patriarch – you know how I told you they shuffled the tables – well, the Syrian patriarch was coming up to his new table; and he noticed a person there, whose name I will not mention, who has a ministry to LGBTQ people, he refused to sit with him at the table. He just walked out.

So, this is back in the 50s, when it comes to issues, LGBTQ issues, they don’t have a clue; they don’t understand. I don’t think they ever knowingly met a gay person or had a conversation with them. Notice, I say, knowingly did that. This is outside their realm of experience.

Like I say, they're American in the 1950s or 40s, whatever decades you want to say, where gates had to be posted, where it wasn't discussed, where it was a shame; always just totally out. Well, that's still where much of the world is, and reflecting these countries.

There's one last thing I would also say about the Africans is, I think, they're very worried about, if the church in Africa said, "Oh, we love our gay brothers and sisters; they're welcome," The Muslim imams and the evangelical pastors would go batty on this; it would be extraordinarily anticultural, countercultural; because of where Africa is in this time; and I think they're afraid of that.

The Synod Report

- "Certain issues, such as those relating to matters of identity and sexuality ... are controversial not only in society, but also in the church, because they raise new questions."
- "Sometimes the anthropological categories we have developed are not able to grasp the complexity of the elements emerging from experience or knowledge in the sciences and require greater precision and further study."
- "It is important to take the time required for this reflection and to invest our best energies in it, without giving in to simplistic judgments that hurt individuals and the Body of Christ."

This is why there's nothing in the report on this. I'll tell what it actually says; "Certain issues, such as those relating to identity and sexuality are controversial—no kidding—(laughter) and they raise new questions.

Sometimes, the anthropological categories we have developed are not able to grasp the complexity in the experience or knowledge that we are getting from science. So, that's a little better; at least it leaves the question open for further discussion.

It is important to take the time required to take the time required for reflection. So, that's it; that's all there is on this topic. That's about as vague in general as you could possibly get; but even these paragraphs, this paragraph, got some negative votes, more negative votes than I think anything else; but it still got a two-thirds in favor.

One of the cardinals commented about the negative votes. He smiled and said, “I was surprised it did so well.” (laughter)

Did anything positive come out of these discussion on LGBTQ?

- Fr. Jim Martin, SJ, was appointed a member of the Synod by the pope.
- Pope Francis met with LGBTQ activists, including Sr. Jeannine Gramick, during the Synod.
- Discussions on this subject took place for the first time at the highest level.
- These discussions are not closed.
- Old language (“considered intrinsically disordered”), was not included.

Well, I think we could say about this. Well, Jim Martin was a voting delegate, appointed by the pope, at this Synod. The pope himself met with LGBTQ activists during the Synod; I mean, met with Sr. Jeaninne Gramick, who had been put on through her position under Ratzinger; and he told her how wonderful her mission, her ministry, was and to keep going.

The very fact that this discussion took place in the Synod, this is the first time; and the discussion is not closed, not closed out; and none of the old language got into the report. And I think it’s not a lot of progress; but it hasn’t gone backwards, and the pope is still in charge. So, he’s going to keep doing what he’s going to keep doing during the Synod; I mean, how could they miss this?

Women Deacons Tread Water

- “Different positions have been expressed. . .
 - For some, this step would be unacceptable, because they consider it a discontinuity with Tradition:
 - In Africa, for example, there are few if any deacons, only priest and catechists mostly male.
 - In the U.S., there are more permanent deacons than in the rest of the world put together.
 - Women are dealing with much more basic issues: patriarchy and clericalism.
 - For others, however, opening access for women to the diaconate would restore the practice of the Early church.

- Others still discern it as an appropriate and necessary response to the signs of the times, faithful to Tradition, and one that would find an echo in the hearts of many who seek new energy and vitality in the Church.
- Some expressed concern that the request speaks of a worrying anthropological confusion, which, if granted, would marry the church to the spirit of the age.”

Women deacons ready; it was basically: nothing happened. Well, I would say that it was heavily discussed, because the women put it forward strongly, and kept pushing it; but it didn't get further. Different positions were expressed. For some, this was unacceptable; for all others, this was simply restoring the practice of the early Church. Historically, of course, there is some evidence that there were women deacons in the past were ordained, and everything else is inappropriate. All this stuff worried this confusion, I don't know what this last means, but in any case, that's what they said about women deacons.

So, no progress was really made here, a lot of discussion. It's interesting that the Amazon synod was much more in support of women deacons; and we thought there would be some progress here on women deacons. It didn't happen. So, I don't think we're going to see when very soon.

So, there was – and I didn't add it here – but there was an interesting discussion of deacons in general. There was some feeling among some that seemed to be expressed, was hard to read between the lines; but it seemed to be that a least a good portion of the Synod felt that the diaconate should be oriented more towards service of the poor rather than liturgical work ministry. But anyway, we'll see how this turns out.

Africa Again

Again, Africa played a heavy role here. There are practically no male deacons in Africa. South Africa had some; but the rest of Africa there are, it's really ironic, the Second Vatican Council instituted the diaconate, because it's needed in missionary territory. Who has more deacons than anybody else? The United States. We have five or ten times the number of deacons in the United States than in the rest of the world. So, it's just huge.

Why didn't Africa want deacons? Because the diocese is financially responsible for a deacon, because he's a cleric.

So, they said, “We cannot afford it; we don’t want this liability. We’re going to keep having catechists.” And so. The catechists play a huge role. They basically play the role of deacons throughout Africa.

Now the problem, of course, is they’re mostly male. So, women, that’s where they want to get in; so, they weren’t pushing hard for women to act as deacons made absolutely no sense for Africa. So, they wanted into the catechists the same thing one, nobody has any data on this, but one priest I know, Thomas Marion, he estimates that about 90% of the catechists are men. Now the United States women, Catholic Church, religious education is all that; so that’s kind of strange to us, but it’s still a very male-dominated ministry in places like Africa.

They’re dealing with more basic issues, e.g., patriarchy, clericalism, than women in the United States; so, deacons was a kind of reaction. So, Africa again plays a leading role.

Synod Report on Women

- **Women cry out for justice in societies still marked by sexual violence, economic inequality, and tendency to treat them as objects. Women are scarred by trafficking, forced migration and war. Pastoral accompaniment and vigorous advocacy should go hand in hand.**
- **The Church must “avoid repeating the mistake about women as an issue or a problem. Instead, we desire to promote a Church in which men and women dialogue together, in order to understand more deeply the horizon of God’s project, that sees them together as protagonists, without subordination, exclusion and competition.”**
- **In the church, ‘It is urgent to ensure that women can participate in decision-making processes and assume roles of responsibility in pastoral care and ministry.’**
- **Liturgical texts and Church documents need to be “more attentive to the use of language that takes into equal consideration both men and women, and also includes a range of words, images and narratives that draw more widely on women’s experience.”**

Now the Synod did have some good things to say about women. (laughter) Women cry out for justice. In a sense, I’ve always felt that Pope Francis doesn’t understand the First World; he’s third World; and here you see it for justice. Society is marked by sexual violence.

Economic inequality: the tendency to treat them as objects. Women are scared by trafficking, forced matrimony and war. Pastoral accompaniment and vigorous, vigorous advocacy for women should go hand in hand from the Church.

This was interesting: intervention also; that was approved by the Synod. They shouldn't treat women as an issue or a problem to be dealt with; but rather, that women are protagonists of their own future of their own and should be empowered and listened to as part of the reform in the Church.

And this was interesting: "It is urgent to ensure that women can participate in decision-making processes in the Church and assume the roles of responsibility in pastoral care and ministry." Those who had access to the first draft of the report noted that the word "urgent" was added through the amendment process. So, theirs is one place, at least, where the document got stronger rather than weaker as part of the amendment process.

There was also a discussion that we have to be attentive to the sexist language in the liturgy and in Church documents, to include a range of words, images, narratives that draw more widely on women's experience. Make sure the lectionary has Scripture readings that talk about women in the Bible. Make sure the language of the translations is inclusive.

So, you see, there are some good things that got in.

So, you know, I'm happy to see this Eucharistic hospitality, of opening the Eucharist to non-Catholics; and they point out this is really very important for inter church couples, where you Protestant-Catholics come to church. the Protestant has to stay on the pew, or just get a blessing; and the kids look at this and say, "Why can't my mother go to communion too? Do you think the pastor thinks my mother is a bad person? Well, the hell with you." I mean, that's a natural reaction when you tell someone that their mother can't go to communion. Anyway, they want to reexamine this.

Also, they want to continue evaluation of the Roman curia; and of the injections is, "Why do they have to be bishops and cardinals? Why can't you have lay people heading these offices?" Francis has finally appointed as a secretary of the dicastery for religious a religious woman. But we need the next step where she becomes the prefect, the top person in that, but getting her appointed a secretary was great progress over what we had in the past. Canon law would have to be updated to implement synodality at all levels; and then they could.

They're dealing with more basic issues, e.g., patriarchy, clericalism, than women in the United States; so, deacons was a kind of reaction. So, Africa again plays a leading role.

Of discussion of small Christian communities, which are, which is the great product of the African church, because there is such a shortage of priests in parts of Africa, especially in rural areas. It's very common for groups, small groups, to get together and reflect on the Scriptures, or to discuss issues facing the parish, and then, by their conclusion, would be passed up. They even have intermediate bodies, and then up into the parish, because sometimes the parish has 20,000 people in it; and then cases, the whole experience of small Christian communities is something, I think, that we could learn about and learn from Africa. That would be a great contribution for the Church in the United States.

Married priests hardly discussed

- “Different opinions have been expressed about priestly celibacy. Its value is appreciated by all as richly prophetic and a profound witness to Christ.
- Some ask, however, whether its appropriateness, theologically, for priestly ministry should translate into a disciplinary obligation in the Latin church, above all in ecclesial and cultural contexts that make it more difficult.
- This discussion is not new but requires further consideration.”

Here men were hardly discussed. Women deacons were more discussed than married priests, which really surprised me. I thought, “Married priests – that's easy – it's just law; there's no theological argument; there's no doctrinal hurdle here; it's simply law. But no, different opinions were expressed. This discussion, not new, but requires consideration. (laughter) Talk about kicking the ball down the field. That's as much as they could do on married clergy. I was really surprised they had so little; the women were better organized. At the same time, I think that's why the whole question was discussed much more.

Hidden gems in the Synod report

- The report encourages synodality and lay involvement for the whole Church.
- The Church should care for the poor, work to reform structures that foster poverty, injustice, and environmental damage, and to combat xenophobia and racism—including inside the Church.
- The church must listen to victims of abuse; ensure a culture of transparency and observe procedures. “It is necessary to develop further structures dedicated to the preservation of abuse.”
- The Synod called for “a thorough review of priestly formation programs, with particular attention to how we foster the contribution of women and families to them.”
- “Formation should not create an artificial environment separate from the ordinary life of the faithful.”
 - Perhaps seminarians should be sent to Catholic colleges where they mix with lay people—men and women.
- The Synod report called for a regular review of how bishops, priests and deacons carry out their ministry.
- The report acknowledges “the widely reported need to make liturgical language more accessible to the faithful and more embodied in the diversity of cultures,
 - e.g., the 1999 Roman Missal approved by the USCCB.
- We need to examine the issue of ‘Eucharistic hospitality – *Communicatio in sacris*,” the report says. “This issue is of particular importance to inter-church couples.”
- The report asked for a careful evaluation of “whether it is opportune to ordain the prelates of the Roman curia as bishops.”
- Canon law needs updating to implement synodality at all levels.
- Small Christian communities should be promoted.
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What’s next?

- Further consultation, reflection, conversations in the Spirit.
- Next session of the Synod will be October 2024.

Anyway, what’s next? More consultation: we’ve got a whole lot of consultation before the next session, and final session of the Synod, which will be October of next year. It’s going to be interesting to see whether more

people now participating in the consultation process, whether more bishops get involved next week in Baltimore (at the USCCB meeting); and then we have reports from the participants. If these participants speak highly of the Synod, and of the Synod process, and are encouraging, especially those that are selected, you might catch the other bishops who were kind of reluctant to get on board with this whole thing.

So, it's going to be interesting to see whether the bishops say, "Okay, there's something I want to get on board with for preparation for the next session of the Synod. We'll have to watch and see.

Thank you. (standing applause)

Addendum: Worldwide Discussions

- The parish and diocesan phase, October 2021 to April 2022
- National stage, 2022
- Continental stage, September 2022 to March 2023
 - North America: 931 delegates (50% women; 50% men)
 - 626 lay persons
 - 146 bishops
- Instrumentum Laboris (working paper) by Synod Secretariat, June 2023

Recorded by Terry Gonda

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