



FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, MISSION

XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS SECOND SESSION (2-27 OCTOBER 2024)

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‘Practised with humility,’ write the bishops in their final document from the 2024 Assembly (47), ‘the synodal style enables the Church to be a prophetic voice in today’s world.’ We live, they write, ‘in an age marked by ever-increasing inequalities’ and by ‘disenchantment with the functioning of democracy.’ Students of Catholic history will be struck by the image of the Church proposing itself as a model of equality and democracy after centuries of fighting both.

Abuse and gender

Much attention has been focussed on the bishops’ approach to abuse and to gender. They attempt to address both.

Victims of war, climate change and social injustice are mentioned at the start. But victims of the church have to wait many pages before the bishops concede (46) ‘the need within the Church for healing, reconciliation and the rebuilding of trust ... particularly in light of so many scandals related to different types of abuse.’ What, however, follows (55) is a disarmingly frank *nostra culpa*. ‘The abuse crisis, in its various and tragic manifestations, has brought untold and often ongoing suffering to victims and survivors, and to their communities. The Church needs to listen with special attention and sensitivity to the voices of victims and survivors of sexual, spiritual, economic, power and conscience abuse by members of the clergy or persons with Church appointments.... The Church must acknowledge its own shortcomings. It must humbly ask for forgiveness, must care for victims, provide for preventative measures, and strive in the Lord to rebuild mutual trust.’

Save for a few passing references (97, 102, 108) it is then left almost to the final paragraph (150) before safeguarding is considered again. 'It is necessary to continue ... offering ongoing specific and adequate formation to those who work in contact with minors and vulnerable adults so that they can act competently and recognise the signals, often silent, of those experiencing difficulties and needing help. It is essential that victims are welcomed and supported, and this needs to be done sensitively.... We must all allow ourselves to be moved by their suffering and practise that proximity, which, through concrete choices, will uplift them, help them and prepare a different future for all. Safeguarding processes must be constantly monitored and evaluated.'

The bishops report (50) that, in the course of the conference, they heard from those who 'continued to express the pain of feeling excluded or judged because of their marital status, identity or sexuality.' But from the rest of the document, we can see that they then ignored these voices.

The bishops recognise that there is a problem of inequality in the church. They condemn (54) the 'inequalities whereby some have possibilities that are denied to others. These are inequalities such as between men and women, racial prejudices, caste divisions, discrimination against people with disabilities, violation of the rights of minorities of all kinds and the reluctance to accept migrants.' They state plainly (52) that, 'inequality between men and women is not part of God's design. In the new creation, this difference is reconsidered in the light of the dignity of Baptism: "As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3: 27-28).'

But they then continue (52) that 'our vocation as Christians is to welcome and respect, in every place and context, this *difference*, which is a gift from God and a source of life' [my emphasis]. So from St Paul's unqualified stress on being 'all one in Christ Jesus' we fall back into the bishops' unexplained and often-repeated insistence on *difference*. They compound the confusion by adding 'we bear witness to the Gospel when we seek to live in relationships that respect the equal dignity and reciprocity between men and women.'

Paragraph (60) again states clearly that 'by virtue of Baptism, women and men have equal dignity as members of the People of God. However, women continue to encounter obstacles in obtaining a fuller recognition of their charisms, vocation and place in all the various areas of the Church's life. This is to the detriment of serving the Church's shared mission..... There is no reason or impediment that should prevent women from carrying out leadership roles in the Church: what comes from the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped.' But what 'leadership' may be remains carefully undefined. And the paragraph continues 'additionally, the question of women's access to diaconal ministry remains open. This discernment needs to continue.' The diaconate is apparently not a 'leadership role'. And deferring yet again the consideration of ordaining women, even as deacons, is apparently not a case of attempting to 'stop' the Holy Spirit. With that, the Bishops have nothing more to say about the inequality they enforce on women.

Listening

The bishops lament their previous failure to listen (6) and the temptation to allow their own ideas to 'prevail over listening to the Gospel and the practice of discernment.' They admit that, when it comes to God's Grace, 'we are not masters but only witnesses.'

Francis stated (43) in the opening address of this second session that 'the Holy Spirit... speaks through everyone'. A 'spirituality of synodality' is 'without ambition, envy or desire for domination or control.' The Bishops echo his call, warning (42) against 'the temptation of being at the centre' and calling all 'to the acceptance of other perspectives.' Again (84c), the bishops counsel 'an inner disposition of freedom regarding one's own interests, both personal and as a group, and a commitment to the pursuit of the common good.' It leads (84e) to 'the widest possible consensus.'

And this is not (44) just 'organisational expediency' or (82) 'an organisational technique.' Instead (44) it leads to, 'a prayer open to participation, a discernment lived together.' It is (82) 'a spiritual practice grounded in a living faith. It calls for interior freedom, humility, prayer, mutual trust, an openness to the new and a surrender to the will of God. It is never just a setting out of one's own personal or group point of view or a summing up of differing individual opinions.'

When it comes to the work of decision-making bodies, they call (90) for 'procedures that make reciprocity effective between the assembly and those who preside over it, in an atmosphere of openness to the Spirit and mutual trust.' They warn (91) that, where the canon law expressly enjoins consultation, then that consultation must be respected and only ignored with 'a compelling reason which must be appropriately explained.'

The bishops note (36) their 'sadness' at 'the lack of participation by so many members of the People of God in this journey of ecclesial renewal.' Synodality calls (31) the whole 'People of God' to 'take an active part in [the Church's] evangelizing mission.' This means (32) 'all, without distinctions of person'. Indeed (82) 'the more everyone is heard, the richer the discernment. Therefore, it is essential that we promote the broadest participation possible in the discernment process, particularly involving those who are at the margins of the Christian community and society.'

Formation

The bishops implicitly recognise (79-80) that there is a problem in 'ecclesial discernment', in the 'decision-making processes', accountability and the evaluation of their decisions. They admit that it all requires transparency and 'a climate of trust' and that this trust 'must be mutual: decision-makers need to be able to trust and listen to the People of God. The latter in turn needs to be able to trust those in authority.' And this, they point out, 'requires adequate formation that is 'not only technical; it also needs to explore theological, biblical

and spiritual foundations. All the Baptized need this formation in witness, mission, holiness and service, which emphasizes co-responsibility.’ This includes (85) instruction in scripture, Tradition, the Fathers, magisterial teaching, theology ‘and the contributions of the human, historical, social and administrative sciences.’

They note (143) that ‘one of the requests that emerged most strongly and from all contexts during the synodal process is that the formation provided by the Christian community be integral, ongoing and shared. Such formation must aim not only at acquiring theoretical knowledge but also at promoting the capacity for openness and encounter, sharing and collaboration, reflection and discernment in common.’ Men and women, laity, consecrated and ordained should take part together.

This is especially true (148, 149) in training for the priesthood and episcopacy. But it is also (147) a ‘shared synodal formation for all the Baptised.’ It will require ‘a demanding change of mentality and a renewed approach to both formation contexts and processes. Above all, it implies an inner readiness to be enriched by the encounter with brothers and sisters in the faith, overcoming prejudices and partisan views.’ After all (144), ‘no one simply receives formation: everyone is an active subject and has something to give to others.’

Decentralisation

The bishops warn (124) against centralised uniformity, calling for ‘the recognition and appreciation of the particularity of the context of each local Church, along with its history and tradition. A synodal style allows local Churches to move at different paces. Differences in pace can be valued as an expression of legitimate diversity and as an opportunity for sharing gifts and mutual enrichment.’

The bishops call (114) for the Church to ‘reconsider the meaning of “local” in its life... It is essential to understand ‘place’ as the real and actual setting in which we come to experience our humanity.’ They mention (24) the ‘specificities of each local church’, adding (110) that ‘this local dimension to our Church preserves the rich diversity of expressions of faith that are grounded in a specific cultural and historical milieu.’ They call the church to recognise (111) that ‘the understanding of place’ is more fluid now than ever before and (112) populations more transient and multicultural. Digital culture (113) is also both more connected and more isolating.

The role of the pope is unaffected except that he should act with an eye to ‘sound decentralisation’(134) But in practice ‘this decentralisation means “to leave *to the competence of Bishops* the authority to resolve, in the exercise of ‘their proper task as teachers’ and pastors, those issues with which they are familiar and that do not affect the Church’s unity of doctrine, discipline and communion.”’ [Emphasis added]

There is however (135) a shot across the bows of the Curia, reiterating the recent Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* and insisting that the Curia “is not set between the Pope and the Bishops, but is at the service of both, according to the modalities proper to



the nature of each” (PE I, 8). ‘Its implementation,’ the bishops continue, ought to promote greater collaboration among the dicasteries and encourage their listening to local Churches.’

Discernment and the *sensus fidei*

The bishops state at the outset (3) that the whole synodal process has been ‘characterised by the wisdom of the “sense of faith” (*sensus fidei*) of the People of God.’ In a sense, from this point, the authority of the document hinges on it.

Again and again the bishops refer to ‘all the Baptised without exception’ and ‘the whole People of God.’ (4) Baptism is the key, not ordination (15). There is ‘nothing higher than this baptismal dignity’ (21). Baptism confers (22) a share in the ‘prophetic role of Christ... an instinct for the truth of the Gospel. We refer to this as the *sensus fidei*.’ The baptised are ‘sharers [participants] in the divine nature.... This is the reason why the Church is certain that the holy People of God cannot err in matters of belief.’

Again (81) they reiterate, that the People of God ‘participate in the prophetic function of Christ...This discernment draws on all the gifts of wisdom that the Lord bestows upon the Church and on the *sensus fidei* bestowed upon all the Baptised by the Spirit. In this Spirit, the life of a missionary and synodal Church must be re-envisioned and re-orientated.’ In a synodal church (87), ‘the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice on taking pastoral decisions.’

The faithful, in other words, are imagined to be involved in every step of governance. Indeed, they foresee (77a) ‘increased participation of laymen and laywomen in Church discernment processes and all phases of decision-making processes (drafting, *making and confirming decisions*).’ [My emphasis]

The notion, which so clearly runs through the 2023 synthesis, that the charism of discernment belongs expressly to the bishops, is now apparently set aside. Now they stress (86) ‘a wide variety of approaches’ to discernment. They warn (57) that the charisms given by the Holy Spirit ‘are not the exclusive property of those who receive and use them, nor are they intended solely for their personal benefit or for that of a group.’

Differentiated co-responsibility and collaboration

‘Differentiated co-responsibility’ is a term that recurs throughout this document. It is first mentioned with relation to participation in the Eucharist (26). There follows a section about unity and plurality with different gifts, but if this is meant to explain ‘differentiated’ it makes it no clearer. Why different gifts should in any way affect co-responsibility is never explained. The bishops later (89) reiterate that their ‘ecclesiological framework shapes the commitment to promote participation based on differentiated co-responsibility. Each



member of the community must be respected, with value placed upon their gifts and abilities in light of the goal of shared decision-making.' But, again, whether this is intended as an *explanation* of 'differentiated responsibility' is unclear.

'Differentiated co-responsibility' in fact belongs to a very old belief among the clerical hierarchy that the laity cannot infringe the exclusive right of the bishops to govern. Indeed, it has been part of Canon Law since the 1980s that the laity cannot exercise the power of governance, but can only co-operate with it. The 2024 Bishops document demonstrates that this belief remains firm. We are all, as the Baptised, equal. But some are more equal than others.

Synodality, we are told (28), is 'walking together', with all humanity, in gatherings 'at all levels of the Church for mutual listening, dialogue and communal discernment'. But, they continue, 'reaching decisions' is only done 'according to differentiated co-responsibilities.' Similarly, (36) there is a 'desire... to expand possibilities for participation' for 'all the Baptized, men and women.' But this is only an 'exercise of differentiated co-responsibility.'

In another place (30a), synodality is a '*modus vivendi et operandi* [that] works through ... the co-responsibility and participation of the whole People of God in its life and mission, on all levels and distinguishing between various ministries and roles.' Here co-responsibility is unqualified, but is broken up into *levels*, ministries and roles. What they might be is nowhere explained.

There are, however, clues as to the bishops' meaning. The *sensus fidei* arises (22) because the baptised are 'sharers in the divine nature' and 'cannot err in matters of belief.' Nonetheless, illogically, "the exercise of the *sensus fidei*... 'is always in conjunction with the discernment of pastors at the different levels of Church life.' And this, we are told, (33) 'is a specific gift ... for the upbuilding of the entire Body... [and] is linked to the sacrament of Orders.' The intention is 'to safeguard the apostolicity of proclamation.' So, far from opening the church to all the faithful (33), 'synodality offers "the most appropriate interpretive framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself.'"

The 'pastors' are therefore revealed in fact to be the clerical hierarchy, separate from but in some way 'conjoined' to the *sensus fidei*. Later (68, 69, 72) the document refers instead to the 'presbyters' who are clearly also the ordained clergy, but are distinct in some unexplained way from the 'pastors'.

The document (74) roundly condemns clericalism, 'understood as the use of power to one's own advantage and the distortion of the authority of the Church that is at the service of the People of God. This expresses itself above all in forms of abuse, be they sexual or economic, the abuse of conscience and of power, by ministers of the Church.' It therefore encourages 'co-responsibility in the exercise of ministry, which includes collaboration with other members of the People of God. A wider distribution of tasks and responsibilities and a more courageous discernment of what properly belongs to the ordained ministry and what can and must be delegated to others will... surely have an impact on decision-making processes, enabling them to have a more clearly synodal character.'

But even this ‘collaboration’ between the clergy and ‘the other members of the People of God’ is itself, in some unexplained way, to be ‘differentiated.’ Suggesting (77) that the laity ‘both men and women, should be given greater opportunities for participation’, the bishops add that this should only be ‘in a spirit of *differentiated collaboration* and co-responsibility.’ [Emphasis added].

The bishops may state that there is ‘nothing higher than this baptismal dignity’ and that Baptism confers a share in the ‘prophetic role of Christ... an instinct for the truth of the Gospel.’ But that, apparently, has no relationship to the practice of exclusive and hierarchical governance.

Transparency and accountability

The bishops refer (11) to the ‘shared understanding of synodality’ that emerged from the first session – although their 2023 document in reality betrayed profound differences among them. Even so, they describe themselves (7) as now embarked on ‘ecclesial discernment, decision-making processes, and a culture of transparency, accountability and evaluation’ and they list growing ‘community discernment’ and ‘co-responsibility in mission’ as fruits of the synodal process so far. They call pointedly (12) for a ‘hope that “does not disappoint.”’

The bishops recognise that, even if they will not concede any part of their power, they will have to be more open about what they do. ‘Keeping the Church faithful to its mission’ calls (98) for transparency and accountability. ‘The absence of these practices is one of the consequences of clericalism, which is thus fuelled. Clericalism is based on the implicit assumption that those who have authority in the Church are not to be held to account for their actions and decisions as if they were isolated from or above the rest of the People of God. Transparency and accountability should not only be invoked when it comes to sexual, financial and other forms of abuse. These practices also concern the lifestyle of pastors, pastoral planning, methods of evangelisation, and the way in which the Church respects human dignity, for example, in regard to the working conditions within its institutions.’

Indeed (99), the bishops continue, ‘the culture and praxis of accountability must shape its actions at all levels. However, those in positions of authority have greater responsibility in this regard and are called to account for it to God and to His People. While accountability to one’s superiors has been practised over the centuries, the dimension of authority’s being accountable to the community is in need of restoration.’

The bishops accept (95) this new emphasis on accountability and evaluation ‘in a spirit of transparency inspired by evangelical criteria’ which they enumerate (96) as ‘truth, loyalty, clarity, honesty, integrity, consistency, rejection of obscurity, hypocrisy and ambiguity, and absence of ulterior motives.’ When these values are lost (97) ‘the weakest and the most vulnerable suffer the most.’ Respect for privacy and confidentiality (96) ‘can never legitimate practices contrary to the Gospel or become a pretext for a cover-up or to

circumvent actions to combat evil.’ (Though they warn, quoting Francis, that, ‘as far as confessional secrecy is concerned, “the sacramental seal is indispensable and no human power has jurisdiction over it.”)

The bishops claim (96) to regard this new approach to accountability and evaluation as ‘a fundamental attitude grounded in the Sacred Scriptures and not... a series of administrative or procedural requirements.’ But they then (100) concede ‘it is necessary to have structures and methods for regularly evaluating the exercise of ministry.’ They go on (101) to say that ‘local churches and their groupings are responsible for developing effective forms and processes of accountability and evaluation in a synodal way in addition to adhering to the criteria and oversight of structures already established by canonical norms.’

Will these yet-to-be-conceived structures and processes involve the laity? The bishops mention (70) their ‘hopes that the People of God will have a greater voice in the selection of bishops.’ But they lay out no mechanisms for achieving it. The Bishops’ own Synod (136) ‘has seen and will be able to see in the future... the participation of other members of the People of God... In deepening the identity of the Synod of Bishops, what is essential is that the combination of the involvement of *all* (the holy People of God), the ministry of *some* (the College of Bishops) and the presidency of *one* (the successor of Peter) appears and is concretely realised throughout the synodal process and in the Assemblies.’

The bishops’ veto

Toward the end of the document (141), the bishops summarise some of their main hopes. ‘Synodality implies a profound vocational and missionary awareness, the source of a renewed way of living ecclesial relations and new dynamics regarding participation. It also means adopting the practice of ecclesial discernment and a culture of ongoing evaluation. These cannot come about unless accompanied by focused formation processes.’

The question is to what extent an ‘awareness’, ‘a renewed way of living’, ‘new dynamics regarding participation’ and a ‘culture of ongoing evaluation’ can have any purchase without new structures and sanctions. They propose no new structures to ensure listening. They appear to propose some kind of balance between the clergy and the overwhelming majority of the faithful, who are lay. They call for lay participation to be ‘increased’. Yet nothing is proposed that will make this possible. They refer to ‘structures and institutions of synodality’ whereas, in reality, there are none.

They call for ‘concrete practices’ to achieve a ‘sound “decentralisation”’(129) But on what they might be and who is to set them up, they offer nothing except the suggestion that the ‘particular councils’ called for by canon law need re-evaluating.

Who is to monitor and evaluate safeguarding, the formation of those working with the vulnerable and or the support given to victims? They do not say. The English translation (150) even omits sentences from the original Italian, including ‘it is imperative that throughout the world the Church activate and promote a culture of prevention and

safeguarding, making communities increasingly safe places for children and vulnerable people.’ Perhaps the translators felt that ‘increasingly safe’ was not enough. The Church is either safe or it is not.

The bishops warn (94) that ‘without concrete changes in the short term, the vision of a synodal Church will not be credible and this will alienate those members of the People of God who have drawn strength and hope from the synodal journey.’ But while they state (91) that ‘the exercise of authority in the Church does not consist in an arbitrary imposition of will’ they propose no means to ensure that that is not the case. Decision-making firmly remains (90) the responsibility of ‘the competent authority.’

It emerges (9) that, although they ‘feel it is our responsibility to promote this process’ of synodal-style consultation and discernment, they can only ‘suggest’ that the various Bishops’ Conferences and Synods allocate ‘personnel and resources’ to it. They conclude (94) that ‘local Churches need to find ways to implement these changes.’ The bishops have handed themselves a veto.

The document blames (71) the faithful for having excessive expectations of the bishops. But the bishops themselves then restate (92) their long-held assertion that ‘the authority of the Bishop, of the Episcopal College and of the Bishop of Rome in regard to decision-taking is inviolable.’ They then cite their wholly unscriptural and unprecedented assertion from the 2024 *Instrumentum Laboris*, that their authority ‘is grounded in the hierarchical structure of the Church established by Christ.’ A bishop (69) is identified as an individual who ‘receives the grace and the task of recognising, discerning and bringing together in unity the gifts that the Spirit pours out on individuals and communities.’ Here the bishop is said to work not with the laity, but ‘with priests and deacons.’

The bishops concede (92) that their authority ‘is not without limits: it may not ignore a direction which emerges through proper discernment within a consultative process, especially if this is done by participatory bodies. It is not appropriate to set the consultative and deliberative elements involved in reaching a decision in opposition to each other.’ The original Italian translates more literally, that the participatory bodies ‘cannot be ignored.’ They even call for re-examination of the ‘recurring formula’ in Canon Law, ‘which speaks of a “merely consultative” vote (*tantum consultivum*).’ ‘If it is true,’ they propose (87), ‘that synodality defines the *modus vivendi et operandi* that qualifies the Church, it points at the same time to an essential practice in the fulfillment of its mission: discerning, reaching consensus, and deciding through the exercise of the various structures and institutions of synodality.’

But there *are no such structures and institutions*. And even if these undefined ‘structures and institutions’ were to exist, they would (30b) be (as the original Italian puts it) ‘at the service of the Church’s authoritative discernment.’ The same is true (30c) of local, regional and universal synods, which involve ‘the whole People of God’ but are ‘presided over by the Bishops in collegial communion with the Bishop of Rome.’ In the end, the bishops are to police themselves.

The bishops admit that their own governance needs reform. They call (125) for ‘a process of evaluation of the experience of the concrete functioning of Episcopal Conferences, of the relations among the Bishops and with the Holy See so as to identify the particular reforms needed.’ But who is to achieve this is left unclear.

More strikingly, the paragraph (93) that sets out the proper procedure for decision-making (‘define the object of the consultation... offering ... input honestly, sincerely... respecting the confidentiality of the information received...’ and so on) suggests that the bishops have not yet mastered even the basic procedures of good management. It is similarly astonishing that they should feel it necessary in a document such as this to call (101c) for ‘preparation and publication (appropriate to the local context and in an accessible form) of an annual financial report, insofar as possible externally audited, demonstrating the transparency of how the temporal goods and financial resources of the Church and its institutions are being managed.’ We may very well ask how it can be that such a thing is not already done.

What action do we need to take now?

What is resoundingly clear is that the bishops are not proposing to institute any new structures for change or sanctions to enforce it. Their words are welcome but cloak an unyielding determination to cling to their own status, privilege and power.

It is now up to the laity. If we want a church fit for the 21st century, we are going to have to raise our voices loudly and repeatedly, in season and out. Uncomfortably and despite the threats we shall face we are going to have to insist. This document gives us manifest justification. But without vigorous, sustained and practical action, the bishops – especially of England and Wales – will continue their disregard for the faithful People of God.

As the Jesuit Nicholas Austin wrote before the Synodal Path had ever been launched, ‘to fail to consult the faithful, to listen to their sense of the faith, to their discernment of what is of God and what is not, is to close the Church off from many tongues through which the Spirit may choose to speak. However, the obligation here falls not merely on the bishops, to listen with humility and with an open heart, but also on the laity, to be ready to speak with *parrhesia*.’ *Parrhesia* is bold, frank speech, of the kind the disciples used after Pentecost.

1. **We must challenge the bishops on every occasion** to explain and justify their notion of ‘differentiated co-responsibility’, which is a fundamental assault on the dignity of the Baptised. We need to demand on every occasion that they explain and justify their claim (92), in direct contradiction of Jesus’s words, that he himself ‘established’ a hierarchical structure for the church.
2. **We can insist on a much more active role in synods and councils and ensure these bodies are listened to.** The bishops point out (103) that ‘the Baptised participate in decision-making, accountability and evaluation processes through institutional structures, primarily through those already provided for the local Church set out in the existing Code of Canon Law.’ They include for example diocesan synods,

diocesan and parochial pastoral councils. Here they call for the ‘rapid implementation of the synodal guidelines, bringing about perceptible changes speedily.’ ‘We insist,’ write the bishops in one of their strongest statements (104) ‘that they be made mandatory, as was requested at all stages of the synodal process, and that they can fully play their role, and not just in a purely formal way in a manner appropriate to their diverse local contexts.’

3. **We can insist that these institutions are not packed by episcopal nominees, but are run in an open and accountable way.** ‘The structure and operations of these bodies need to be addressed,’ state the bishops (105). ‘It is necessary to start by adopting a synodal working method.... Particular attention should be given to the way members are selected. When no election is envisaged, a synodal consultation should be carried out that expresses as much as possible the reality of the community or the local Church, and the relevant authority should proceed to the appointment on the basis of its results.... It is also necessary to ensure that members of diocesan and parish pastoral councils are able to propose agenda items in an analogous way to that allowed for in the presbyteral council.’ So there is to be no more packing of meetings with lay church appointees, which so undermined credibility of the synodal process. Nor are agendas to be restricted to the bishops’ preferences, as they were then. Where these things happen, we need to call them out.
4. **We can insist on better formation of clergy.** The bishops call (148, 149) for the laity to be more involved in the formation of clergy. They need to be held to this.
5. **We can organise better formation of the laity.** The bishops acknowledge (85, 143, 147) the widespread calls for better lay formation. In the absence of action by the bishops, we should organise this ourselves.
6. **We must call out every instance of clericalism.** ‘Keeping the Church faithful to its mission’ calls (98) for transparency and accountability. The absence of these practices is one of the consequences of clericalism, which is thus fuelled.’
7. **We can insist that synods and councils meet more often.** ‘It is... necessary (108) to strengthen the existing canonical provisions in order to better reflect the missionary synodal character of each local Church, making provision that these bodies meet on a regular, and not rare or infrequent, basis.’
8. **We can insist that the bishops publish a detailed annual account of themselves.** We are told (108), ‘the diocesan Synod may provide scope for the exercise of accountability and evaluation whereby the Bishop gives an account of pastoral activity in various areas: the implementation of a diocesan pastoral plan, reception of the synodal processes of the entire Church, initiatives in safeguarding and the administration of finances and temporal goods.’ Paragraph (102) similarly calls ‘at the very least’ for ‘the *preparation and publication of an annual report* on the carrying out of the local Church’s mission, including also safeguarding initiatives... and progress made in promoting the laity’s access to positions of authority and to



decision-making processes, specifying the proportion of men and women.’
(Emphasis added)

9. **The bishops must (101c) publish annual financial accounts.**
10. **‘Safeguarding (150) must be constantly monitored and evaluated.’**
11. **The bishops must conduct their affairs (93) in a business-like way.** They must be clear, honest and sincere and must respect confidentiality.
12. **Above all (81) we have to state and restate, in season and out of season, that ‘the People of God... participate in the prophetic function of Christ.... This discernment draws on all the gifts of wisdom that the Lord bestows upon the Church and on the *sensus fidei* bestowed upon all the Baptised by the Spirit. In this Spirit, the life of a missionary and synodal Church must be re-envisioned and re-orientated.’ And again (22), ‘the baptised are ‘sharers in the divine nature.... This is the reason why the Church is certain that the holy People of God cannot err in matters of belief.’**