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German synod elite put Pope Leo to test

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On Saturday morning, the apostolic nuncio to Germany, Monsignor Nikola Eterović, placed his letter of resignation on the desk in the private library of the Apostolic Palace. Today, the diplomat will celebrate his 75th birthday with some relief, perhaps hoping that Leo XIV will not ask him to stay. The German Church is, in fact, a pot ready to explode.

February will see the eagerly awaited plenary assembly of the Bishops' Conference, which will be called upon to express its opinion on the Statutes of the Synodal Conference. These were approved by the Central Committee of German Catholics on 29 November. Approved by the Synodal Committee on 22 November 2025 in Fulda, these statutes bring the controversial Synodal Conference to life. According to the final document of the Synod of Bishops on synodality, the conference is intended to be in 'continuity with the objectives of the Synodal Path', and it puts 'bishops and other faithful' on the same level. This gives certain lay people the power to deliberate and make decisions 'on important issues of ecclesial life of supra-diocesan relevance'.

In short, the majority of the German episcopate and organised laity have once again ignored Rome's warning in a letter to the Bishops' Conference, signed by Cardinal Robert Prevost on 16 February 2024, that the Synodal Council is not compatible with canon law. The Conference's Statutes, which aim to redesign the Church and even assign themselves the function of modifying doctrine, call for 'gender and generational equality' in both its composition and presidency. The downgrading of the role of bishops in this project is evident not only from the fact that they will be outnumbered by certain members of the laity, but also from the statement that 'if they are unable to implement a decision, they shall explain their reasons to the presidency of the Synodal Conference, in compliance with data protection and privacy regulations'.

This contradicts what the Holy See stated on 21 July 2022 regarding the Synodal Path in Germany, namely that it 'has no power to oblige bishops and the faithful to adopt new forms of government and new approaches to doctrine and morality'. Reading the soon-to-be-approved Statute, it seems that this has happened. Rome silently disapproves, and Pope Leone XIV, who is familiar with the dossier from his time as head of the Dicastery for Bishops, realises the seriousness of the situation.

The problem is that the Germans seem to have gone too far, and a show of force will be needed to stop the process that has now been set in motion. The synodal agenda in Germany started with the Path, passed to the Committee, and is now destined for the Conference. It openly aims to disregard Catholic doctrine. Theological aims include

democratising the Church by placing religious and lay people on an equal footing, questioning ecclesiastical celibacy, and promoting the ordination of women. In the moral sphere, the document symbolising this shift was published by the joint conference of the Bishops' Conference and the Central Committee shortly after Francis's death. It is a collection of liturgical guidelines for blessing unions of any kind. In the field of anthropology, the same symbolic function was assumed by the publication last October of the Educational Commission of the Bishops' Conference's guidelines, which de facto incorporated gender ideology.

Recently, *Die Tagespost*, a magazine at the forefront of defending traditional Catholic teachings, published the results of a survey showing that the majority of German Catholics do not feel represented by the German Synodal Path. However, this minority risks imposing itself on the majority through complicated decision-making processes designed to reward a lay elite.

In the face of all this, Rome must blow the whistle on a game that has gone on for too long. If this does not happen, it is those three bishops — Rudolf Voderholzer, Stefan Oster and Rainer Maria Woelki — who have been under attack for years for their opposition to the Synodal Path agenda, who will suffer first.