

CHURCH

Italian Synod flop won't halt progressive agenda

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The Italian synodal process has suffered an accident that has brought it to a standstill. The draft final document of the Synodal Assembly, after four years of meetings at different ecclesial levels, was contested, the work was suspended and postponed until next autumn, because the text of the proposed draft did not satisfy the progressive majority of those present at the Assembly, who wanted something more "prophetic"

and "courageous".

This led to the idea that the leaders had tried to slow down the innovative momentum, to freeze the process from above, while the "people of God" wanted to remain open to the innovations "proposed by the Spirit".

On the other hand, there were those who believed that the event represented the definitive 'suicide' of the Synod at the very moment of its conclusion, thus demonstrating all its internal contradictions: the sorcerer's apprentice had summoned the spirits, but was then unable to control them. In reality, things are more complicated.

On this occasion, the Synod certainly confirmed its artificial nature and its role in a project to change the vision of the Church. An ecclesial "assembly" has no theological character, and the value of its final document is not clear, if not that of forcing an ongoing process. The participants in this assembly were like a 'self-convened' group or an elite of people appointed according to unknown criteria. It was a 'synodal' assembly only by convention or fiction. The opinions expressed there by the participants were personal. Their selection during the previous phases of the Italian Synod had been based on criteria of ecclesiastical politics. A synodal assembly of this kind doesn't meet either theological and canonical requirements or democratic ones, so it doesn't represent anyone, and even less can it express any form of "prophecy". The final clash of positions in the hall certainly highlighted these profound deficiencies, and those who thought that the new synodality would not easily recover from this failure certainly had good reasons, but that is not what will happen.

At the grassroots level of the Italian Church there hasn't been much interest in the synodal process. Most of the faithful don't even know that anything has happened. The process has interested a few and always the same ones. There has been a lot of participation 'out of duty' but without conviction. But it would be wrong to think that the elitism and the use of coded language have been defeated by recent events. The new synodality is being imposed on the ecclesial base and even those who have not even heard of it will suffer the consequences. Between now and October this process will be intensified in order to re-educate the faithful to accept the changes willingly.

How will the content of the new synodality be imposed on the base of the Catholic Church? It may be useful to give an example: the recent assembly of the diocese of Vicenza. In the diocesan weekly *La voce dei Berici* of 16 February 2025, the editor, Don Alessio Graziani, summarised the synodal vision of the future that emerged from the assembly as follows: "The Bishop is convinced that the future must pass

through the decisive overcoming of 'clericalism', that is, the giving life to more open and non-judgmental communities, with a low degree of institutionalisation and a different capacity for welcoming, in which women and young people are listened to more and involved in decision-making processes, in which priests and deacons exercise their ministry at the service of the community, without protagonism, in a fraternal way and together with truly co-responsible lay people, whose service is recognised in the form of ministerial groups or established ministries".

This is the image of the new Church that emerged from one of the many diocesan assemblies, described in an apparently mild and persuasive code of expression, but in reality profoundly transforming: It makes us understand the aim of the "inverted pyramid", the entry of women into the liturgy, the acceptance of all diversity, the "who are we to judge", the reduction of the ordained priesthood, the Mass in the background of the teaching and duties of the bishop, the assembly style as the main decision-making method, and the focus on environmental protection that does no harm. These initiatives will continue, especially through some "emergencies" presented as opportunities: the shortage of priests and the challenge of pastoral units.

Another way will be the further weakening of the bishops. There has been talk of Vicenza... it has just been announced that the interdiocesan seminary of the dioceses of Vicenza, Padua, Adria-Rovigo and Chioggia will be inaugurated in September 2025. This is another way of preventing bishops from becoming bishops. Even if, hypothetically, one of them were critical of the synodal process, he wouldn't be able to train his priests in this sense. Interdiocesan seminaries are tools for a conformed Church.

There was a hiccup in the synodal assembly, but the journey will continue, because it doesn't take place only in the synod hall in the Vatican.