

SCHOOL OF SYNODALITY

Synod rehearsals in the name of “forbidden to forbid”

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The choice of Dominican Father Timothy Radcliffe as preacher of the short course of preparatory Spiritual Exercises to the October Synod was not very reassuring news, given his 'openness' towards LGBTQ issues. This means there will be a gay-friendly

Dominican to prepare the souls for the Synod. Conducting the orchestra will be another friend of the rainbow world (see [here](#)), the general rapporteur of the Synod, Jean-Claude Hollerich, created cardinal by Pope Francis in 2019. And that makes two. In the all-inclusive vein is the recent [intervention](#) on the Synod by another 'creature' of Francis, the newly created Cardinal Robert McElroy, Bishop of San Diego, who has pushed for the diaconal ordination of women, for a reconsideration of their ordination as priests, for a revision of Catholic sexual morality, including on homosexuality, and of the Church's teaching on the state of grace in order to receive the Holy Eucharist. And that makes three.

Furthermore, what's uniting the three is the call to overcome divisions and oppositions in the Church, to move away from the dynamics of a political context rather than of a community guided by the Holy Spirit. In their vision, the Synod is called to enlarge the space of its tent to include everyone, to overcome polarisations, creating a space where everyone can find their place and no one is excluded.

This path was indicated with greater clarity by Father Radcliffe in a recent speech in Bologna ([here](#) from minute 44:22, and then again from minute 1:17:26); an indication that could be precisely the central theme of his lectures during the Spiritual Exercises, with the potential to orient the Synod towards an unconditional inclusivism.

Father Radcliffe's talk on 29 January was part of the cycle of meetings 'Small School of Synodality', organised by the Foundation for Religious Sciences in Bologna and the Theological Faculty of Emilia Romagna, in the church of S. Maria della Pietà, in which, until recently, the only Mass in the ancient rite recognised in the Bologna diocese was celebrated, and which was recently removed from divine worship by Cardinal Matteo Zuppi.

Radcliffe began by presenting the fears of many who believe that the synodal path has strayed from 'the straight and narrow' and will lead to "divisions and disappointments in the Church". On the one hand, there are indeed people who desire "a return to the security of the Church of the past; for example, to the Tridentine Rite of the Mass. For others, this is a denial of the Council. Some people desire a Church in which the divorced and remarried are allowed to receive Communion, but for others this constitutes a betrayal of marriage. Some want priests to be able to marry, for others this would be the terrible loss of an admirable tradition".

"It is true that the Church is divided by hopes for different futures," continues the Dominican, who exhorts us to look to a greater and more surprising hope that the

Lord has in store and that would be able to reconcile opposing hopes. It is precisely in this vertical thrust, in the reliance on 'God's creative grace', that Radcliffe's reflection becomes particularly attractive. And insidious. Especially when he adds that God's creativity must be matched by the creativity of Christians: "Let us therefore dare to be creative by the creativity of God's grace".

But how do we open ourselves to welcome this 'creative grace'? By freeing ourselves from those "identities that are constructed against other people [...]". Modernity fears difference: difference of creed, of ideology, of culture, and even of gender". The way is therefore to support diversity regardless rather than uniformity regardless, avoiding creating groups that share the same principles as opposed to others, "trapped in closed environments with people who share the same slogans". The evangelical support that is always useful is that of Jesus, who, eating with publicans and prostitutes, went down the road of 'unlikely friendships', thus breaking down barriers. We must, according to Radcliffe, leave behind "small identities built on exclusion and opposition. The Synod is the unlikely gathering of God's friends".

The challenge of the Synod is therefore "to imagine why people think differently"; to put oneself in each person's shoes, "to feel with their skin, to see with their eyes", to go beyond rational argumentation, in itself insufficient. Opposing positions are necessary, like threads in weaving. Not only that, but when there are differences, "we must learn to rejoice in those differences, take pleasure in those differences. Only then can we talk about the deeper differences".

Good Fr. Radcliffe should be reminded that not all differences are equal: there is a difference that is a manifestation of God's manifold wisdom and there is a difference that is called sin. Just as there is uniformity without which it is impossible to be saved and uniformity with which it is impossible to be saved. The point is that God's Revelation has also given us some indication in this regard, and not in an interlocutory tone, but in an imperative one: "Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God". (1 Cor 6:9-10).

We must be vigilant; the turn that the Synod could take has a certain attraction : the fundamental principle of condemning all exclusivism - the only condemnation allowed -, could seduce many to seek their place in the new 'Synodal Church', at the price of silence towards sin and error. An adherence, in essence, to the 1968 mantra 'banning is banned', suitably updated in ecclesial sauce.

It should be remembered that this position is closer to the portrait of the Antichrist

, sketched by Vladimir Solov'ev, than to that of a wrathful tyrant. The great universal peacemaker particularly cares that each may have his own: "I will give to all men what is necessary for them". And he actually keeps his promise, even with regard to the different Christian sensitivities. Just as he is also willing to recognise Christ as the source of inspiration for high values. But this Christ must finally be outdone, with a more universal inclusivism, which he was unable to achieve: "Christ, as a moralist, divided men according to good and evil, whereas I will unite them with the benefits that are equally necessary to the good and the evil. I will be the true representative of that God who makes his sun rise for the good and the evil, and distributes the rain on the just and the unjust. Christ brought the sword, I will bring peace. He has threatened the Earth with the terrible last judgement. But I will be the last judgement, and my judgement will not only be a judgement of justice but also a judgement of mercy".