

8. Formation for Synodality

Theological Briefing Papers for the Synod 2023

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Summary

As noted in the *Instrumentum Laboris* (no. 58-59), all the reports of the continental assemblies indicated a need for formation for synodality. The literature echoes this need for formation but pays it little in-depth attention. Indeed, when formation does appear, it is a prescription rather than the subject of investigation. The literature therefore does not generally engage in the evaluation of concrete proposals for formation.

The following key themes emerge. Firstly, formation is often rooted in the particular needs of local churches, which necessitates a “healthy decentralization” for effective implementation. Secondly, the literature emphasizes the importance of experiential and affective formation in contrast to more didactic, information-based models. A few other issues are elaborated below.

Detailed Analysis

Statistics

- Nearly 250/651 articles mention formation, but only about 15 have more than 10 references to formation. Thus, formation is not explored much in the literature.
- Some of the more concrete proposals—which are further elaborated below—come from the field of religious education (Lamont and Sullivan), but the contributions from this field remain few in number.

Formation of whom? And what sort of formation?

- There are two clear audiences for formation with distinct needs and problems: laity (Clifford and Lamont) and clergy (Kochuthara and Costadoat).
- In the context of youth ministry and synodal listening practices, two authors call for an experiential formation (Lamont, Silva Coelho). Questioning whether Christian truth is mere knowledge meant to be deposited in the minds of those being formed, the authors push for a more incarnated, affective conception of Christian truth.
- Kochuthara and Costadoat apply a similar analysis to seminary formation. Commenting on the sexual abuse crisis and clericalism, they plea for a more holistic and affective formation that involves laypeople in seminary formation, “including women and families” (Kochuthara).
- Sullivan argues for formation in friendship. He explains that the frankness of speech demanded by synodality requires friendship if it is not to devolve into fighting and politics. For this virtue of friendship, we should cultivate spaces for informal relationships in our communities.
- The precise form of the Church’s missionary activity is an unresolved tension for formation. Do we form with the aim of restoring church attendance, or do we form for novel forms of Christian communities? (Clifford)
- There is also a need to consider formation for ecumenism for both clergy and laity in increasingly plural religious contexts (Arenas).
- Finally, Clifford highlights that the lack of financial resources limits the Church’s capacity to invest in lay and clerical formation.

Materials: Major Recommended Readings

Arenas, Sandra, “Eclesiología ecuménica y sinodalidad: senderos y desafíos en América Latina,” in *En camino hacia una iglesia sinodal. De Pablo VI a Francisco*, ed. by Rafael Luciani and Teresa Compte (Madrid: PPC, 2020), 237-267.

Clifford, Catherine E, “Synodality and the Renewal of Mission in the Archdiocese of Gatineau (Canada): A Case Study,” *Studia Canonica. Revue Canadienne de Droit Canonique* 56, no. 2 (2022): 629-644.

Costadoat, Jorge, “Sinodalidad, pero en un cristianismo no sacerdotal,” *Revista CLAR* 60, no. 1 (2022): 125-132.

- Kochuthara**, Shaji George, “The Sexual Abuse Scandal and a New Ethical Horizon: A Perspective from India,” *Theological Studies* 80, no. 4 (2019): 931-949, doi:[10.1177/0040563919874517](https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563919874517).
- Lamont**, Tracey, “From Change to Transformation: Living Synodality in Ministry with Young Adults,” *Religions* 14 (2023), doi:[10.3390/rel14030314](https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030314).
- Silva Coelho**, Allan, “Community Discernment as an Educational Process for Synodality,” *European Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 3 (2023): 37-44, doi:[10.24018/theology.2023.3.2.101](https://doi.org/10.24018/theology.2023.3.2.101).
- Sullivan**, John William, “Friendship and Spiritual Learning: Seedbed for Synodality,” *Religions* 14 (2023). doi:[10.3390/rel14050592](https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14050592).

Italian References

- Nicola Salato, “Per una chiesa sinodale: il sentiero interrotto del consensus fidelium,” in *La sinodalità al tempo di papa Francesco. Una chiave di lettura storico-dogmatica*, ed. by Nicola Salato (Bologna: EDB, 2020), 171-182.
- Assunta Steccanella, “Formare a una “mentalità sinodale”, in *Sinodalità. Dimensione della Chiesa, pratiche nella chiesa*, ed. by Riccardo Battocchio and Livio Tonello (Padova: EMP, 2020), 365-374.