

9. Liturgy and Synodality

Theological Briefing Papers for the Synod 2023

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Summary

The official documents for the Synod have always insisted that liturgy is part of the synodal experience. For example, they recommend that prayer and liturgical celebrations be part of synodal gatherings (*Vademecum*). Over time, attention to liturgy has broadened. For example, the *Working Document* also appreciates liturgical unity in diversity as an expression of synodality and identifies the need for a more participatory and therefore synodal liturgy (no. 88-97).

In a small number of contributions on liturgy and synodality, academics share (sometimes explicitly) the conviction that liturgical practice and faith convictions are related and mutually shape one another (*lex orandi lex credendi*). In light of this relationship, three key themes emerge. First, how may liturgical practice better facilitate synodal experience? Secondly, how may a more synodal theology of ministry and community lead to better liturgical articulations of synodality? Thirdly, some reflection draw attention to Eucharistic ecclesiology: modeling the Church on the celebration of the Eucharist.

Detailed Analysis

Statistics

- The search term liturgy* yields a relatively small number of 1,795 hits in almost 60% of the documents (383 out of 651). Eleven articles (out of 700+) mention in their title the words liturgy, Eucharist, or sacraments. A small number of top publications has over 50 references (Jeggle-Merz, Join-Lambert, Denysenko, Haquin, O'Loughlin).

1) The Mutual Reinforcement of Synodality and Liturgy

- Liturgy can make people experience a synodal Church (cf. what follows below on Eucharistic ecclesiology). Various possibilities to improve this experience are mentioned. According to Join-Lambert the actual liturgy during synodal gatherings merits consideration: does it happen in a way that befits synodality (cf. *lex congregandi*)? Speaking about liturgy in general, Jeggle-Merz asks what “the new way of being Church” (*die neue Art, Kirche zu sein*) means for liturgical life. She challenges the liturgical focus on the priest and suggests focusing on baptism, promoting inculturation, appreciating the roles of women, and developing other types of liturgies than the Eucharist. O’Loughlin makes various creative proposals to overcome a “sacramental individualism,” such as the practice of standing around the altar (cf. *circumstantes* in Eucharistic Prayer 1).
- In these matters, the underlying and often implicit theology of ministry and of liturgy plays a major role. Most authors highlight the relation between ministry and the community, and therefore plead for greater participation. Legrand regrets that ministry is usually considered an individual vocation and that ordination is usually about sacramental power. Reminding that all eucharistic prayers have as its subject “we” (*nous*), he suggests another, more community-related understanding of ministry and ordination. Denysenko notes that “the [Orthodox] rite of a bishop’s ordination shows that the ministry of primacy is always exercised in dialogue with fellow bishops (the synod) and the laity (ecclesial collegiality).” Therefore, he suggests that the laity’s involvement should increase, e.g. in the procedure of appointing bishops or in the reception of Church teaching. For similar thoughts, see Jeggle-Merz and Routhier.
- Some authors develop their reflection in another direction. Cavadini warns for a “flattening out of the Church on the basis of baptism,” and promotes a co-responsibility that respects ordination-based differences. Gefaell develops his view of the liturgy and the Church with ample reference to papal primacy. Healy underlines the sacramental nature of authority, which means that it refers to Christ. Therefore, “true [synodal] reform demands a return to the lifegiving source of authority, Christ himself” rather than focusing on equal participation of all.
- A quite specific, both liturgical and theological and canonical issue—that we don’t elaborate here—is dealing with contexts without priests and therefore no Eucharist; it is discussed especially in relation to Querida Amazonia (see, e.g., De Almeida 2020, Luciani 2020, Noceti 2020, Wijlens 2022).

2) Eucharistic Ecclesiology

- According to the Orthodox perspective, the local Church's Eucharistic life implies synodality (Denysenko, Stavrou, Turner). Just as the laity are actively involved in the Eucharist, so too are they actively involved in church life, e.g., in actively receiving teaching. In light of liturgical practice, it is obvious that bishops do not stand apart from their congregation, and that local Churches are in communion with other local Churches. Primacy is especially linked with Christ and the Holy Spirit. There has been a historical development from a "synodal ethos" to a synodal ecclesiology, although a synodal theory does not guarantee a synodal spirit (Stavrou).
- Roman Catholic theology appreciates liturgy also. Routhier speaks of the Eucharist as "a heuristic model" and argues that we should think the Church more from the liturgy, especially the Eucharist. Following this perspective, a first type of Roman Catholic Eucharistic theology focuses on the community. Bueno and Martínez consider the Eucharist a "foundation" of synodality, for "the eucharistic gathering implies a plurality of members (a "we") in a specific place and a concrete human, sociological, and cultural space" (Bueno). Or, as Martínez explains, "synodality, then, has its origin and culmination in the conscious and active participation in the eucharistic synaxis" (cf. Routhier). In their elaboration, they touch on aspects such as building community and fraternity, diversity, a certain structure, and being rooted in Christ and the Spirit.
- Fearing for a form of synodality that minimizes the hierarchical dimension of the Church, Cavadini and Gefaell present another, second type of Eucharistic ecclesiology. Cavadini differentiates between a baptismal communion and a eucharistic one. He underlines that the Church's communion being built up in the Eucharist, which supposes hierarchical ministry. Gefaell distinguishes between an orthodox Eucharistic approach and the Catholic Church's; the latter supposes "communion with a visible center of unity which is identified in the Bishop of the Church of Rome."

Materials: Major Recommended Readings

Bueno de la Fuente, Eloy, "El fundamento teológico de la sinodalidad," *Scripta Theologica. Revista de la Facultad de Teología de la Universidad de Navarra* 48 (2016): 645-665.

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- Jeggle-Merz**, Birgit, “Amazonien-Synode. Aufruf zu einer partizipativen, zeitsensiblen Liturgie,” in *Laboratorium Weltkirche. Die Amazonien-Synode und ihre Potenziale*, ed. by Judith Gruber, Gregor Maria Hoff, Julia Knop and Benedikt Kranemann (Quaestiones disputatae, vol. 322) (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2022), 138-153.
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- , “Synodalität feiern – Synodalität als grundlegender Aspekt der christlichen Liturgie,” in *Synodalisierung. Eine Zerreißprobe für die katholische Weltkirche? Expertinnen und Experten aus aller Welt beziehen Stellung*, ed. by Paul Zulehner, Peter Neuner and Anna Hennersperger (Ostfildern: Grünewald, 2022), 159-176.
- Routhier**, Gilles, “La synodalité dans l’Église locale,” *Scripta Theologica. Revista de la Facultad de Teología de la Universidad de Navarra* 48 (2016): 687-706.
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- Turner**, Robert, “Synodality and John Zizioulas,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien. Revue œcuménique d’études et d’informations* 69 (2019): 42-51.

Italian References

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- Agostino Porreca, “La sinodalità in prospettiva eucaristica. Forma eucaristica e forma sinodale della chiesa,” in *La sinodalità al tempo di papa Francesco*, ed. Nicola Salato, (Bologna: EDB, 2020), 105-117

Roberto Repole, “Assemblea eucaristica e assemblea sinodale. La comune azione dello Spirito santo,” in *Rivista liturgica* 109 (2022), 155-167.

Giuseppe Ruggieri, “La liturgia come matrice della sinodalità,” in *Rivista liturgica* 109 (2022), 127-153.