

SYNDOLADITY AND FREEDOM IN THE CHURCH – SELECTED SESSION

Topic: Synodality and Freedom in the Church
 Convener: Martin Madar, Xavier University
 Moderator: James Nickoloff, College of the Holy Cross
 Presenters: Kristin Colberg, College of St. Benedict/St. John’s University
 John Markey, O.P., Oblate School of Theology
 Mary Kate Holman, Benedictine University

The Catholic Church is currently undergoing the largest consultative process in its history, namely, the Synod on Synodality. Many see the synodal process as a *kairos* in the life of the church and the most significant event in Catholicism since the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II, 1962-1965). The presenters at this session reflected on a connection between synodality and freedom in the church.

Kristin Colberg opened the session with “Synodality as Ecclesial Self-Actualization.” Drawing on the work of Karl Rahner, she started by defining freedom as the human capacity to make a commitment to the path that leads one to become one’s best self. In this line of thinking, freedom is seen as self-actualization. She spent the rest of her presentation reflecting on the current synodal assembly as an event in the church’s self-actualization, a process in which the church is becoming more fully and truly itself. She emphasized three points. First, she argued that one clear characteristic of a self-actualized church would be its openness to the Spirit of God, which requires careful listening to the entire people of God and discerning the *sensus fidelium*. Second, she noted that self-actualization must be expressed in history. Therefore, to discern the *sensus fidelium* the church must establish structures, habits, and practices that are open and inclusive. Third, she pointed out that a self-actualized church realizes that listening requires accountability to what is heard. She concluded by expressing hope that the synodal process will help to bring about meaningful changes that reflect the church’s true identity.

John Markey’s presentation, “Freeing the Spirit to Free the Church: Implications of the Pneumatological Principle for a More Authentic Synodal Process,” followed well on the points made by Colberg. His focus was on the pneumatology implicit in the synodal process. He offered a critical assessment of the Preparatory Schema for the diocesan phase of the synodal process. He argued that the synodal process as it is outlined in the Preparatory Schema betrays the pneumatology that grounds it by presuming that merely listening to the faithful is the same thing as including them in the discernment of what it means to be a Spirit-led church. Building on insights from Yves Congar, he proposed four practical suggestions that might aid in freeing the synodal process so that it can “free the church.” First, the process must concretely demonstrate a repentance for clericalism and the almost total monopolization of charisms by the ordained and ecclesial elites. Second, the synod must be free to address any issues that the participants deem appropriate. Third, the examination of matters that touch on the ordinary life of believers such as gender, sexuality, and ecclesial organization and management should be considered the proper domain of synodal conversations; conclusions should be taken seriously. Lastly, the goal of the synodal

process should be to develop an ongoing institutional process of discerning what changes need to be made at the level of the universal church.

Mary Kate Holman's presentation, "The Freedom to Speak and the Freedom to Be Heard," was historical in nature. She examined the experiences of three French thinkers at Vatican II to understand how institutional structures can both facilitate and hinder the freedom to participate in ecclesial dialogue. Her starting point was Pope Francis' call to *parrhesia* (boldness and freedom of speech) and an observation that *parrhesia* has largely been absent from the modern history of the Catholic Church. However, she finds such speech in the lives and works of Henri de Lubac, Marie-Dominique Chenu, and Marie-Thérèse Lacaze. Holman concludes that there is a difference between the freedom to speak and the freedom to be heard, and that an effective shift toward synodality will require shedding an internalized culture of censorship. She noted that a call to *parrhesia* must be accompanied by a call to genuine listening. We must therefore ask which structures allow theologians and others in the church with bold ideas to inform the proceedings of the "institutional" church.

The session concluded with an energetic discussion among members of the audience and the presenters.

MARTIN MADAR
Xavier University
Cincinnati, Ohio