



Carlo FANTAPPIÈ: *Metamorfosi della sinodalità*
Dal Vaticano II a papa Francesco
[Metamorphosis of synodality
From Vatican II to Pope Francis]
Venezia: Marcianum Press, 2023

Nowadays, there is no shortage of studies and scientific publications on the issue of synodality in the Church in recent years. The author of the reviewed book, Carlo Fantappiè, mentions it in the introduction (p. 7). Those interested in this issue can consult the many publications available in bookshops. For those unfamiliar with the subject matter, it may come as a surprise that a significant number of authors focus their attention on the changes introduced by Pope Francis, commenting on them, explaining them, or assessing them negatively, while attempting to understand and define the phenomenon of synodality so accentuated in the Church today. Yet, contemporary studies are not merely historical, theological or canonical analyses of synodality. For experts in this field and those trying to explore this issue, each new study will inspire them to see those aspects that have not always been present in their own research work.

There is no doubt that the new process of holding the Synod of Bishops, introduced by Pope Francis, which is beginning at the level of particular Churches with the strong involvement of the lay faithful and dedicated to the theme of the synodal Church, provokes questions about the foundations of this phenomenon, in particular its legitimacy, aiming to understand or even negate it to a certain extent. For every novelty in a legal institution raises questions about its foundations. In the case of the phenomenon of synodality, the legitimacy of its new aspects or forms

can be understood by noticing and emphasising the permanence of the ecclesiastical phenomenon. The historicity of the phenomenon, and this is the case with synodality as an experience present in the Church and prior to the conceptualisation of phenomenon itself, requires its essence to be grasped. For what is present can only be known and understood by taking into account the past. The coexisting elements of permanence and variability should be the object of scientific inquiry and explanation, and thus strengthen the theological basis of the phenomenon, demonstrate canonical solidity and pastoral effectiveness. It is in this perspective that Carlo Fantappiè stresses while considering the scientific matter under discussion (cf. p. 6).

Fantappiè seems to be aware that his study is another one in a series of publications dealing with the theme of synodality. However, in his words to the reader, he explains that in its content the book differs from the others addressing the issue. This had been his intention when he began his research. The attentive reader therefore has the opportunity to look at the phenomenon of synodality in a new perspective. To do this, however, surely requires some familiarity with studies published prior to Fantappiè's book. Further reading, however, deals away with these concerns. The author briefly and concretely presents contemporary developments in the topic of synodality. For a person unfamiliar with the topic of synodality, the author's assumptions addressed at the reader may be an encouragement to take the first steps familiarising oneself with the phenomenon in question. The author indicates this in his opening words when he writes that he will draw attention to the weaknesses of the "synodal programme in the life of the Church" by proposing necessary additions and solutions. Thus, the study will not be a destructive criticism, but rather an expression of constructive criticism in full conformity with the "synodal spirit of the Church." This two-pronged approach: to present the phenomenon of synodality since Vatican II, and thus to point to its foundations, and to analyse its contemporary forms in varying permanence together with an indication of its weak moments, makes the study of Carlo Fantappiè a proposition for both critics and supporters of the synodal process taking place before our eyes. The author's intentions, apart from being an intellectual struggle with today's form of synodality, reach out to those who may not fully understand this phenomenon. This can lead either to indifference, rejection or, to the contrary, may give rise to exaggerated stance of proclaiming erroneous views, or to undertaking inappropriate forms of updating synodality.

A novelty of the synod announced for October 2023, with the second synodal session in October 2024, is the participation of lay faithful from the first stages of the synodal process in the particular churches.

As Fantappiè claims, this is not a sensational novelty, but the result of reflection and pastoral choices aimed at giving the Church a new evangelising impulse. Regardless of the outlook and framing thereof, such a synodal process raises questions of a theological and canonical nature which, in the author's opinion, have not been sufficiently highlighted so far. Carlo Fantappiè devotes his study to these issues.

For the sake of clarity, the author provides elements of the methodology used in the study. With regard to the first two issues, he traces and presents the genesis of the various conceptions of synodality to then indicate the implications that theological and canonist doctrines have had on the understanding of synodality. However, he does not intend to remain at the level of description, but rather to point out the ambiguity that is present in the various approaches to the phenomenon itself and the critical moments of the synodal process, in order to finally propose methodological guarantees that make it possible to update the phenomenon of synodality in the Church.

Already in the introduction, Fantappiè points to what is important in considering synodality, its concept and its significance for the Church. He draws attention to the erroneous approach that seeks the basis of the phenomenon in the early Church, which draws upon today's understanding and framing of the term. In considering the definition and content of synodality, the history of the Church showing her in a specific historical moment cannot be overlooked. The author believes that, for this reason, the starting point for a consideration of synodality should be the image of the Church as it was presented at the last Council. The perspective of contemporary reflections on synodality, its meaning and the limits of understanding is the concept of *communio* in the Church, which is actualised on many different levels: *communio cum Deo et hominibus*, *communio* between the faithful, God, the Church, and the world, *communio ecclesiarum* between the particular Churches and the Church in Rome and between the bishops as their representatives. Furthermore, in the current consideration of the phenomenon of synodality, it is necessary to take into account what is characteristic of today's awareness of ecclesial communion, namely the principle of dignity and equality of rights and duties and shared responsibility for the Church (p. 14).

The methodology and perspective of consideration is therefore precisely defined. The phenomenon of synodality must be approached in the light of what the Church says about herself today. In Chapter I, "Genesi del concetto" (Genesis of the concept), the author presents the first attempts to develop the concept of synodality on the part of theologians and canonists that emerged under the influence of Vatican II (pp. 15–33). He draws attention to the differences in the approach to synodality that

emerged among German, Swiss, and American canonists, who link their understanding of synodality to the concept of *communio*, and the concept present among Italian or Spanish canonists, who see it in the ways in which collegiality is made present in relation to primacy or in relation to questions of rights and duties in the Church.

The second chapter, “Sviluppi dottrinali” (Doctrinal developments) is devoted to the presentation of the further development of the concept of synodality (1978—1993; 2001—2018). The author makes it clear that after Vatican II, despite the many attempts to define synodality, its concept is not unambiguous and even less commonly shared. The author does not stop at merely presenting these concepts. He reflects on the sources of this diversity in understanding of synodality. He points out that the authors of the concepts did not take into account the theories of their predecessors, but instead developed their concepts autonomously based on the accepted criteria. Fantappiè indicates three main groups of reasons (he mentions others when discussing the main ones) for the different conceptions of synodality: 1) synodality existing in a functional sense (*modello funzionale*) in relation to one of the selected elements underlying it (*communio ecclesiarum, munus episcopale, munus regendi*) or in relation to the life of the Church in her fullness; 2) synodality not only as a constitutive aspect of the Church, but one that includes all the other forms of participation in the governance of the Church (*modello unitario*); 3) synodality derived from the various constitutive realities of the Church such as communion, shared responsibility, collegiality, conciliarity, which remain in relation to one another as concentric circles (*modello plurale*). The author closes the discussion around the understanding of synodality by quoting a document of the International Theological Commission, pointing out the multifaceted and interdisciplinary nature in the quest for its full understanding. This requires combining ecclesiology, theology (Bible, Tradition), the history of ecclesiastical institutions and integrating the conclusions they present with the ecclesiology *communio* of Vatican II, the teaching of Francis and the problems of the contemporary Church. The author emphasises that from the definition of synodality comes the activation of listening to all the members who make up the People of God in the quest for the discernment of truth in the missionary activity of the Church.

The author begins Chapter III, “La recezione dell’idea di ‘Chiesa sinodale’” (The reception of the idea of the “synodal Church”) by presenting Francis’s teaching on synodality and the changes made by the pope to further trace the reception of his teaching. It is not the first time that he highlights the lack of unanimity in the understanding and reception of papal teaching. Fantappiè devotes the next section of the said chapter

to this topic looking at past as well as contemporary understanding of synodality. He analyses each of them, pointing out those elements that pose a danger to a correct understanding of synodality and should be unmasked, which the author himself does in his critical analysis. He does not stop at merely presenting the erroneous elements of the views formed, but in the last point describes the precautions that should be taken into account in today's understanding of synodality and in the practice of the entire synodal process. He points to three of them: 1) the one of a methodological nature (the need to define an operative boundary for the concept of synodality); 2) the one of a doctrinal nature (drawing a clear line between synodality and democracy); 3) the one of an institutional-legal nature (avoiding the violation of the constitutive structure of the Church by the divine decree).

Carlo Fantappiè concludes his study with a question of an ecclesiological nature: In the case of Francis and his doctrine of synodality, are we dealing with a new form of reception of Vatican II or are we rather dealing with a transition from a hierarchical Church to a synodal Church, thus modifying the structure of authority based on the Pope, the Roman Curia or the College of Cardinals. The author remains with this question, which the attentive reader can answer for himself. It is not a doctrinal answer, but a functional one in the dimension of the shared responsibility for ecclesial communion.

Fantappiè, in the publication reviewed here, guides us through the meanders of the richness of community life in the Church. He does not stop at presenting the story of how the phenomenon of synodality has been understood thus far, but points to a process that is constantly alive, not only because we are witnessing it, but as a way of the Church's existence in the world placing clear boundaries between what the Church is and what it is supposed to be according to this world. The publication by Fantappiè is a concise and succinct study, concrete and topical in the Church that talks about synodality but also learns the synodal way.

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