

## Article

# Contributions of the Synodal Process to the Religious Life of Adult Believers in Christian Communities

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**Abstract:** Synodality, as a determinant of the mentality and style of pastoral activity, has proven to be one of the key themes of Church life in the last few years. The synodal dimension of the Church is seen as the fundamental backbone of all the other important components of pastoral engagement. Religious life and practice of adult believers, on the other hand, remains one of the most challenging pastoral tasks. This claim is so current that concerning many church environments one can legitimately ask whether a mature and developed practice of faith exists at all. The synodal process that is ongoing in the Catholic Church, especially until the fall of 2024, helps to improve so many pastoral activities and most of them concern the practice of faith of adult believers. This paper is dedicated to the theological–pastoral study of the main components of the improvement of this practice in light of the contributions of the synodal process.

**Keywords:** church; synodality; adults; pastoral activity; practice of faith

## 1. Introduction

The experience of the synodal process of the local churches during the pastoral year 2021–2022, in the form of offerings to the Synod of Bishops in Rome in 2023 and 2024, provides enough material for theological–pastoral discernment of the challenges and incentives of synodality today. This process, as well as further synodal consultations until today, stimulated so many theological reflections and discussions about the elements and meaning of synodality in the Church. Both experiences and theological reflection are in some way part of the Church’s maturation process in understanding and living synodality, and this is exactly what is expected concerning this reality, especially since Vatican II (see SLMC, § 5).

If we leave aside some specifically challenging issues, it is possible to see many precious contributions that the synodal process as such offered to the life of the Catholic Church, but also more widely. Among other things, this process offered very important insights into some of the key elements of religious life and pastoral activity, with those concerning the catechesis with adult believers in Christian communities standing out (see BSSSRN, pp. 7–10). In addition, the respective process strongly highlighted some elements of a different activity of believers. Of the wealth of theological and pastoral insights and elements of synodality, some more important ones are discussed here, in the light of contemporary theological understandings of this reality, as well as the indications of the Church’s teaching on it. At the same time, the theological–pastoral understanding of the relevant topic is primarily achieved by observing the incentives that make living this reality particularly fruitful for the overall pastoral engagement of the Church, as well as the challenges that stand in the way of the same in current circumstances. It is important to note that the incentives of synodality are not studied here in relation to all theological–pastoral challenges connected with the meaning of this term. It is more about recognizing incentives for the religious life of adults and their Christian action on a broader and more general theological–pastoral level. These incentives should then serve theological experts for further elaboration, which certainly goes beyond the scope of this paper. The



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mentioned incentives were mainly observed in connection with the synodal experiences of some local churches and the opinions of some theological experts.

The religious practice of adult believers in the Church today is a very challenging task in many environments. This practice implies numerous preconditions, of which catechesis in its own sense should be mentioned here (see DC, § 257–265). It is not necessary to emphasize how much Christian enthusiasm and activity depend on correct education. However, in contrast to the catechesis of children and young people, adults are especially called to develop models of self-education, including in religion (see DC, § 257–259). Nevertheless, in general, the synodal process showed that both catechesis and self-education are in a big crisis concerning knowledge and other dimensions of living the Christian faith (see SSIHB, § 2–3). Clearly, in addition to the issue of catechesis, the synodal process revealed many other challenges of the life and practice of faith of adult believers.

In this context, it is important to warn about the complexity of the situation of adults today. As is well known, the age of adults in the catechetical context is generally placed between youth and old age (see DC, § 257–266). At the same time, it is important to emphasize that today, due to many factors, it is very difficult to accurately determine the chronological limit of adulthood in specific cases. Without going into a detailed elaboration of the situation of adults, it should be said that this very long and very complex period is made even more difficult today by the accelerated processes of individualization, globalization, virtualization, and pragmatic competitiveness of living. In all of this, the strong influence of existential human fragility should be recognized today (see [De Bourqueney 2022](#), pp. 169–72). In this sense, it becomes comprehensible why it is so difficult to realize the demands of adulthood in different cultural contexts, especially for specific individuals. Often, chronologically mature age does not translate into maturity in the psychological, cultural, educational, and especially not in the religious sense (see [Vranješ 2021](#), pp. 97–99). Adult believers are therefore in a rather complex situation of connecting the indicated processes in which they are immersed with the faith they profess. This is precisely the additional reason for the need for additional incentives in the religious life of adults at all times.

The synodal process, on the one hand, showed precisely the complexity of the situation of adult believers, while on the other hand, it pointed out the fact that adult believers possess weak religious knowledge, as well as the rather scarce offer of models of religious activity and engagement of adult believers in certain communities (see SSIHB, § 2.4). It is in some church and cultural contexts that a drastic lack of appropriate models of engagement by adults has been observed. In many parish environments, it is not even possible to talk about developed models of their religious activity. This is especially emphasized in connection with the fact that the educational potential in Christian communities is mostly directed at children and young people. In addition, the offer of specific catechetical models for adults is scarce, and in some communities, there are some not very suitable models of catechesis with adults. This is exactly what the synodal process showed as one of the main causes of the weak religious activity of adult believers (see SSIHB, § 2). This is also the reason why the more powerful activities of many adult believers are related to the environments of movements, small communities, and associations of believers. In many of these settings, there is a serious problem with the quality and integrity of indicated activities. All of these are additional reasons for discerning the religious life and practice of adults, even in the wake of the contribution of the synodal process (see [Legrand 2022](#), pp. 227–33).

## 2. Contribution to the Ecclesial Experience through the Experience of Synodality

The first essential element of the contribution of the synodal process to the religious life and practice of adults is certainly the possibility of experiencing the Church in a new way (see [Torcivia 2021](#), pp. 207–9). Although it is a rather general element, it is very important to start from this point. Namely, it represents a framework for observing and understanding some other elements of the synodal process. The experiences of the synodal involvement

of adult believers testified to the importance it left in their lives. This applies especially to those who for the first time were given the opportunity to speak publicly in church communities about certain topics (see BSSSRN, pp. 6–16). Thus, for many, the experience of synodality was a new form of the true experience of what being a Church means, but at the same time, an experience of maturing in so many ways concerning religious knowledge, and this is precisely one of the key questions of the permanent theological formation of both lay believers and the clergy (see [Steccanella 2021](#), pp. 371–74).

In certain environments, the problem of reducing synodal processes to only certain synodal events has appeared. In other words, the problem of understanding synodality appeared precisely as a dimension that permeates all the components of what it means ‘to be a Church’, in the sense of ‘walking together’ and of the co-responsibility for its mission (see [Noceti 2021](#), p. 35). But, despite this, the possibility of new ways of participating in the processes of being the Church has become for many, especially adult believers, the first real turning point in recent times in contributing to the personal religious life and life of the Church. This is of key importance for the religious practice of adults since there is no such practice in the Christian sense if people lack the real experience of being a Church. That is exactly why, despite so much resistance in some environments, synodal meetings and consultations proved to be extremely valuable experiences for so many adult believers.

The synodal process significantly contributes to the deepening of faith in all aspects. Faith as such, both in the form of knowledge and under the form of experience, implies the permanent advancement of man in his historical framework. Faith requires constant deepening. Man’s life in communion with God deepens with slow steps. Since the life of the community of believers is an inseparable component of the total life in faith, it becomes understandable that its dimensions and dynamism become decisive factors in the deepening of knowledge and experience of faith. This is precisely why synodality is among the key dimensions of the correct actualization of religious life, which implies the action of grace, time, community, and a common path (see [Desmazières 2022](#), p. 28).

### *2.1. Starting from the Basic Labels of the Term and Basic Experiences*

It is good to emphasize that the fundamental experiences regarding the understanding of the dimension of synodality in the Church were quite challenging for adult believers. Many believers in different church environments have expressed dual, and sometimes conflicting, experiences and attitudes about synodality (see SSIHB, § 2–3). That is why the concept of synodality as such has become one of the first essential elements of maturing in the knowledge of the unity of the Church and its numerous components. So it can be understood that the mentioning of fundamental experiences is recognized here as an incentive for the most authentic theological discernment of synodality in today’s framework, taking into account the diversity of the historical and social context, but also the burden of the life and experience of the church community, both in the past and today. At the same time, it is important to add that the majority of adult believers in the Church today find themselves in a rather challenging situation concerning the quality and depth of religious knowledge, and especially about their ability to connect it with the signs of the sociocultural context in which they live (see SSIHB, § 2.5). For many adult believers, the specific experience of synodal involvement in local communities was one of the strongest incentives they received for deepening both their religious experience and religious knowledge.

### *2.2. An Experience That Helps to Clarify Concepts and Change the Perspective of Action*

To understand the synodal process in the Church and some of its essential contributions to religious life in a broader sense, it is important to take into account the truth that today’s experiences of synodality of adult believers should not be distinguished by themselves, but in the context of the life and activity of the Church as such. This means that experiences should be distinguished in terms of the totality of religious knowledge and experience, while taking into account the specificity of particular communities in the Church. It is also important to always measure the experience in terms of the essential

elements of the content of the synodality, which today is primarily seen as the constitutive dimension of the Church's life and mission (see SLMC, § 1). This should be noted since the synodal process itself can only achieve the desired effect on the religious life of adults and their actions if it is understood as an integral component of all essential evangelization and pastoral activities.

However, this fact is not self-explanatory in such a wide range of experiences. In fact, at the beginning of the synodal process (and this is often still the case today), the concept of synodality was not even clear to many believers and not even to the clergy, and especially not synodality as a constitutive element of the Church's life, and that means neither as a specific theological concept (see [Coda 2021](#), p. 188). We do not dive into a detailed analysis of the meaning of the term synodality here since it is already a well-researched area. Nevertheless, highlighted above refers to those elements of marked experiences concerning which the meaning of the term proves to be challenging and sometimes even controversial. Experts thus warn that sometimes an effort is noticed to expand the meaning of synodality concerning some other theological concepts. They also warn that sometimes there is a kind of confusion about the indicated relationship of synodality and some other similar realities whose framework of meaning is more specific regarding some dimensions of Church life (see [Noceti 2021](#), pp. 36–38). This is not surprising if one takes into account that until a few years ago the reality of synodality was not too prominent in Church life. So it was also logical to expect that a large part of the laity, but also a good part of the clergy, would not experience the revaluation of this concept correctly.

In addition to the fact that, at the beginning of the process of synodal consultations, many believers possess weak or almost no knowledge of the concept of synodality, it should also be noted that there is a significant effort to replace the meaning of the term synodality with the content of other terms, especially among some believers who view the term synodality with suspicion. In this way, there was a strong effort to mix up terms in some circles, and there was also an attempt in some Church circles to ignore the concept and reality of synodality. Instead, what sometimes starts to occur is that many believers begin talking about so many other topics, mostly of a pious or purely practical nature. Most often, this is done from more traditional motives of action (see [BSSSRN](#), pp. 10–11).

However, phenomena of this type indicate an additional need not only to emphasize but also to explain the meaning of synodality in a theological–pastoral way, even concerning some other important concepts. In particular, many adult believers are wary of synodality precisely because they do not know and do not understand its content. Seen from this perspective, the value of the contribution of the synodal process to clarify the content of theological concepts and realities for many people becomes even more clear. These facts show why it is important to recognize the synodal process as such in terms of contributing to the clarification of concepts. This therefore primarily refers to the concept of synodality itself, and then to a whole series of related concepts, such as the concept of collegiality, participation, togetherness, co-responsibility, etc. (see [Noceti 2021](#), p. 36). That is why it is important to immediately point out the distinction of synodality in the Church from the content and meaning of some other concepts since the correct perception of many elements of the content of the respective concepts directly depends on this.

With regard to highlighting the importance of the correct understanding of the term, it is also important to point out the importance of the correct perspective of action regarding the actualization of synodality among both the clergy and laity. For example, the synodal process in many circles is too often reduced to only certain synodal events. With this, many people were given the impression that the issue of synodality in the Church was solved with the organization of several separate events or gatherings (see [BSSSRN](#), pp. 10–11). However, this is precisely where one of the pitfalls of a superficial understanding of synodality is hidden. Synodality should first of all be understood as an essential element of the common walk of Christ's disciples through history. It is primarily seen as a reality which as such is not reducible to some individual events, but concerns all components of the Church's life. It particularly touches on the question of mentality and style, and then on the revitalization

and correct actualization of all structures of Church representativeness and participation in the most diverse contexts of life. It is important to note that this is not primarily an issue of institutional architecture, but rather a style of existence and action (see SLMC, § 70). This is exactly the area where the revitalization of church life should take place (see [Coda 2021](#), pp. 192–93). This stimulation of the synodal process and the religious education of believers and their actions should be recognized as one of the most important in terms of understanding and living synodality.

### 3. Some Accents *Ad Intra*

The contribution of the synodal process to the religious life of adult believers and their actions in the Church and the world can be observed in terms of the activities of the Church community *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Understanding the relevance of the synodal process *ad intra* is related to inner Church life, while the *ad extra* area is designated by the question of the Christian behavior and action toward society, culture, and the world. Of course, this is only a logical attempt at a simpler presentation of the topic. At the same time, it should be added that this is certainly not about strictly separated areas of discernment, but only about an attempt at a more complete and comprehensive theological–pastoral overview of the theme. This division also seems logical due to the different emphases related to some areas, which in themselves require a clear limitation regarding the pastoral and catechetical, as well as the sociocultural context of actualization. In this way, certain important details are better observed both in terms of the understanding of synodality itself and also in terms of pastoral activity with adults. Although the aforementioned highlights are in some way part of the reflection on the contribution of *ad intra*, some other related points will be highlighted below.

#### 3.1. Contribution to the Knowledge and Experience of the Community

Concerning the *ad intra* area, the synodal process, as already emphasized, helped so many believers to gain a deeper understanding of the nature and existence of the Church as a communion. However, this process was not always smooth or simple. Some of the experiences concerned were an open refusal to participate, or were insufficient and very cautious forms of participation in synodal processes, with the excuse of reluctance to participate in the so-called ‘liberalization’ or ‘protestantization’ of the Catholic church or, to put it mildly, unnecessary ‘innovations’ (see SSIHB, § 1.2). However, at the heart of the problem is usually the image of a rather monolithic Church, whose communication processes would be more like those suitable for the mentality of past centuries. In this regard, the synodal process strongly encourages a change in the perspective of thinking and experience, and with it, the pastoral paradigm of action. Precisely concerning this, it is necessary to notice the elements of theological discernment that warn of the need for reform in the form of authentic synodality that Pope Francis is looking for. This reform concerns a change in mentality, but also pastoral practices and structures in the form of synodality as an indispensable constitutive dimension of the Church and as a style of its engagement (see [Noceti 2021](#), p. 43). It was the actualization of this knowledge that helped so many believers to recognize the Church, not as a static, but as a very alive and dynamic reality. The actualization of synodality is inextricably linked to the understanding of the Church in becoming, i.e., in development and maturation (see [Desmazières 2022](#), p. 7).

#### 3.2. In Light of the Revaluation of the Subject

The abovementioned experiences and emphases enabled the Church as a community, but also so many individuals in it, to see in a new way the dignity, meaning, and role of individual persons in the community. The contribution of the synodal process to this reality should certainly be highlighted as one of the key ones. The experiences of the synodal dynamics, but also of some diocesan synods that took place before and partially during the still current synodal process, clearly confirm this claim (see TSK, § 22, 248–249; DSZN, § 104–105). The revaluation of the subject in Church life and activity is thus recognized as a

key incentive that the synodal process highlighted, and it proved to be very important in the promotion of services, responsibilities, and roles of lay believers. However, it should not be forgotten that structurally connected with this is the area of correct understanding and living of the ministry of the clergy in the Church (see [Mignozzi 2020](#), pp. 38–41), namely that synodality strives for the complete promotion of all persons and all vocations in the Church. In this sense, it is an echo of the efforts of God's people, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, to fully develop their mission in all its subjects and components. The revaluation of the subject in the church mission should therefore be recognized and experienced as a whole concerning all factors of that mission.

Discernment of the contribution of the conducted synodal consultations first of all points to one basic truth from which it is worth starting, and it is certainly about the fact that the numerous experiences of the participants of the synodal processes in different forms reveal, on the one hand, joy, and on the other hand, a living need for a stronger and more serious evaluation of opinions and experience of individual believers. Moreover, in some local churches, many believers have declared that this synodal process is the first opportunity to ask them something in the Church (see BSSSRN, § 8–15). These experiences of synodal consultations coincide with the opinions of theological experts who point out that some necessary and important transitions must be made at the community level to enable the development of a stronger affirmation of persons and their engagement in the context of the community. In this context, and especially in the form of the actualization of renewed ecclesio-genesis, one could highlight the need for three transitions that could encourage a renewed dynamism of engagement of both individuals and communities: transition from a too structured and centralized community to a more open community of stronger participation; a transition toward a stronger actualization of experiential ecclesio-genesis; and a transition toward structures that encourage and truly serve the renewal of communion at all levels (see [Tonello 2022](#), p. 22). These transitions are an important part of the collection of theological insights and experiences achieved in these years.

### *3.3. Synodality as an Expression of Deepening Relations and Communication*

Since a person is always immersed in the context of his or her community, and is somehow more dependent on the community than the community on him or her, it is logical that the synodal processes, in addition to the emphases mentioned above, also pointed to those related to the topics of relationships and communication. One of the biggest challenges pointed out by synodal consultations and theological research is certainly the issue of relationships and communication in the Church (see [Lojudice 2022](#), pp. 14–22). Relationship as a fundamental element of community is inseparable from communication. That is exactly why it is important to consider these two realities together. Synodality essentially concerns both of them. The synodal process clearly highlighted the need to create a higher level of true and mature communication in the Church at all levels (see BSSSRN, pp. 7–8). Moreover, this very process is an exceptional opportunity to observe so many shortcomings and so many manifestations of immaturity within the communication processes in the Church. This is precisely the area in which all members of the Church should be permanently engaged in maturing and listening to each other.

### *3.4. Synodality and Services, Responsibilities and Roles of Lay Believers*

The synodal process made a special contribution to the promotion of services, responsibilities, and roles of lay believers in the Church in general. Moreover, it can be asserted that few recent processes in the Church have strongly contributed in this area. Although it may seem that the similar echoes in some church communities are weak, it is important to take into account the time needed for more complex dynamics such as this to come to life. In this regard, it should be immediately pointed out that it was the synodal process that made it possible to deal more strongly with the problem of the dichotomy between the clergy and laity (see [Tangora 2020](#), pp. 27–28). Although in many church environments, some clerics had serious problems with accepting synodal processes, it should still be

pointed out that precisely these processes enabled the clergy to more strongly realize their role in the Church. For lay believers, the same processes enable a stronger step forward in commitment since the majority of lay people, especially in some Central European contexts, have so far been close to the margins of church engagement.

The incentives of the synodality for the service of the lay faithful are multiple. As the first, one could recognize the one who points out to believers the importance of active participation in the life of the community in general. First of all, synodality enables the recognition of the importance of a community for religious life and the contribution that each believer can make to the same. In a way, synodality is a special expression of communion, and more precisely, an appropriate way of living and behaving that corresponds to the reality of communion (see BSSSRN, pp. 18–19). The dynamics of synodality thus help believers to see that it is indeed possible to create a suitable framework within the community in which each believer can recognize his/her place and act by the charisms and gifts he/she receives from God. The synodal processes enabled lay believers to see the value and meaning of their charisms and forms of service for the good of the Church and the world (see Theobald 2019, pp. 245–46). This is of exceptional importance for the services of lay believers, as well as for other services. This means that all believers are called to recognize whether they really have the charisms for a particular service, and then to fit their gift into the totality of the gifts and charisms of the Church. In this respect, the synodal dynamics also enabled purification, i.e., clearer discernment in many communities (see SSIHB, § 2–3). It can also be pointed out that the synodal process strongly encouraged adult believers in particular to recognize and live their charisms.

The synodal process gave a special impetus to the promotion of liturgical services of the lay faithful. The liturgical services of lay believers in the Church are a special reflection of their cooperation in the life of the community. While ordained ministers over time profiled their indispensable part in the overall mission of the Church, the services of the lay faithful only in recent decades, in the framework in which we recognize them today, came to the fore. In some respects, it can be stated that many participants of these services are still in the process of searching for suitable ways of their education, and concrete realization of them. In many cases and many church communities, it is possible to see different problems concerning the realization of the liturgical services of lay believers. The synodal process showed this clearly (see BSSSRN, pp. 7–12). All of these are ultimately questions of the style of behavior and action in the community, to which the dimension of synodality provides many suitable answers. That is precisely why it is important to recognize it as one of the fundamental pillars of the promotion of services in the Church.

In addition to the aforementioned elements, synodality encourages all service holders to express their responsibility in such a way that will enable the permanent refinement of service. This means, among other things, that service holders should be prepared for permanent theological–liturgical and theological–biblical formation, which in many segments will require the inclusion of elements of formation from other non-theological disciplines. The issue of insufficient formation of the faithful for services, but also insufficient religious knowledge in general, is one of the first insights of the synodal processes with regard to the laity (see BSSSRN, p. 18). Synodality, therefore, in the matter of performing services in the Church gives a special incentive in terms of permanent formation for services. Lifelong education has already become one of the main components of the lives of so many people in civil society who have realized that the appropriate realization of their professional tasks is not possible without permanent training. Unfortunately, from a pastoral point of view, such thoughts and approaches have not yet become a significant component of the life of the Church on a broader level, especially as far as lay believers are concerned. To this, the challenge of flawed and insufficient models of theological education of the laity should be added at the broadest level, which is mostly related to the issue of parish catechesis. All of this points to the importance of including lay believers, and especially holders of certain services in the community, in models of formation and permanent education. Today, this is one of the key prerequisites for appropriate action concerning the entrusted service, but

also the services, responsibilities, and roles of other subjects of Church life (see [Brignoli 2022](#), pp. 55–57).

In the respective theological–pastoral discernment, it is important to point out that the area of cooperation of lay believers in the Church in the synodal process is particularly highlighted under one special aspect. Namely, one of the most complex issues that has emerged in the Church during the synodal process so far is certainly the question of the ways and models of the participation of lay believers in the life of the Church, especially in decision-making processes. This was seen as a first-rate issue at the general Church level. It is therefore worth noting the theological efforts which, based on documents at the broadest Church level, propose some solutions in a new and modern way (see [Zaccaria 2024](#), pp. 3–8). The synodal process thus became a first-class incentive for adult lay believers to recognize, and then become involved in the processes that lead to decisions important for the life of Church communities. It seems that this is one of the most important incentives of the synodal process so far for lay believers, and especially for those who are active in certain advisory bodies in smaller communities in the Church, and especially in parishes. Thus, the synodal process became one of the strongest incentives for the development of pastoral counseling of the lay faithful (see [Theobald 2019](#), p. 246). This is exactly what clerics and lay people themselves should see more and respect more.

#### 4. Some Contributions to the *Ad Extra* Area

As it was pointed out, the above division of looking at the echoes of the synodal experiences and reflections according to the areas *ad intra* and here *ad extra* is logical. Such a division serves as a more transparent view of the topic. This also makes it easier to see the contribution of the synodal process to the religious education of adults on a broader and more general level. In this sense, it is important to recognize some of the emphases that the synodal process points out regarding the relationship of the Church to society and culture, i.e., to those environments of life that are not typically religious (see SSHIB, § 4–5). Moreover, one of the basic incentives of the synodal process for the life of believers is precisely the connection of intra-church life with the area of culture and society in the broadest sense of the word (see [Legrand 2022](#), pp. 233–35). We should not forget that this very connection represents one of the greatest challenges of religious life today; of life, which many narrow down only to the intra-church area.

##### 4.1. *The Synodal Process as a Stimulus for Evangelization*

If the contributions of the synodal process to the *ad extra* area of living the Christian faith can in a certain sense be summarized and presented in an interconnected manner, it can be said that they essentially correspond to the programmatic evangelization call of Pope Francis. Although there are certain opposite tendencies in synodal contributions in some local churches, in general, it can be stated that the process as such is a great stimulus to the new evangelization. Various elements of the synodal process contribute to the education and practice of the faithful in achieving a different attitude toward contemporary culture (see SLMC, § 118–19). It should be pointed out that even the abovementioned negative tendencies regarding different Christian approaches to culture today are a kind of indicator of the state of the Church regarding its relationship to culture in general. That is an important insight into the synodal process as well.

In this process, culture is primarily recognized and proposed as a place of meeting and dialogue. In this way, the believers were presented with an area of activity that is most often skipped in the sense that they immediately move on to direct evangelization, sometimes imbued with the intentions of the old apologetics of the faith. The elements of the synodal process allow the faithful to see evangelization as a very complex undertaking that must always be imbued with the effort of dialogue, and by proposing the Gospel as a free offer, but without trying to force anyone's conversion. In this sense, the synodal process can be understood as a dynamic that enables a new, contemporary meeting of faith and culture (see [Legrand 2022](#), pp. 234–35). The various stages of the synodal process

enabled the recognition of points of contact between faith and culture, as well as those elements that are disputed in the pastoral and catechetical practice itself. In this sense, the manifestation of certain fanatical and fundamentalist, as well as integrist and traditionalist tendencies can be recognized today (see [Vranješ 2023](#), pp. 25–26). Many believers actualize the same, most often due to insufficient or low-quality religious education. In this way, the incentive to recognize the importance of educating adults in the faith as a prerequisite for participation in true evangelization came to the fore.

#### 4.2. The Contribution to the Ecumenical Collaboration

Among the areas that are typically Christian, but which logically differ concerning a typically pastoral intra-church action in the form of regular activity with the Catholic faithful is certainly the area of ecumenical cooperation. Although the synodal process also highlighted this form of cooperation to the faithful as important, it seems that many more immediate incentives are related to the Church's activities as a community. That is why this cooperation can be discussed more in the *ad extra* area. The importance of this cooperation has been highlighted since the beginning of the indicated synodal process (see [Noceti 2021](#), p. 33). This claim is particularly important today in a time of a kind of fatigue in ecumenical cooperation, and a kind of closure between individual Christian communities in certain areas. Unfortunately, regarding the relationship between some Christian communities, one can once again speak of certain hostility, which only further actualizes the always significant issue of ecumenical cooperation today and in the future. The participation of representatives of other Christian Churches in the synodal processes of the Catholic Church, as well as the understanding of the evangelistic meaning of the ecumenical movement, is strongly emphasized by Pope Francis (see EG, § 245–46). In this regard, synodality is an opportunity to recognize the gift for the Catholic Church that the Holy Spirit manifests in other Christians, provided that ecumenical dialogue is not understood only in a purely diplomatic way (see [Russo 2015](#), p. 206). It is particularly important to recognize the values of the understanding and practice of synodality of the Eastern Churches.

### 5. Conclusions

This paper is dedicated to the theological and pastoral research of the contribution that the current synodal process in the Catholic Church provides to the religious life of adult believers, as well as their concrete involvement in the Church and society. At the instigation of Pope Francis, the synodal process is particularly concerned with contributing to the work of the synod of bishops in Rome in 2023 and 2024. The contributions of synodal consultations in local Churches, as well as theological reflections on synodality, clearly brought to light many elements that are particularly useful for the religious life and activities of the faithful. The indicated elements are viewed in principle and logically under the prism of *ad intra* and *ad extra* areas of engagement and action. Concerning the *ad intra* typical ecclesiastical area, particularly noted contributions are contributions to the reevaluation of the subject within the community, contribution to the promotion of services and the role of lay believers, as well as an incentive to reflect on the role of lay people in decision-making processes. In relation to the *ad extra* area, the importance of a different, more constructive relationship between the dynamics of evangelization and culture is highlighted. All contributions were recognized on the basis of the new ecclesial experience through the experience of synodality. The synodal process makes a special contribution in terms of distinguishing and understanding the concept of synodality in relation to the content of other concepts, the content of which is also crucial for Church communion.

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## Abbreviations

BSSSRN	Riječka nadbiskupija, <i>Biskupijska sinteza sinodalnih savjetovanja u Riječkoj nadbiskupiji</i> . Rijeka 2022.
DC	Pontificio consiglio per la promozione della nuova evangelizzazione, <i>Direttorio per la catechesi</i> , Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020.
DSZN	Zagrebačka nadbiskupija, <i>Druga sinoda Zagrebačke nadbiskupije. Izjave i odluke</i> , Zagreb 2022.
EG	Francis. <i>Evangelii Gaudium</i> [Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World]. November 24. Available online: <a href="https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#:~:text=%22Evangelii%20Gaudium%22:%20Apostolic%20Exhortation,(24%20November%202013)%20%7C%20Francis&amp;text=1.,sorrow,%20inner%20emptiness%20and%20loneliness">https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#:~:text=%22Evangelii%20Gaudium%22:%20Apostolic%20Exhortation,(24%20November%202013)%20%7C%20Francis&amp;text=1.,sorrow,%20inner%20emptiness%20and%20loneliness</a> (accessed on 1 February 2024).
SLMC	International Theological Commission, <i>Synodality in the Life and Mission of The Church</i> (2018), <a href="https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html">https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html</a> (accessed on 29 January 2024)
SSIHB	Hrvatska biskupija, <i>Sažetak sinodskog iskustva Hvarske biskupije</i> , <a href="https://hvarskabiskupija.hr/vijesti/sazetak-sinodskog-iskustva-hvarske-biskupije/2719/">https://hvarskabiskupija.hr/vijesti/sazetak-sinodskog-iskustva-hvarske-biskupije/2719/</a> (accessed on 8 February 2023).
TSK	Nadbiskupski ordinarijat Đakovo, <i>Ti si Krist za nas i za sve ljude. Izjave i odluke Druge biskupijske sinode đakovačke i srijemske</i> , Đakovo 2008.

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