

Mysticism and Method

Hubertus Blaumeiser

On the eve of the second session of the Synod, here is yet another issue which focuses on synodality. The aim is clear: to investigate the relationship between the theological dimension and the contribution of the human sciences, or, as the title of this issue puts it, between mysticism and method. This is not about choosing between one or the other, but about an extremely interesting pairing, one of those antithetical pairings that permeate the Christian faith and guarantee its authenticity.

With the term mysticism, we wish to emphasize that the often-used – and perhaps even overused and sometimes abused – term “synodality” does not simply refer to a way of living and proceeding, but that a synodal style of the Church has its roots in the very life of God and can, and must, therefore, be an experience of God; a practice that does not end in the horizontal but has – to borrow a phrase dear to Iginio Giordani – a triangular structure: I – my brother/sister – God. In listening to one another with all our depth, it is about finding and hearing what the Spirit wants to say to the Church. Otherwise – as has been observed somewhat drastically – synodality risks becoming just “blah, blah, blah.”

Therefore, what is needed is a true spirituality of synodality that helps us to live it in its not only human but profoundly theological dimension; a spirituality of discernment such as the one which Saint Ignatius of Loyola offered to the Church, but projected into the communal dimension, so as not to fall into ecclesial “do-it-yourself” or even ideology. There is an urgent need for an unconditional openness to God and to the unpredictable movements of the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, it is also true that “what falls from Heaven must sprout from the earth” (Klaus Hemmerle). Therefore, no fideism or quietism: there is a human element that cannot be ignored. And this is where the other term comes into play: method. Synodality, in fact, is not simply “communion,” but requires procedures and structures. It is then understandable why facilitation has a rightful place in the

synodal process. It provides synodality with a “toolbox”: methods and instruments derived from human experience and the expertise of social sciences, which can help us make space for one another and, ultimately, for the Holy Spirit.

But here’s the point: these methods and instruments can prepare the necessary ground and create the human conditions – such as a real and profound listening – but they cannot produce the descent of the Spirit. This is a cornerstone of Christianity: you cannot scale Heaven, but you can only position yourself for its descent (cf. Jn 3). No one knew this more than Mary, the Mother of the Son of God made man in her – indispensable – womb.

In light of this, one can understand why the idea of a true ministry of the facilitator has emerged in the context of the synodal process. Similarly, it becomes clear that the very method of conversation in the Spirit, providentially brought into prominence along the way, is always an act of humility and hope, and ultimately a prayer: “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20).

Mysticism and method: two dimensions that should not be separated but also not confused, as the Christological dogma rightly teaches. Both are indispensable and not reducible to one another, but they also have an order of priority. And so, it is obvious that synodality is not only “the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God” (Preparatory Document for the 2021-2024 Synod, September 2021, no. 10, referring to the study of the International Theological Commission *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, March 2018, no. 3), but it is also a human-divine art that we are all invited to learn and experience more and more.

With the contributions of this issue, some of which stem from a study seminar held by the *Evangelii Gaudium* Center of the Sophia University Institute in May last year in Castel Gandolfo, *Ekklesia* hopes to contribute to the deepening of this art and to stimulate further reflections. At stake is not only the well-being of the Catholic Church and the potential revival of Christianity in this era of change, but the very destiny of humanity, which is in desperate need of learning this art of mutual listening and acceptance that opens the space for the Spirit, who makes all things new.