

Orientation text of the Synodal Path

“On the Path of Conversion and Renewal. Theological Foundations of the Synodal Path of the Catholic Church in Germany”

(Decision of the Synodal Path at the Third Synodal Assembly on February 3rd, 2022)

The supreme magisterium of the Church has presented the binding doctrine on revelation in the dogmatic constitution on divine revelation Dei Verbum of the Second Vatican Council, considering the entire tradition, namely the Council of Trent and the First Vatican Council. The presentation of this doctrine is not a dogma in the formal sense but enjoys the highest binding character as an act of the supreme magisterium and as a testimony to the continuous teaching tradition.

An architecture of theological epistemology that reflects this binding character results from this presentation by the magisterium.

In general, it can be said that the Synodal Path’s orientation text dissolves this architecture and fundamentally shifts it. The pragmatics of the text reveal the goal of this tectonic shift: **It is about the preparation of the revision of Christian teaching, in which sources of revelation (“history”, “signs of the times”) are being made prominent, which lie beyond the eschatologically final and complete revelation of God in Jesus Christ (cf. DV 4 and factually already DV 2).**

Furthermore, the unity of scripture, tradition, and magisterium (cf. DV 10), which is decisive for Dei Verbum, is dissolved. Correspondingly, the sole ultimate authority of the magisterium to interpret the Word of God (cf. *ibid.*) is ignored.

So, in total, you will have to realize: The text breaks with the supreme doctrine of Dei Verbum at crucial points. It does so clearly on the matter, but not openly. It disguises the facts in what appears to be traditional language. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the course of the text precisely.

It is decisive that in No. 10 of the orientation text and the further architecture of the text, the unity of scripture, magisterium, and tradition, programmatically postulated by Dei Verbum 10, is dissolved. The magisterium is separated (against DV 10) from scripture and tradition, subordinated to the sense of the faithful and the signs of the times, and finally assigned to theology. **This fundamental shift determines the entire further architecture of the orientation text. Therefore, it is not an inaccuracy but clearly a systematic option.**

In the text, due to potential revelation quality, the so-called “**signs of the times**” factually become their own, possibly normative sources of knowledge of teaching, in which the will of God can be recognized. In the end, this confirms the undoubtedly authentic interpretation that Bishop Georg Bätzing, in the dispute with Cardinal Koch, gave in the orientation text. **The way it is formulated here clearly conflicts with the statement that revelation is complete in Jesus Christ (DV 4, cf. 2).**

By the dissolution of the connection between scripture, magisterium, and tradition, scripture and tradition become ambiguous, which is also clearly stated in the orientation text. The binding determination of their meaning shifts from the magisterium to theology in the text. The question “Quis iudicat?” is answered more or less openly with reference to academic theology. For the latter is also an interpreter of the sense of the faithful and the signs of the times.

In the entire text, the testifying function of the magisterium appears almost exclusively; its ability to make binding, magisterial decisions (e.g., in the event of a conflict) systematically plays no role, nor does the idea of a binding form of teaching based on judgements, which is the starting point and point of reference for any legitimate development and deepening.

This is another indication of the pragmatics of the text: It is about the preparation of the revision of Christian teaching, which does not deepen the previous form of teaching, but negates it (anthropology, sexual ethics, and the teaching of marriage and the teaching of the episcopate are to be mentioned as examples).

**Quotations from the original text
(following the number of paragraphs in the German version):**

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(10) Among the most important “places” of theology include the Holy Scripture and tradition, the signs of the times and the sense of the faith of the people of God, the magisterium, and theology. **No place can substitute the other places; they all need mutual distinction and connection. All these “places” need to be rediscovered and always relinked anew** so that God’s faithfulness to His promise has the power to renew the Church’s faith from one generation to the next. Each place has a surplus of promise at any time, which cannot be reduced by other “places” and other “times” but strengthened.

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(30) “Reforms are an integral part of the tradition: Worship is changing; the doctrine develops; Caritas unfolds. In its dynamics, tradition is the process of examining the current form of the Church and the faith to receive and shape it ever anew as a gift from God. **The tradition of the Church is open to the context of new discoveries, new insights, and new experiences that challenge traditional faith and call for new responses** that testify more deeply the revealed truth of God, serve the growth of the Church, the proclamation of the Gospel and communion with all people to whom God’s grace applies. **The philosophy and wisdom of the peoples, science and the arts, the life of the people, and the social work of the Church were and are inspiring**

factors for the further development and ever-new unfolding of the tradition. Prophetic voices are found not only within but also outside the Church. **People's living conditions and attitudes change over time; these changes are shaped by tradition** and help shape it."

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Bishop Bätzing's interpretation of this: "But the orientation text, together with a series of magisterial texts such as the conciliar constitution *Gaudium et spes* and the encyclical *Pacem in terris* of St. Pope John XXIII, assumes that God, the creator and sustainer of the world, reveals himself again and again in this world and human history, that his work and his nature can be recognized in a concentrated form through events in history... With this in mind, they are not just "background of comprehension" but genuine sources for the reflection of faith. Something about God's will for people and his Church can be learned not only from Scripture and tradition, theology, magisterium, and the sense of the faithful but also from contemporary events and developments in history, through which the people of God are on a pilgrimage."

Bishop Bätzing's statement:

<https://www.dbk.de/presse/aktuelles/meldung/bischof-baetzing-stellungnahme-zur-antwort-von-kardinal-kurt-koch-vom-29-september-2022>

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(35) "The signs of the times indicate in which direction the tradition must be further developed. In their sense of the faith, the people of God recognize, by the Spirit, where the paths of faith run: what to preserve from the past and what to discard, what to develop further, and what new things to integrate. Theology reflects what tradition is, what has been considered tradition, and what may be considered tradition."

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(43) "The sign of the times, which the outcry of the victims of sexualized violence is marking powerfully, does not remain without consequences. It brings into focus further questions of the life of the Church, some of which have been open for a long time: **the question of power and the desire for a separation of powers;** the sustainability of priestly ways of life; the desire for equal access for all genders to ministries and offices of the Church; **the reception of current research findings on sexual morals of the Church.** They, too, could prove themselves to be signs of the times. They also want to be interpreted on the trail of God's presence and His counsel. The following also applies to them: "Do not quench the Spirit! Do not despise prophecies! Test everything and hold fast what is good!" (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21)."

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(48) **“No personal judgment of conscience could stand if it were to close itself to the pros and cons of common considerations with others. [...] It is no coincidence that the word **conscience** refers to **knowing together**, to con-scientia, to syn-eidesis (1 Cor 10:28). But in the end, it always appeals to **one’s own insight, to one’s own judgement, to one’s own decision**. The highly personal, conscientious final decision **about one’s own way of life is binding** – even if it turns out that it was made in error. To ignore conscience, to control it from the outside, to eliminate it, or even to neglect it would mean to negate the personal center of human beings and their dignity created by God. The conscience, for its part, finds orientation in the light of faith.[...]”**

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(49) **“Not least, the conscience of the faithful uses the findings of different sciences**. But this also shows: The sense of faith does not justify an exclusive claim of ownership by a single faithful. **The sense of the faithful insists on a consensus**, on a shared sense - even if such a consensus is not always reached, and the community of the faithful then must live with dissent for a certain time. The Church is not only a community of remembrance but also a community of dialogue.”

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(62) **“Thus theology also has the task of countering fundamentalist temptations when positions of individuals or groups are to be made absolute in a manner incapable of dialogue and are to be withdrawn from any debate. There is a self-correction in the scientific community of theology through critical scientific discourse. A critical counterpart is also required for both dialogue partners in the dialogue with the magisterium.”**

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(68) **“The question of the appropriate participation of the entire people of God in the deliberations and decisions in the Church arises worldwide and demands new responses. Above all, those affected and survivors of abuse must be heard. Their experiences, their indignation, and lamentations must find an echo in the teaching and practice of the Church.** Even in Holy Scripture, human experience and the proclamation of the Word of God are inseparable. Nobody may tear them apart.”

Link to the original document:

https://www.synodalerweg.de/fileadmin/Synodalerweg/dokumente_Rednen_Beitraege/SV-III_1.1NEU_Synodalpraesidium-Orientationstext-Beschluss.pdf