

Our report to the Synod

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DRAFT – WORK IN PROGRESS

See also the separate document “*Instructions for contributors*”

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Introduction

(1) This document is the synthesis of what the people of God living in Estonia have to say at the Synod on Synodality. It has been compiled by **Luc Saffre** as the Diocesan Contact Person of Estonia under authority of the Bishop **Philippe Jourdan**.

(2) Many people have contributed to this document with their prayer and their feedback. It compiles responses from X contributors, Y of which consent with the result.

The Church in Estonia

(3) There are about 4500 baptized Roman Catholics living in Estonia. We are a small group within the Christians in Estonia (300.000), which is itself a small group within the population of Estonia (1.330.000), which is itself a tiny group of the world population (0.0168%).

(4) Because of our irrelevance in terms of numbers, we did not even *try* to collect statistical data about how synodality is happening in our local church. Instead of producing documents, our statement focuses on a prophetic answer to the question “What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our ‘journeying together’?”

Message from Catholics in Estonia

(5) Many active members of the Roman Catholic church in Estonia have a message to the Synod that I summarize as follows:

(6) The main question of the Synod and the Catholic church is how we can live as the Church according to our teachings, and how to influence other people and especially the members of our church in a reliable way. The teachings of the church about the Gospel are reliable, well elaborated and carefully researched. We must not doubt in these teachings. We encourage you to remain faithful to the truth of Jesus Christ as it has been taught by the Church from its beginnings.

(7) Regarding critics on administrative questions, we advise to learn from the other big organizations in the real world regarding transparent accounting, efficient human resource management, reliable auditing procedures, ...

A big challenge needs big hope

(8) But some inspiration tells me there is more to say. The remaining part of this document is what a minority says. It contains “**church fiction**”. But as the [PD](#) (no 32) says: let’s “dream and draw forth prophecies and visions”. May my fictive report and your feedback contribute to “allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands.”

(9) From all aspects of the consultation project I hear a clear tenor resonating: the [Church](#) in Estonia and in the world is experiencing a [controversial battle](#) between two “camps” or “paradigms”.

(10) Already the names of these camps are a problem. Often they are labelled “traditional” or “conservative” versus “liberal” or “progressive”. I was obviously born in the “liberal” or “progressive” camp. But confusingly I feel very traditional and conservative in many regards, and I *do not* see faith as something “liberal” (meaning an individual choice).

(11) The first step in every dialogue is to agree on what we are talking about. We cannot solve a problem by refusing that it exists. And we *do* have a problem. A fundamental one. There *are* two fundamentally opposing views about how the Church should “live and operate”. Certain parts of these views *do exclude* each other, there is no way to embrace both. Jesus refers to such situations when he says “No one can serve two masters” ([Matthew 6:24](#), [Luke 16:13](#)), or “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!” ([Luke 12,49](#))

(12) The mere word “synodality” as a [neologism](#) seems to be the right name for this challenge. Synodality reminds the expression [Unity in](#)

[Diversity](#), a prominent principle of the Bahá'í Faith, which also has become the [Motto of the European Union](#). Synodality also reminds the [code of conduct](#) and the [Conflict of interest policies](#) of the Wikimedia Foundation, or the [Ubuntu philosophy](#) (“A collection of values and practices that people of Africa or of African origin view as making people authentic human beings”).

(13) The Synod on Synodality gives us hope that we can change this battle into a [dialogue](#). It is going to make a few things clear. We are about to have a shift in [paradigm](#).

(14) It is good to have a name for an important topic. But what does “synodality” mean *in practice*? The big task of the Synod is to develop clear answers to this question.

Two paradigms

(15) In this section we try to illustrate the two paradigms. During the consultation phase I often heard statements that I classify as **fears** or **obstacles**. I collected these on the left side in the table below. On the right side I collected statements that I classify as **synodal answers** to those fears.

1. Companions on the journey – *In the Church and in society we are side by side on the same road.*

We must hold together because we are a small community in a dangerous world. Those who do not live according to the Church teachings are not on our side, we need to protect ourselves against them.	We will clarify our definition of faithful and “baptized”. There are “baptized” people who don’t understand the Gospel and who follow something else. And there are people who follow the Gospel but refuse to get “baptized” because they have seen too much of the harm caused by the Church.
We must keep a clear distance from those who want to make us believe something other than the truth.	We must explain the Gospel to those who did not yet decide to follow Jesus.

2. Listening – *Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice.*

We must be careful because listening to lies causes you to believe them in the end.	We will be careful to avoid listening only in order to find arguments against “their” opinion and to explain once more “our” opinion.
Listening to a wrong opinion without clearly replying can encourage the other to remain in their mistake.	We will learn to not fear other humans as our “enemies”.

3. Speaking out – *All are invited to speak with courage and parrhesia, that is, in freedom, truth, and charity.*

We must not speak out everything without worrying about how the enemy might use our words against us. Dip-	We will learn the art of speaking boldly where needed. When our brother sins, we will explain him what disturbs us even if he might feel offended. Hurting can
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plomacy is the art of saying the truth without offending the enemy.	be the opposite of harming. Of course every unpleasant message needs special prudence.
“Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.” (Mt 7:6)	We will respect that not every faithful is ready to understand every teaching.

4. Celebration – *“Walking together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.*

The Holy Mass fosters our identity and grows our faith. We must not let modernistic tendencies tell us how to celebrate.	Many rites developed by many cultures are a way of celebrating the Gospel. We will embrace them and learn from each other.
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5. Sharing responsibility for our common mission – *Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate.*

A lay person must not instruct other people regarding faith questions; teaching should be done by a priest.	The Gospel propagates mostly through our lives, through what we say and do to other people.
Beware of the “stench effect”: constantly living in a faithless environment makes you indifferent to the stench. You can lose your faith when you are constantly surrounded by people who don’t believe.	Nothing can ever come between us and the love of God revealed to us in Christ Jesus.

6. Dialogue in Church and society – *Dialogue requires perseverance and patience, but it also enables mutual understanding.*

We must not waste our energy trying to understand people who refuse to accept the truth.	Before we can explain the Gospel to somebody, we need to understand their worries and fears and convictions.
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7. Ecumenism – *The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey.*

The purpose of <i>ecumenism</i> is to open a door to other confessions so that lost faithful can turn back to the Roman Catholic church.	We will learn from each other and share what we have learned during our different history.
During Holy Mass we welcome non-Catholic visitors and expect them to follow the rules.	Every rite is open for visitors and we help them to understand what is going on.

8. Authority and participation – A synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church.

<p>The Church needs a clear hierarchy. Whenever humans do something together, it must be clear who is the boss. The boss is responsible in the end. If you are not the boss, then you must rather obey than feel co-responsible. That's called discipline. We don't believe in co-responsibility.</p>	<p>An apostolic leader is like a choir director: he does not produce a single sound, but he is the most important actor of the choir.</p>
<p>Participation means communism. History shows that communism has failed. It is not a sustainable way for living together.</p>	<p>...</p>

9. Discerning and deciding – In a synodal style we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community.

<p>Common decisions must be the result of a well-organized democratic process. We cannot allow corrupt leaders who do what they want, even if they call it discernment.</p>	
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10. Forming ourselves in synodality – Synodality entails receptivity to change, formation, and on-going learning.

<p>The Church must align to Jesus Christ alone, not to a multicultural mix of ideologies. The mission of the Church is to <i>teach</i> others, not to <i>learn</i> from others.</p>	<p>Teaching requires learning. While the Church teaches what she has learned so far, we must never forget that her learning continues. The Church must not claim to teach the <i>only</i> valid teaching about God.</p>
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(16) A series of traditional expressions used for explaining the Gospel need clarification because they tend to get misunderstood, which leads to *disorder*.

<p>“No salvation outside the Church”</p>	<p>“No salvation without the Gospel”</p>
<p>“Christ Saviour” means that you are lost if you do not repent from your sins and don't decide to follow Jesus.</p>	<p>“Christ Saviour” means that Jesus saved humanity from the idea that God accounts our sins. Following Jesus means to follow the Gospel, but members of other religions can follow the Gospel without knowing Jesus. We dare to speak about sins because God has already forgiven them before we even regret them. Not realizing or failing to repent from a sin causes harm to others and problems in the visible world, but it doesn't exclude you from God's love nor from community of the Church.</p>

My vision

(17) In November 2021 I had the following vision:

(18) Pope Francis will do yet another important step during his lifetime. He will appoint another person as the Bishop of Rome and become himself leader of the **Synodal Church**, a new institution that will embrace and unite all Christian institutions. The Bishop of Rome will have full responsibility over the Roman Catholic church but remains under authority of the Pope.

(19) Most institutional property will remain with the Roman Catholic church, he will take with him only what an institution needs to survive. I guess that this will be the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, parts of the Holy See and a few other administrations, maybe a few real estate objects. Like his patron St. Francis of Assisi when he left his parents, Pope Francis will be “naked” during a short moment.

(20) This step is is not a schism. In the contrary, it is the only way to *avoid another schism* and to reconcile the Church. It is a step towards greater unity. No single faithful will get lost and no single faithful will be forced to change more than they are able to change.

(21) The other parts of the Roman Catholic church will follow little by little, each at their pace and when their pastor decides so. They will do this more or less carefully, more or less quickly, each of them as it is due. They will discover their place under the new institution.

(22) At the same time other religious institutions, protestant and orthodox, will do the same and unite in joy with the Synodal Church. Also many of the faithful who left the visible Church during the last years will return. And even a series of corporations that have not called themselves “Christian” until now, will join this choir, discover the Gospel and align into the Synodal Church.

(23) The Roman Catholic church will simply no longer be the “top of the tree”, it will find itself at the same level together with protestant and orthodox Christians.

(24) There will be resistance because humans are naturally resistant to change. This resistance itself is rather a confirmation than an obstacle.

Comments about my vision

(25) Real-life details about how this vision arrived are in [my blog](#). It was a joyful vision of hope, not a threatful vision of warning. It encouraged me to raise my voice because it describes a surprising solution that has not yet received enough attention.

(26) In daily life I work as a professional software developer. The issues I work upon for my customers are similar to the issues I see in the Church. I practice the art of discerning what a customer needs even when they

are unable to formulate their requirements clearly. If the Church were a software application and the Pope my customer, then this is what I would suggest to do.

(27) The time indication (“Pope Francis” and “during his lifetime”) is not absolute. It just means that this step is the important next step. Any work that does not align to this direction is a waste of time.

(28) While creating the Synodal Church institution is basically “just a little shift of power” in the executive floor of the Church, there are more important consequences that will influence daily life of many people. These will be the actual challenge. But the Synodal Church would be just a farce without them.

(29) The Synodal Church is an abstract church. It won't perform any rites. You become member of the Synodal Church by declaring so. Most members are *also* member of some concrete church (Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, ...) where they attend community life and receive sacraments.

(30) The Synodal Church will have two main goals:

(31) Its *institutional* goal is to **organize the apostolic succession** of the Pope. The administrations of the Roman Catholic church responsible for organizing the apostolic succession will move together with the Pope and become synodal institutions.

(32) Its *operational* goal is to **explain the Gospel to everybody**. It will develop, publish and maintain a set of documents with teachings about the [Gospel](#). It will shed new light upon knowledge that has always been there but was hidden under the dust of history. It will embrace many existing teachings of the concrete churches and help them to align their existing teachings to those of the Synodal Church.

(33) Announcing the Gospel is more important than insisting on a given rite or teaching. The Synodal Church will foster a **diversity of rites and teachings** that will respect and unite the existing treasures.

(34) The Synodal Church won't force any concrete church institution to follow its teachings. It won't be “a kingdom of the visible world”. It won't have [executive](#) power. Its teachings will be **directives** to the concrete church institutions and to every [faithful](#), which these are *invited* to “either follow or criticize” as long as there is no consensus. Finding a consensus on every topic is important, but not always immediately possible.

(35) The Synodal Church will also develop and publish **rules**, to which she will adhere herself as a legal person.

(36) The Synodal Church will be the first Christian institution to declare two established law systems as [collective sins](#). See (86) to (90).

(37) I do not know where the Synodal Church will physically reside in the real world. It seems clear that those who work for it must also pray together, otherwise it would be just another publishing house. When I think about this question, an image drops into my mind: the Pope will live in a monastery, which will receive a constant flow of visitors. Something like Taizé or Dharamshala (the residence of the the current Dalai Lama).

The teachings about the Gospel

(38) The main activity of the Synodal Church will be to publish and maintain reliable teachings about the Gospel. The mission of the Church is to “announce” the Gospel to “all peoples”, to every group and class of humans. But how to do this?

(39) You cannot announce something without formulating your knowledge about it. But what is knowledge?

(40) **Individual knowledge**, also called **faith**, is the sum of beliefs you rely on, the result of what you have learned during your personal history. It is stored in your *heart*. Your *faith* tells you in every concrete situation, spontaneously and without further reflection, whether something is “good” or “bad”. It says this with a varying degree of conviction, ranging from “vague feeling” to “doubtless belief”. This choice happens independently of how skillful you are for explaining it to other using words.

(41) **Community knowledge** is similar, but with a fundamental difference: it isn’t stored in your heart. It is stored somewhere else. It needs a medium. Every collection of teachings maintained by a community is such a medium. Every community is defined by its teachings. Teachings are the *heart* of every community, they are also the *heart* of the Church.

(42) The Church has developed a rich treasure of teachings about the Gospel during her long history. The teachings of the Church are probably the biggest and most complex *documentation library* in the world, collected during **more than 3000 years**, with **document types** ranging from blog entries, news, homilies, prayers, songs, books, films, to dogmatic constitutions, research reports or law collections, with **audiences** ranging from 2 year old children to experts of every branch of science, with the biggest **community of contributors**. Maintaining this *documentation library* is a huge and never-ending task.

(43) Meanwhile humanity has entered the digital era. If already the discovery of book printing 500 years ago caused revolutionary changes to the way of teaching the Gospel, how could we assume that the digital era would be less revolutionary for our work? How is it possible that a few private corporations manage to provide a billion of humans individually, day by day, with teachings that these humans crave to read,

although much of this information is useless or even harmful to them or others (see 86-90)? And at the same time the teachings of the Gospel produced by the Church are followed –boldly spoken– by some insiders?

(44) Every teaching *includes answers to moral questions*. No teaching can be ethically neutral. Even a teaching about how to cook an egg assumes certain choices regarding moral questions (e.g. “Is it [good](#) to eat eggs?” or “If it’s okay to eat them, isn’t it better to eat them uncooked?”). The Gospel does not say “everything is okay”. There are things in this world that are *not* good. The Gospel *is* a moral message and gives answers to ethical questions. It tells us what is good and what isn’t.

(45) Every teaching is *meant to be reliable*. That’s why teachings exist. A teaching makes no sense when nobody relies on it. But what can we teach reliably about the Gospel if we assume that God is beyond human knowledge? Or more shortly: how to explain the unexplainable?

(46) **The Bible is a first answer** to this question. It is recognized as a historic text by all scholars of all religions, and as such a milestone in human history. The Church is the community of those who use the [Bible](#) as their [Holy Scripture](#), as the immutable base of their teachings.

(47) But the Bible is a very fundamental document. It can give **contradicting answers** to certain concrete questions of the visible world, which evolves constantly. It can get interpreted in different ways, leading to different sets of teachings. Each [church institution](#) has its own set of teachings. While parts of these teachings are in harmony with each other, some of them differ considerably among the church institutions. Which confirms that God is beyond human knowledge.

(48) **Teachings evolve constantly**. Teachings are neither eternal nor immutable. The Gospel is eternal, the Bible is immutable, but teachings aren’t. The teachings of the Church are dynamic and need constant maintenance because they are human-made responses to the Gospel.

(49) The ultimate goal of every teaching is to be **true**, i.e. that it reflects [reality](#) without distorting it. We trust that our teachings are the truest teachings in the visible world, but we must keep in mind that no teaching about God can be perfect or definitive. Ideally our teachings are in harmony with [God’s plan](#), but it would be an illusion to claim that they are perfect.

(50) A rule of thumb: As long as one member of the *Church* disagrees with a teaching, this teaching can’t be fully true.

(51) A corollary: Publishing a teaching and then discovering that it needs to be reviewed is an integral part of our learning process. We are on a journey, we do not stand still.

(52) Teachings cannot contradict science. When some new discovery brings [scientific evidence](#) that a given teaching is suboptimal or even wrong, the the teaching needs to get updated. “The tree is known by its fruit” ([Mt 12:33](#))

(53) An important feature of every teaching is to be **clear**. The current teachings of the Roman Catholic church are impressive but *not very* clear. You need years of education before you can claim to understand them more or less.

(54) Another important feature of every teaching is to be **accessible**. Every human must be able to access them without paying a license fee and without being distracted by commercial advertisements.

The rules of the Church

(55) Besides teachings about the Gospel, the Synodal Church will also develop and publish **rules**, to which she will adhere herself as a legal person. Rules are a special form of teachings.

(56) Rules are different from teachings about the Gospel in that they speak about the visible world. Unlike teachings, rules bind us to follow them in a legally measurable way. Declaring that you follow a rule makes you legally responsible in the visible world. Rules can be used in documents that legally bind two business partners.

(57) The rules of the Synodal Church will define the concept of **apostolic government**, which embraces democracy and monarchy and as such can be an answer to issues of these government forms. This has the potential to eventually lead to a new social and economic system called **synodalism**, as an alternative to capitalism, communism and socialism.

(58) These rules will cover transparency, privacy and the apostolic government style. They will define the roles of workers and contributors in the Church (priests, teachers, healers, prophets, ...). They will explain the value of celibate persons for the community.

(59) These rules will enforce privacy of relations with *natural* persons, including e.g. the duty to confessional secret. On the other hand these rules will refuse any right on privacy to organizations. All agreements of a synodal organization with other organizations will be accessible to the public. See also [Public money, public agreements](#).

(60) One of the differences between apostolic government and (classical) democratic government is that when a minority of the community says “something is wrong”, the community needs to listen. Synodality seeks consensus, not majority.

(61) There are topics that need time. As long as there is no consensus about some [controversial question](#), synodality means that the institution remains impartial and suggests possible compromises. Silencing down

minority opinions in controversial discussions is not the synodal way of finding sustainable peace.

(62) There are things we cannot change, and we need to accept these things. It would be a waste of energy to continuously quarrel and complain about them. And of course it is not always easy to discern the things we can change from those we can't. If you are really the only one to see a problem, you need to humbly ask yourself whether your inner voice is right, whether that problem is really important enough and whether you really have the duty to disturb the community process with your concerns right now. One of the important functions of celebrating is to offer a spiritual place where "the rule" says to everybody: "shut up now!" If we fail to obey this rule, we spoil the celebration. One benefit of art of celebrating is to cultivate our [detachment](#) skills. On the other hand, if you comply with the majority against your inner voice and just because you are too lazy or shy or arrogant to talk about the problem, then you sweep the dirt under the carpet. The problem will remain and eventually grow. Synodality means to cultivate a humble and patient form of perseverance.

(63) Apostolic government is more than pure democracy, which can lead to lazy compromises, resignation, despair, loss of motivation and attitudes called "work-to-rule". It is also more than monarchy, which can lead to idolatry, elitism and nationalism.

Why everybody is invited

(64) Regarding other Christian denominations, the [Church](#) has experienced two major schisms during her history. More than twenty human generations have passed since [Reformation](#), more than forty generations since the [Schism of 1054](#).

(65) The foundation of the Synodal Church is the opposite of another schism, it will unite all Christians back under one institution. Many [faithful](#) from all [denominations](#) have been doing important work to prepare this step.

(66) The traditional approach of the [Roman Catholic](#) church is to assume that "our" teachings are the true ones while those of other Christian [denominations](#) are "heresy". This approach is a major obstacle for reconciliation. It is time to repent about this. This is especially visible in Estonia where most Christians are non-Catholic.

(67) The teachings about the Gospel that have been developed by other denominations cannot be ignored. We must learn from them. Loving our neighbour means to give those teachings the same careful consideration as our own teachings. In case of conflict we cannot apply lynch justice. We need a superior authority.

(68) This superior authority must be a new [legal person](#) because its teachings will introduce some backwards-incompatible changes. It will take several generations before “everything” has become “clear” because convictions usually don’t change during a human lifetime. See (91) ff.

(69) The above principles apply to other religions as well. My report just doesn’t cover them because I had no time for personal contacts to them.

Non-religious faithful

(70) There are many humans who believe in the Gospel and work for it without identifying themselves as “religious”. Such organizations include governments and political parties as well as non-profit groups and independent artists who engage for peace, healthcare, charity, human rights, climate justice or free knowledge. Their language is different from the Church, but their mission is in harmony with the Gospel. They are a visible fruit of the [Holy Spirit](#). (Luke 9:49-50)

(71) The rules of the Synodal Church do not cover religious rites and practices. This will open the door to non-religious organizations who can use our rules without agreeing to our way of teaching the Gospel.

Technical considerations

(72) Technically and juridically spoken, the teachings of the Synodal Church are **published content** that is intended to be freely available to everybody. These teachings are a gift of the Holy Spirit, a fruit of our ongoing search of what is good and true. Therefore they cannot be private property. The Synodal Church will learn from existing organizations like the Free Software Foundation, Creative Commons or the Wikimedia Foundation, who have done important work about how to manage knowledge as a public resource in a way that aligns with the Gospel. These organizations fundamentally differ from organizations who consider *published content* as a *private property*.

(73) The Synodal Church will use concepts and technologies developed by these movements for publishing and maintaining complex documentation systems. An example of such a technology is the one used by Wikipedia. Note that Wikipedia is an encyclopedia, not a teaching.

Examples of some teachings

(74) I listened to people who, inspired by the [vision](#), went yet another step further and imagined how the teachings of the ideal Synodal Church might evolve in the future. Keep in mind that the following examples are just crazy thoughts of a few people who let their theological fantasies fly high. We do not suggest any of these teachings because they are not the

topic of the Synod. But we observe our feelings while considering these thoughts and will reflect on our feelings in the last section of our report.

(75) Let's simplify our **teachings about sins**. A **sin** is when you cause harm to somebody. Christians dare to speak about sins because we believe that God forgives them even before we realize or repent them. Your sins may cause you trouble in the visible world, but they cannot separate you from God's love.

This applies to our own sins as well as to those of other people. Our own sins are the only ones we can –sometimes– change directly, but they are the most difficult to see. The sins of other people are theoretically “not our business”, but speaking about them may be important.

(76) **Sacraments** are visible symbols, a gift of the Church to the faithful, a confirmation given by the Church about something holy. But they aren't contracts. They are unconditional gifts. They apply only as long as the receiver wants them.

(77) When somebody gives you a book, but you fail to read it, then the book unfortunately didn't work for you. You can fail to read a book for many reasons. For example because it was stolen before you had the time to read it. Or because you didn't care, which just means that you didn't understand that this book would be important.

(78) Consequently, the Synodal Church will describe a way to *revoke* any life-long sacrament (**baptism, marriage, priesthood**). And this revoking is done by the receiver(s) of the sacrament, the Church has no veto, her job is to register the decision of having revoked. We cannot say that your failure of receiving this sacrament is a [sin](#). We can be sorry for you, but we cannot blame you or even exclude you from our communion.

(79) Note that while baptism and priesthood requires a *single* human to revoke it, revoking a marriage needs *both* partners to agree on the divorce.

(80) The Synodal Church will have a shift of focus in her work against child **abandonment and abortion**. Traditional approaches for avoiding unwanted pregnancies are based on some form of culpability. But history shows that no law and no faith culture, however strict, can avoid unwanted pregnancies completely. Parents happen to get pregnant by accident.

(81) The Synodal Church will move the action responsibility from the mother to the community. Instead of saying „pro life“ or „pro choice“, it is going to say „pro care“. Questions like “Who is guilty?”, “Who pays the bill?” or “How to avoid unwanted pregnancies?” are to be regulated by each nation, while the Church asks “How to save both the child and its parents?” It will teach that every pregnant woman must have the option to renounce from her maternal responsibility without feeling guilty for her

choice. The community must give her moral, social and economical protection during the remaining phase of her pregnancy. After having given birth to the child, this woman is free from any maternal duty towards her child.

(82) The Synodal Church will say clearly that the question of when exactly an embryo can be considered a human is controversial. Rather than giving a doctrinal answer, it will help each faithful to find peace of heart by giving advice on reliability and trustworthiness of the different sources of information.

(83) The controversial dialogue about the rights of **homosexual and queer people** are especially interesting for synodality because the topic itself is rather simple (compared e.g. to the Covid discussions) and touches a rather small minority. And at the same time it is a very hot topic in Estonia. Why does this dialogue so easily turn into a battle? Where is the sin?

(84) After many centuries of research we can now assume with [scientific evidence](#) that homosexuality does not harm anybody. Therefore we cannot any longer consider it a sin. It is just an extraordinary sexual orientation. It has been considered a sin for historic reasons. The fact that it was considered a sin by biblical authors says as much about God's plan as the fact that slavery wasn't.

(85) If homosexuality is not the sin, where is the sin? Can it be that *speaking about it* is a sin? Indeed sexuality is a topic that should always be handled with prudence. On the other hand, initiating a [controversial dialogue](#) in a decent way is a normal step of our learning process. Raising the topic cannot be a sin. Neither can our difficulties to find consensus be considered a sin because our personal convictions about sexuality are deep in our hearts, in the lower layers of our consciousness. A human's opinion about sexuality are unlikely to change during his or her lifetime. So it is normal that this discussion needs more than a few generations

(86) If speaking –even emotionnally– about topics like abortion or homo-sexuality is not the sin, where is the sin? [Fratelli Tutti](#) started to point out that the sin has to do with money and industry. Many news industries make money from people who get excited and speak hatefully. Some medical industries make money from harmful wishes caused by new types of desires, e.g. sexual or cosmetic fantasies. Many entertainment, technology and food industries make money by cultivating desires that are harmful to the consumer or to the Earth.

(87) But we cannot say that industry or money as such are sins: they are a neutral infrastructure, which can be used to do good or to do evil. We start to understand that the sins are certain law systems that allow corporations to make money this way. We all are guilty because our civili-

zation created these laws. The Synodal Church will condemn these law systems as the most important [collective sins](#), from which we must repent urgently because they cause so harm that the Earth as our common home is in danger. Repenting from these sins will be difficult because they have deep roots and because much wealth depends on them.

(88) The first of these [collective sins](#) is **granting unlimited profit while demanding only *limited responsibility*** for the risks. This idea is rooted in limited liability law, which was first enacted by the state of New York in 1811. It causes the strong to become even stronger, and the weak to become even weaker. It leads to screaming injustices and causes harm to many creatures. The modern world is built on two centuries of industrialisation, much of which was built by equity finance, which relies on the idea limited liability. Limited liability corporations are the key to industrial capitalism ([economist.com](#), [Wikipedia](#)).

(89) The second of these [collective sins](#) is **preventing others from using published knowledge**. By **published knowledge** we refer to publications formulated as text, picture, sound, movie, software source code or any other media. It covers publications of any investment size, ranging from spontaneous postings in an Internet forum to books, songs, movies, scientific reports or patents. The established copyright system mixes up the (legitimate) right to get identified and honoured for your work of creating these public resources and the (illegitimate) right to control their usage. It creates a social and economic system that benefits some strong actors while causing harm to most people by limiting their liberty. It causes social disorder. It leads owners of proprietary knowledge to use malicious strategies in order to increase their power.

(90) The idea that published knowledge should be considered a public resource are not new. Already in 1985 [Richard M. Stallman](#) designated intellectual property as a seductive mirage. Another software developer, [Eric S. Raymond](#) did similar work. Both remained focused on software, and both also caused [controversial battles](#) on unrelated topics. In 2010 Lawrence Lessig extended the idea to all forms of published content. Both failed to consider the [Church](#) as their ally, and the Church failed to realize their work as important.

Human hearts and the Church

(91) A considerable number of convinced Christians in Estonia seem to feel irritated or even threatened by the thoughts about Synodality presented in the previous section. Similarly, when we see a way of celebrating or understanding that is not “as we were taught”, then we feel irritated and are tempted to say “this is wrong”.

(92) Compare for example a Catholic Mass with a service in a Baptist community. Look at the discussion about the Old Mass. Compare the mainstream opinion about homosexuality in Denmark with that in Nigeria. I have seen emotions of Lutherans, Baptists or Orthodox people about Catholic rites and teachings. I have seen emotions of people who grew up without any religion when they got in contact with Christian rites and teachings. I have observed my own emotions as a Catholic during twenty years of contact with people of other faith cultures.

(93) Such feelings are caused by our **convictions**. Convictions are part of our hearts. Human hearts are not elastic. Our convictions are based on our personal history. We cannot rewrite our personal history. More than this, our convictions are designed by nature to not subdue to our reason. Every conviction deserves respect. This is why we must handle every emotion with respect and prudence.

(94) Some teachings of the Church have evolved because they respond to natural human fears. We all suffer from miscellaneous fears that are a result of our personal history. We all are only partially conscious about our fears. Our fears, especially when many members of a community feel them, naturally have influence on the teachings of the Church.

(95) The Gospel calls us to overcome some of our fears. It calls us to *cultivate* the good fears and to *overcome* the bad fears. It is the job of the Church to discern which of them are good and which are bad or useless.

(96) Overcoming these fears does not mean that you personally must stop feeling or experiencing them. These fears are based on our convictions, which we cannot change by our will. Even when we sometimes wish we could. God never calls us to do something that we are not able to do.

(97) We cannot change our convictions, but the Church can change her teachings by making conscious synodal decisions. The Church is an organization, not a human being. Organizations have no emotions. Overcoming these fears means to adapt our teachings as needed. Teachings are more flexible than human hearts. This is why teachings must change first while human hearts will follow later. Refusing to update a teaching that needs to be updated would increase disorder.

(98) Trusting in the Synodal Church then means to decide at least in the conscious part of your mind: “Even if I won’t get rid of these particular fears during my lifetime, I will decide to not teach them to our children.” [Mark 9:14-29](#) calls us to cry out with the father of the muted child: “I want to believe! Help my unbelief!”

(99) No human will ever be free from all fears. We have inherited these fears since the day we left Paradise. But by cultivating the Gospel, the

risen Christ can little by little make himself at home in our heart and help us to evolve out of [Hell](#) into [Heaven](#).

*Compiled by Luc Saffre on **13. January 2022** with X of Y contributors consenting to the content and with the following benedictions: (...)*