

## STUDY GROUPS

on relevant questions from the *Synthesis' Report* of the First Session  
of the XVI General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH:  
COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, MISSION

### STUDY GROUP N. 4 THE REVISION OF THE *RATIO FUNDAMENTALIS INSTITUTIONIS SACERDOTALIS* FROM A SYNODAL MISSIONARY PERSPECTIVE

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

[Original text: Italian. Working translation.]

The fruits of the Study Group's work are compiled in a "Proposed Document", which outlines points of reference and practical pathways for updating formation to the ministry of the priesthood, in tune with the synodal-missionary conversion of the Church. By so doing, the intention was not to change the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, as it is relatively recent (2016), and offers principles, criteria and guidelines that already direct formation pathways consistent with the figure of a missionary and therefore synodal Church. Consider, for example, its insistence on discipleship as a decisive condition for configuration to Christ the Shepherd and Servant; the essential communitarian dimension of formation; the requirement for an integral formation; and the involvement of a variety of agents in discernment.

At the same time, in docile listening to the *Final Document*, the requests of the Synodal Assembly concerning the relational identity of ordained ministry "in and from" the People of God must be addressed without delay: a formation that takes place within the normal life of Christian communities; regular (not merely sporadic) moments of formation shared with other members of the People of God; broader participation of people from various vocations in the formation of future pastors, with particular attention to the contribution of women and families; the acquisition of the indispensable competencies for a synodal Church, such as listening skills, the ability to dialogue, co-responsibility and ecclesial discernment. This is always in view of a more generous correspondence to the missionary mandate of Jesus.

Consequently, the Study Group prepared a proposal for a "Guiding Document for the implementation of the *Ratio Fundamentalis* and the *Ratio Nationalis* in a synodal missionary perspective".

The proposed Document first provides an ecclesiological-pastoral framework (*Preamble*) with which to review and implement priestly formation according to the synodal "novelty". It focuses on the figure of the Church and, respectively, that of priests. Without rewriting ecclesiology or a theology of the ordained ministry, it highlights those features of the communion and mission of the People of God and, within it, the ordained ministry, that the Synodal Assembly specified by the reception and integration of the Council's legacy.

In line with the *Final Document*, conversions are identified to which the Church is called in docility to the Spirit of the Lord, starting from *relational conversion* (*Preamble* 1), whereby the People

of God lives in new relationships, shaped by mutual love, thus becoming an effective leaven of fraternity in the various spheres of society.

The *missionary conversion* (*Preamble 2*) of the Church seeks to foster the awareness of the co-responsibility of all the faithful in the witness and proclamation of the Gospel; a co-responsibility that implies the involvement of all in the discernment and implementation of the necessary steps of conversion to walk in the “delightful and comforting joy of evangelizing” (*EG 10*).

The common mission of all the baptized is based on a great variety of gifts, which by their evangelical nature, bear fruit in the communion of the People of God which is missionary by its very nature. *Conversion to communion* (*Preamble 3*), together with the courageous recognition of charisms and ministries, must include fruitful practices of mutual recognition capable of supporting a real apostolic collaboration.

Consistent with this synodal development of conciliar ecclesiology, the identity of priests must be outlined in relational and communal terms. If the reference to Jesus Christ as Head, Servant and Shepherd is foundational, it becomes truly fruitful when, by valuing the ecclesiological dimension of the ordained ministry, it is conceived “in and from” the People of God. Drawing from the ever-valuable insights of *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, a *conversion to service* takes shape (*Preamble 4*), for which the fraternity of the People of God is far from secondary to the identity of the ordained ministers. Nor, therefore, can fraternity within the Christian community be neglected or lived only sporadically in formation. It is not merely a backdrop, but a vital place, good soil from which the identity of priests blossoms and grows: men of presbyteral fraternity around the Bishop together with the deacons, men who know the faces and the needs of their brothers and sisters in the Christian community to which they belong, men who in this attitude of service preside over the building up of the People of God on the Word and the Eucharist. Avoiding models of formation marked by sacred separation of the ordained minister from the People of God, this conversion drives every formation project, with its places, times and communities, to ensure a wider participation of candidates in the life of Christian communities.

If formation aims to shape a relational identity of priests in their configuration to Jesus Christ the Head, Servant and Shepherd, it must also accompany candidates to acquire the dispositions and competencies proper to a *conversion to a synodal style* (*Preamble 5*). The missionary and synodal conversion of the Church will bear results worthy of the Gospel if those who preside over Christian communities strive for ecclesial discernment. Together with the Bishop, priests have a particular responsibility to ensure that the *sensus fidei* of the People of God be expressed and that the expectations of the poor be heard. They are therefore called to practice differentiated co-responsibility in decision-making processes and to ensure transparency, accountability and evaluation in the choices that affect the life of the Christian community.

The proposed Document recalls the *conversion of formation* (*Preamble 6*) alluding to “operational pathways”, which are specified below in the *Guidelines*. The formative experience should be more consistent with the life that candidates will subsequently lead: in pastoral ministry, being with Jesus leads to an apostolic journey with and for the People of God. From this perspective, the appropriate updates of the formative community of the Seminary must go ahead. However, it is also opportune to prepare other formative ‘places/times’ necessary for education in mission and synodality. If the conversion also concerns the structural side of the Church’s formative responsibility, it is good to develop pathways to the priesthood in which the ‘Seminary’ is not the sole place for formation.

Certainly, what must be guaranteed is the necessary time and space to deepen and verify the call to priestly ministry (“come away”) and, for the Latin Church, the charism of celibacy with an intense spiritual life marked by guarded and guided rhythms. At the same time, however, the Seminary should not be a prolonged experience far from the People of God. It seems necessary to provide other formative modules along the way, not alternative but complementary to the ‘place/time’ of the Seminary; these can guarantee candidates a real experience of ordinary human life and stable immersion in the life of the

Christian community and ensure solid growth in an integral manner. This will avoid the condition of separation where irresponsibility, dissimulation and clerical infantilism are more easily bred. A modulation of different places and times in the journey towards the ordained ministry also facilitates a shared formation with brothers and sisters engaged in other vocational/ministerial paths, activating dynamics of mutual recognition and appreciation. Only thus can we hope to ensure a solid integral maturation for our times.

In the second part (*Guidelines*), the proposed Document offers indications for a review and implementation of the *Ratio Fundamentalis* and the *Ratio Nationalis* in a synodal and missionary perspective: “operational pathways” for a renewal which, on the cultural and training level, on the structural and institutional level, as well as on the normative level, already benefit from experiments and updates currently underway that are collected in the Appendix (*Best Practices*) of the Document.

Attention to the educational environment and *care for a shared formation* of the People of God introduces the first operational pathways (*Guidelines* 1).

Formative experiences detached from the ordinary life of the faithful prove detrimental for the journey towards ordained ministry. Rather, the formation process should take place in close contact with the daily life of the People of God, in order to truly be part of the human condition, thus ensuring both a true experience of God and the complementarity of diverse vocations.

From this point of view, an authentic lived experience of faith and commitment within the Christian community is an indispensable prerequisite for initial vocational discernment, before specific paths are undertaken.

Beginning with the propaedeutic stage, experiences and moments of shared formation with lay people, consecrated persons and ordained ministers are required, so that in the everyday reality of relationships, self-knowledge takes place and one learns to collaborate fraternally with all.

Regarding the formative environment, the proposed Document considers it appropriate to alternate the traditional module, which necessarily entails residence in the Seminary during the early years, *with other modules* that involve residence in parish communities or other ecclesial environments, especially during *the configurative stage*. This should not prolong the formation period.

Choices in this direction promise to facilitate a truly integral formation; such formation would benefit from the ordinary relationships with all members of the People of God, favouring the growth of responsible and mature personalities, including the area of affectivity and sexuality.

A second set of operational pathways (*Guidelines* 2) concerns the participatory and synodal style that must permeate priestly formation. It is above all a matter of cultivating and safeguarding the intimate link between the deep relationship with Jesus Christ and the fraternal life of the community (*Guidelines* 2.1). In order to ensure a formative community a sufficient number of seminarians and formators is required. Within the Seminary, if the community is large enough, “fellowship groups” should be formed that allow a more personalised accompaniment and foster a real experience of fraternal sharing in the community. In this way, experience of ‘normal life’ is guaranteed, whereby everyone can acquire responsibility and a spirit of service in everyday matters, sheltered from tendencies towards clerical elitism. A spiritual life can thus emerge, deeply marked by passion for the community, its mission and its synodality.

Further operational pathways concern the theoretical-practical *curriculum* for the formation of a priesthood in favour of a missionary and synodal Church (*Guidelines* 2.2). From the propaedeutic stage of formation, the *Final Document* of the Synod should be studied so that attitudes and skills related to co-responsibility and community discernment are acquired. It is also necessary to revise the academic proposal, from a biblical and theological perspective, as well as that of the human sciences and of

philosophy. This is required so that studies contribute to the concrete appropriation of a relational anthropology, of an ecclesiology of the missionary and synodal People of God, and of the presbyteral identity in a relational-communitarian perspective, which then must be verified and strengthened on the ground during the pastoral stage.

The proposed Document also identifies operational pathways aimed at establishing a synodal approach to priestly formation (*Guidelines 2.3*). Since priestly ministry ultimately receives its Christological identity “in and from” the People of God, priestly formation must have the People of God as its proper subject, in its charismatic-hierarchical configuration. A key area for greater investment is the training of formators, particularly their ability to live in fraternity and work synodally. It is not enough to continue the already established practice of involving competent men and women religious, together with the laity in academic and practical teaching. Moreover, well-prepared and competent women must necessarily be included as co-responsible at all levels of formation, also within the formation team, in order to benefit from their indispensable contribution to vocational discernment and to the accompaniment of candidates to the priesthood. This development is to be promoted – where not yet underway – through a process involving the educational community, while respecting the various cultural contexts and responding to the renewal required by a synodal and missionary Church.

How should the People of God contribute to the formation process, naturally with the Bishop and those directly appointed to this task? The operational pathways call for decisions and practices that embody the differentiated co-responsibility that is the Church’s commitment to priestly formation (*Guidelines 3*). In drafting the *Ratio Nationalis* and the formation project of individual Seminaries, Bishops must promote the contribution of people of different vocations. In the care and accompaniment of vocational journeys, the vitality of lay people, families, educators and catechists must be recognized and supported, also through *Vocational Centres*. Moreover, the periodic evaluation of the candidates’ progress must not remain the exclusive responsibility of those ultimately in charge of formation; those who share the environments in which the candidates live, study and work should be more involved. Additionally, the scrutinies for the conferral of Holy Orders should include a non-formal, yet authentic listening to the People of God, giving particular importance to the perspective and judgment of women.

Finally, operational pathways are offered for formation in that apostolic zeal which must inspire future priests in serving the missionary Church (*Guidelines 4*). Since the mission of the Gospel is at stake, formation must include proclamation and service to the poor, within a comprehensive sensitivity to the cry of the peripheries and of the planet. In missionary outreach and throughout the whole journey of formation, ecumenical and interreligious fraternity must be cultivated. Furthermore, being immersed in the human condition facilitates a homiletic and catechetical formation that teaches how to connect the heart of the Gospel with the life experiences of people. Therefore, formation processes should provide skills, tools and, above all, criteria for navigating the digital culture and for sowing therein the seed of the Gospel. Regarding initiation to mission, an invaluable aspect is a rigorous formation in the culture of safeguarding, thus laying foundations for a more decisive prevention from all kinds of abuse. The proposed Document also highlights the value of periods of formation spent in other countries or in Dioceses where the sense of mission can become even more alive.

In conclusion, the Group presents an *itinerary for the dissemination and implementation of the operational pathways* offered in the proposed Document (*Corollary*).