

# Spanish bishop warns that the Synod on Synodality can't re-invent the mission of the Church



Daniel Ibanez/CNA.



By **Nicolás de Cárdenas**  
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The bishop of Córdoba, Spain, Demetrio Fernández, warned about the challenges facing the Synod on Synodality, an initiative that he acknowledges "has stirred up the waters of the Church" but that cannot "invent" the mission of the Catholic Church.

In his weekly pastoral letter, which concludes by quoting the Letter to the Hebrews — "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. **Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teaching**" — the **bishop explained some of the challenges of the synodal process.**

He noted that "the Church, by its very nature, is synodal, it is communion, it's an assembly, and therefore we are called to prophesy."

However, he clarified, "It is the Holy Spirit who speaks in us. And here's where the ambiguity can come in, **because there is no lack of people who confuse the Holy Spirit with their own strange ideas.**"

## **The need for discernment**

Fernández warned that, although there are places where "erratic proposals" have been rejected in the first phase of the synod, in others, some of them "proposed by a small minority, have been immediately included in the concluding documents, *lacking the most elementary discernment.*"

Therefore, the prelate called for the exercise of discernment to "test the spirits to see if they come from God or from the evil one."

**This discernment must be carried out under the criteria of the Word of God,** the bishop stressed. "If all this movement distracts us in words and words, in meetings and in groups, in encounters at all levels, spending time and energy, and we do not convert, that does not come from God."



Bishop Demetrio Fernández of Córdoba says Mass to mark the close of the diocesan phase of the beatification cause of Pedro Manuel Salado in Córdoba, Spain, March 20, 2021. Credit: Diocese of Córdoba.

**The prelate emphasized the importance of “looking at what the Church has done everywhere and always throughout the centuries.”**

"The Church and the mission that Christ has entrusted to her are not going to be invented by us now," he said.

Fernández said that found within Tradition is the Magisterium of the Church, of the pope, and of the bishops in communion with him. Departing from that Tradition "is erratic, it is condemning oneself to sterility. **The Holy Spirit cannot now come to tell us something contrary to what he has said on previous occasions,**" he said.

Fernández pointed out that **"it makes no sense now to contradict" the doctrine referring to the priestly ordination of men only, priestly celibacy, the blessing of same-sex unions, abortion, or respect for human life until natural death.**

## **The Church is not a parliament**

Fernández emphasized that **the synodal process cannot be equated to the way in which secular governments draft, debate, and pass their laws.** "The synods and assemblies are not to contradict what the Spirit says to his Church as if the Church were a civil parliament, which changes the laws at the demand of the voters," he said.

For this reason, he said, warnings about the danger of schism in the case of the Church in Germany also must be applied to the Synod on Synodality.

"What is happening at the Synod of the Church in Germany, and that the Holy See has warned that **it 'doesn't have the power to oblige the bishops and**

**the faithful to adopt new forms of government and new approaches to doctrine and morals'** ought to be applied to the whole Church," Fernández said.

"Synods and assemblies. May God help us in these moments of turbulence in society and also in the Church," the prelate added.

## **Controversy at the Synod**

One of the controversies that have been part of the process of the Synod on Synodality took place in Spain, where the archdioceses of Barcelona and Zaragoza included among their proposals the abolition of priestly celibacy and that women have access to the priesthood.

In the final synthesis of the diocesan phase of the Synod on Synodality, which was closed June 11 by the Spanish Bishops' Conference, it states that "although these are issues raised only in some dioceses and, in them, by a small number of groups or individuals, we see fit to incorporate into this synthesis, due to their relevance in the essential ecclesial dialogue and with our fellow citizens, the request they make regarding the need to discern in greater depth the issue concerning optional celibacy in the case of priests and the ordination of married men; to a lesser extent, the issue of women's ordination has also come up."

The synthesis published by the Spanish Bishops' Conference will go to Rome to be included in the previous work of the Synod on Synodality.

## What is the Synod on Synodality?

The Synod of Bishops, which will have as its theme "For a Synodal Church: communion, participation, and mission," will be held in October 2023 at the Vatican.

When inaugurating the work of the Synod on Synodality on Oct. 10, 2021, Pope Francis said that "the synod is a path of spiritual discernment, of ecclesial discernment, which takes place in adoration, in prayer, in contact with the Word of God."

The preparation for the Synod has three stages: at the diocesan level, the continental level, and at the level of the Universal Church.

This last stage will take place when the General Secretariat of the Synod sends to the participants of the Synodal Assembly the text of the second Instrumentum Laboris, or working document of the Synod.

This second working instrument will be the one that the Synod Fathers will discuss in the Synodal Assembly in October 2023.

At the conclusion of their debates, the Synod Fathers will present a final document to Pope Francis.

Finally, the Holy Father could publish a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, which does not necessarily have to agree with the final document of the Synod Fathers.

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