

Co-Responsible Leadership and Governance in the Vineyard of the Lord: Theological Foundation and Canonical Opportunities

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2025 Knox Public Lecture

Catholic Theological College
University of Divinity

Melbourne - October 15, 2025

1. The Context

1. Pope Francis: Hitting a reset button (2015)
2. 2021 Convoled the **Synod on Synodality:**

Communion – Mission – Participation

4. Interaction of **Local and entire church: Continental level**
5. Culminating in XIV General Assembly in 2023- 2024:
participation of all - Final Document

2. The Challenge

1. Throughout the world and on all levels:

Rediscovery of Baptism

2. Baptism implies an **equality in dignity** of all
3. There is a co-responsibility³ for the **mission** of the Church
4. The co-responsibility leads to **accountability**, which presupposes **transparency and evaluation**.

2. The Challenge

“A desire emerged to expand possibilities for participation and for the exercise of differentiated co-responsibility by all the Baptised, men and women. In this regard, however, the lack of participation by so many⁴ members of the People of God in this journey of ecclesial renewal was a source of sadness.” FD 36

“By **virtue of Baptism**, women and men have **equal dignity** as members of the People of God. However, women continue to encounter **obstacles** in obtaining a fuller recognition of their charisms, vocation and place in all the various areas of the Church’s life. ... This Assembly asks for **full implementation** of all the opportunities already provided for in Canon Law with regard to the role of women, particularly in those places where they remain **underutilised**.” (FC 60)

The topic is not ordination.

Three Questions

1. What is the theological basis for our reflection?
2. Which opportunities does canon law offer?
3. How can we move forward?



PIUS IX - FIRST VATICAN COUNCIL
1869



SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL 1962



SYNOD PARTICIPANTS

- GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2024

4. The Theological Basis for our Reflection:

- **Revelation:** God interacts with his people as friends, enters their life and receives them into relationship (DV 2)
- Hence: Revelation is an **encounter** – which is **ongoing**
- The response is: **baptism**
- Baptism: living in communion / community: the **people of God**

- **Baptism:** *all* participate in Christ's prophet, priestly and kingly office (c. 204 CIC): thus *all* are **acting subjects** in *all* domains
- Baptismal ecclesiology: Communality leads to term *christifideles* – Christ faithful (not: ordained and laity)
- Baptism: **equality** with regard to **dignity** and activity (c. 208 CIC)
- All cooperate and hold responsibility for building the body of Christ – the Kingdom of God = **MISSION**

- All are **acting** subjects, but diversity due to
- **charisms and ministries** granted to individuals for the benefit of the **mission** of the community = the church
- **Ordination** places a person in a new relationship within the community. With the ordination comes the power necessary for the fulfillment of the ministry.

Susan Wood – referring to Richard Gaillardetz / John Zizioulas

This implies a **change in Perspective**

FROM : Distinction *between* hierarchy / laity (with focus on personal ontological change)

TO : Ecclesiology of communio within which there is ministry and ministries as *service to the mission* of the community

Ordination / commissioning: creates new ecclesial **relationship**

5 Which Opportunities does Canon Law Offer?

- the participation of women and lay men in governance
- Have there been any developments to build on?

FROM VATICAN II TO THE 1983 CODE

- 1917 Code of Canon Law:
 - ▶ Only clerics exercise power of jurisdiction - c. 118 CIC/1917
 - ▶ Cleric: those who have received tonsure
- 1971 Lay *men* as judge in collegiate tribunal for marriage cases:
(*Causa matrimoniales*)
- 1972 Paul VI abolishes minor orders (*Ministeria quaedam*)
- 1973 First religious sister as defender of the bond
- 1974 Lay *men* for all court cases

FROM VATICAN II TO THE 1983 CODE

Considerations for the revision of the law – c. 129 CIC/1983

Participation of the “**non-ordained**” (!) in the power of governance

▶ **Italian school: participation is possible:**

- Emperors convoked councils,
- Popes exercised jurisdiction before being ordained a bishop
- Abbesses granted priests the faculty to hear confessions

▶ **Munich school: Vatican II *sacrapotestas*– participation is not possible**

POPE JOHN PAUL II

- Code of Canon Law 1983

- Lay men and women *cooperate* in the power of governance (c. 129)
- Lay men and women can *participate* in pastoral care of a parish (c. 517 § 2)
- Lay men and women can be judges in a collegiate tribunal with two clerics (c. 1421 § 2): exercise of jurisdiction *ex officio*¹⁷
- Only clerics can obtain those offices for whose exercise there is required the power of orders or the power of ecclesiastical governance (c. 274 § 1)
- *Cooperare* or *participare*?

- **Appointment** of a religious sister as Undersecretary at the Congregation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life

POPE BENEDICT XVI

- Priests are ordained *in persona Christi capitis*, but deacons *ad ministeriam* (*Omnium in mentem* - 2010)
 - ▶ Impacts notion of cleric
 - ▶ Deacons may continue to act as a single judge
- Lay men and women can be judges in reserved **penal cases of clerics** at a diocesan level or for clerical Institutes of Consecrated Life (2010).

POPE FRANCIS

- Abolishes the requirement that a layperson can only serve in a collegiate **tribunal** composed of two clerics (2015): **two lay persons & one cleric.**
- Abolishes the privilege of cardinals, bishops, and apostolic nuncios to be heard in trials at Vatican City State courts only by the Roman Pontiff and allows laypersons to serve as judges on these trials (2021); (cf. c. 1405).
- ▶ **Rationale provided:** all share equality with regard to dignity and activity in building the Body of Christ (LG 32).

POPE FRANCIS & LEO XIV

Roman Curia (AC *Praedicate Evangelium*)

- Provides for laypersons to an **office of leadership in the Roman Curia** that might involve the power of governance (2022)
- The offices of prefects of Dicastries have **vicarious** power
- Most times no ordination required for the work exercised.

POPE FRANCIS & Leo XIV

Roman Curia (AC *Praedicate Evangelium*)

- Appoints 3 women as members of the Dicastery for Bishops (2023)
- Appoints a female Secretary to the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (Francis 2023 – **Leo XIV** 2025)
- Appoints e.g. a female prefect for Dicastery of Consecrated Life(2025):
she uses the title: “Prefetta” (not: Prefetto)

POPE FRANCIS

Synod

- Appoints a woman Undersecretary to the Synod of Bishops; from the **office** of undersecretary flows the right **to vote** in the Synod ex officio (2021)
- Lay men and women participate as **members** and thus **hold the right to vote** in the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (2023 / 2024)
- Appoints two women to the XVI Ordinary Council of General Secretariat of the Synod (2024)

POPE FRANCIS

Consecrated life:

Provides for religious **brothers** to be a **major superior** in a clerical religious institute of consecrated life of pontifical right (2022); does not clarify whether this person is an Ordinary.

Nota bene. Religious women exercise executive power e.g. by placing juridic acts: erect, suppress provinces, admit members to final vows, etc. (c. 596)

OBJECTIONS

What are the theological and canonical arguments that cause

some bishops / faithful etc. **to see / not to see** possibilities

for women / lay men to participate in the governance of the church?

Recall the Perspective as outlined above: Is it baptism or ordination?

6. How to Move Forward?

1. Attend to the **perspective: baptism- communio**
2. Canon law does already provide: **build on the ongoing development**
consider developments *beyond* the law (*praeter legem* – c. 26)
3. What level? **Parish - diocese** and **supra diocesan** (episcopal conference)
4. Modality of Discernment: **synodal**: all involved under **leadership of bishop**
5. **Format**: diocesan / parish pastoral council, diocesan synod etc.
while considering needs, context, available recourses

7. CONCLUSION

“There is no reason or impediment that should prevent women
from carrying out leadership roles in the Church:

What comes from the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped.”
(Final Document Nr. 60)

THANK YOU

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FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. Peter and Paul Seminar Research Group

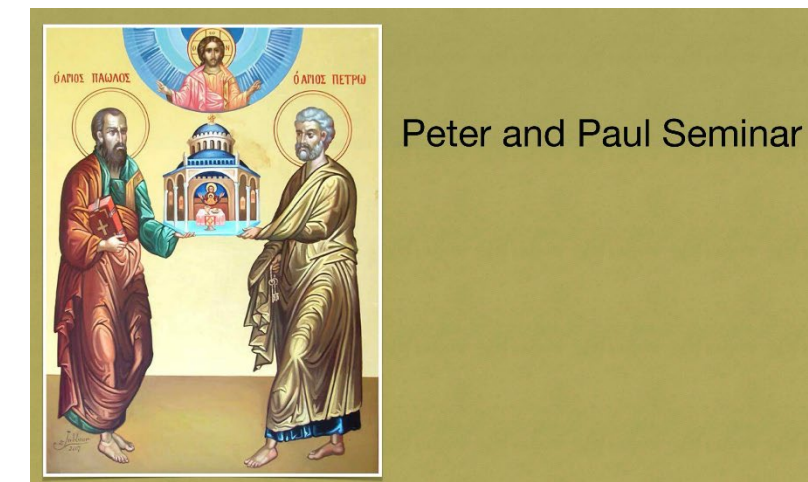
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2. Research Project - *Reframing the Understanding of Participation in Mission and Leadership in a Synodal Church* Table of Contents with Summaries

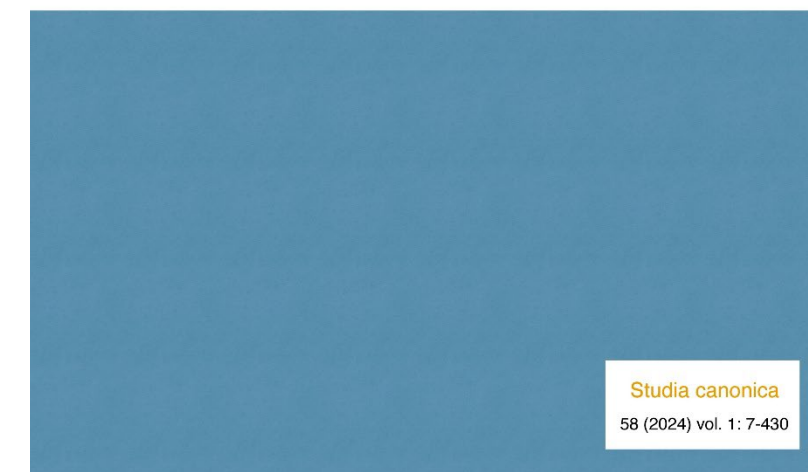
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3. Myriam Wijlens, “Laypersons Participating in Leadership and Governance in a Synodal Church: Canonical Developments Calling for Theological Reflections,” *Studia Canonica* 58 (2024) 53-78.

4. Susan K. Wood, “Christifideles within a Baptismal Ecclesiology: Reframing the Question of Participation in Leadership and Mission,” *Studia Canonica* 58 (2024) 79-102.

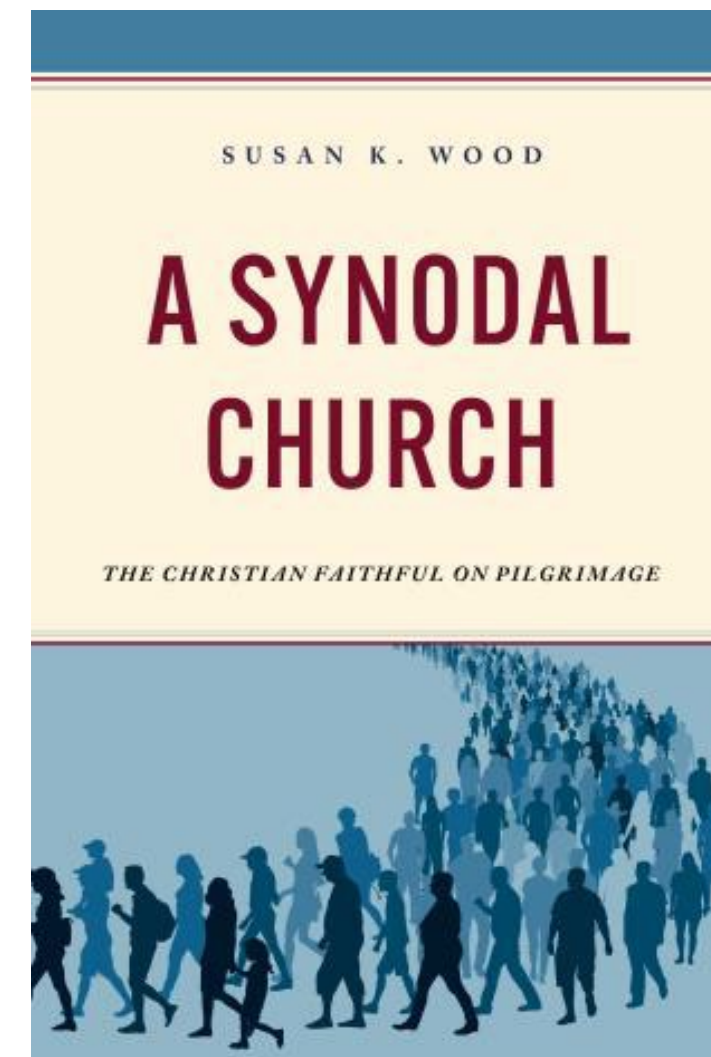


*Called to Serve in the Vineyard of the Lord.
Reframing the Understanding of Participation in
Mission and Leadership in a Synodal Church*



FOR FURTHER STUDY:

5. Susan K. Wood, *A Synodal Church: The Christian Faithful on Pilgrimage* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2025)



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