

“Synodal Way” is frontal attack on the church

Maria 1.0, a Catholic initiative, draws a gloomy summary of the recent synodal assembly.

“We are extremely grateful to Dorothea Schmidt for once again subjecting herself to this irritating procedure,” is the initial reaction of Clara Steinbrecher, spokesperson for Maria 1.0. Dorothea Schmidt represents Maria 1.0, a Catholic lay initiative, in the so-called Synodal Way. “Irritating procedure” refers to the second Synodal Assembly, which ended on Saturday (Oct. 3, 2021) in Frankfurt.

According to Maria 1.0, many participants of this non-binding event in Frankfurt mistakenly understand the Church to be an association or a party-like construct, in which the mechanisms of party conventions with motions and majority principles apply. “What we observed here in Frankfurt was nothing less than a frontal attack on the church, carried by theological ignorance and downright embarrassing groveling before the secular public,” Steinbrecher said. “Although they always emphasize that this is only the first reading and nothing is definite, a closer look shows how untrustworthy these statements are. The secular press and the reform camp largely deal with the resolutions that have been passed as if they had already been decided. They are always ready with an argument: either appeasement – it's only a draft after all – or clarification – this or that issue will come up anyway,” Steinbrecher adds.

Among other things, the Synodal Way's idea of introducing a council system in the Catholic Church is being met with criticism. Dorothea Schmidt comments: “Has anyone ever thought about what that really means? Admittedly, it worked 2000 years ago, too. The Pharisees voted Jesus out, gave him up for execution, and then had him crucified.”

The fact that this synodal forum also questions the sexual morals of the church meanwhile comes as little surprise to the women of Maria 1.0. Catholic sexual morality is demanding and pretty much the opposite of the lived reality of people's lives. Unhealthy nutrition and excessive alcohol consumption belong, however, also to the life reality of many Germans, but nobody has come up with the idea that perhaps the nutritionists are simply wrong, explains Steinbrecher.

Maria 1.0 considers the reinterpretation, or for some even the reinvention, of original sin to be particularly interesting. The “new original sin” is abuse, and for this sin to be overcome, according to some synod members, ONLY a structural change in the church is needed. Through abuse, however, perpetrators who live and work in the Church have brought guilt on themselves; they have sinned against people and against God. This particular sin, we hear again and again, blocks our access to God – according to some synod members, the “new original sin” even robs the Church of part of its sacramental authority. They claim that the only one who can give us back this authority is now considered to be the institution of the Church itself, by punishing the perpetrators, listening to the victims and, above all, being ready to abolish or fundamentally change the structures that allegedly contributed significantly to making abuse possible. Steinbrecher points out: “It must be absolutely clear that the perpetrators of abuse must be held accountable, that the church must hear the victims, and that attempts are being made to make abuse impossible in the future. But, in my view, a comment is necessary: perpetrators have sinned not only against individuals, but against God Himself – an act of repentance by individuals and the Church in our country must be made not only to the victims, but also to Almighty God. I criticize the claim that the new Messiah in this picture is supposed to be THE structural change, and that Jesus Christ has no reform offers, nor clarification competence – in the end, he is not included.”

Dorothea Schmidt was dismayed that some bishops at the synodal forum also voted against the teachings of the church, which they were supposed to guard and defend, according to their oath of consecration. “If now bishops are also to vote for gender ideology, which is to be discussed at the next assembly, if they abolish themselves as well as the teaching of the Church, then for me it will clearly fall into an abyss,” Schmidt sums up. Maria 1.0 explains the behavior of some bishops in two ways. First, if there has been a shortage of priests for decades, the quality of bishops must inevitably decline, since there are fewer and fewer qualified candidates for ordination to this pastoral office. Second, some bishops are driven by the fear of worldly insignificance. They are afraid of no longer being noticed, popular, or accepted in a secular world in which the majority principle sets the tone. Some will certainly also be afraid of the end of state services, if they don’t curry favor with the current clientele of politicians and journalists. So, Maria 1.0 is all the more grateful for every bishop who courageously goes against the tide and defends the teachings of the Church against all odds.

“What both the media and the initiators of the Synodal Way fail to realize is that the issues are completely out of touch with the interests of most people in Germany. In Germany, pretty much every sacrament is at rock bottom. Seminaries are empty, divorce rates are high, few people go to confirmation, and by international standards, German confessionals are largely deserted. The fact that we want to show the universal church how things can be better in the face of this poor record borders on pitiful hubris,” says Clara Steinbrecher.

Maria 1.0 was launched in May 2019 in response to the Maria 2.0 movement, which developed from Münster, Germany, into a nationwide protest against the valid teaching authority of the Catholic Church and for women's access to ordained ministry. Maria 1.0 believes that “Mary does not need an update.” The initiative wants to show “that there are also women who are faithful to the teachings of the Church.” Since May 1, 2021, Clara Steinbrecher, a student (majoring in mathematics education and school psychology) has taken up the reins from Stöhr. Steinbrecher has already been part of the Maria 1.0 team for some time.