

# For a synodal Church

This is version 11 (released 12 March 2022) of our input to the Synod on Synodality. Until end of March 2022 you are welcome to participate by formulating your feedback. For more information, see <https://hw.saffre-rumma.net/sc/report/>

## Table of Contents

About this document.....	1	Step 6 : Collaborate with language regulators.....	12
Introduction.....	2	Step 7 : Assume our political role.....	12
A metamorphosis, not a battle.....	2	Conclusion.....	13
Some definititions.....	2	What is a synodal Church?.....	13
The teachings of the Church.....	3	Appendices.....	15
Vision: Naked Pope Leaves Rome.....	4	(A-1) Mistakes are good.....	15
Section 1 : What does „synodal“ mean?.....	5	(A-2) Individual versus common knowledge.....	15
Together on our way.....	5	(A-3) Frequently asked questions.....	16
Who is together with us?.....	5	Tell me the Gospel in 60 seconds.....	16
Human hearts are not elastic.....	6	Do we need to repent from our mistakes?.....	17
Section 2 : The Church in Estonia.....	6	(A-4) Local project ideas.....	17
A Church in the underground.....	6	(A-5) Sources.....	18
Sheep in the midst of wolves.....	7	(A-6) Real-life stories.....	18
Presynodal images of the Church.....	8	(A-7) Independant content publishers.....	18
Christians are divided.....	9	(A-8) Publishers that don't call themselves „religious“.....	19
Unclear vocabulary promotes disorder.....	9	(A-9) Clarify the concept of apostolic governance.....	19
Section 3 : Suggestions.....	10	(A-10) Examples of collective sins.....	20
Step 1 : Introduce “master teachings”.....	10	(A-11) More about biblicism.....	20
Step 2 : Introduce version control.....	10	(A-12) Unclassified and removed thoughts.....	20
Step 3 : Introduce reliable technology for dialogue.....	10		
Step 4 : Declare the Gospel as our axiom.....	11		
.....	11		
Step 5 : Clean up presynodal language...11			

## About this document

(1) This document is what an informal interconfessional group led by a single person decided to say at the Synod on Synodality. We tried to listen to *all* those who care for the Church, „including those who have abandoned the practice of the faith, people from other faith traditions, people who have no religious beliefs at all.“<sup>1</sup>

(2) The authors love the Church as she is, despite all justified criticism<sup>2</sup>. We believe that the Church *does* have serious issues, some of which deserve criticism and require steps to be taken. We hope that the Synod on Synodality is going to address these issues. Some of us feel this hope only very distantly and have turned away from institutionalized religion because the Church disappoints them.

(3) X of the 18 contributors chose not to sign the final result. Which in no way means that their contribution was useless. It is rather a confirmation that synodality is one of the biggest challenges of the church and the world.

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1 Vademecum 2.1

2 General Audience 2022-02-16, <https://www.vaticannews.va/de/papst/news/2022-02/papst-franziskus-generalaudienz-kritik-josef-kirche.html>

(4) You may share this document in unmodified form with anybody, it is published under a [CC BY-ND license](#).

## Introduction

### A metamorphosis, not a battle

(5) The Synod on Synodality is sometimes seen as a battle between two “camps” with fundamentally opposing images of the Church. The two camps are sometimes labelled “traditional” or “conservative” versus “liberal” or “progressive”. But cutting *reality* into two halves ([dichotomy](#)) is a simplification. You can be labelled “liberal” without seeing *faith* as an individual choice. You can be labelled “progressive” and still be very conservative in many regards. Nobody is fully in one „camp“.

(6) There are clear reactions against the topic “Synodality” as such. Some participants said “The Church is *rooted* in Jesus Christ, it does not *journey*”. Others said “We *know* what is good and true, we are not *seeking* for it.” One responder<sup>3</sup> said boldly: “I view the Synod on Synodality as negative influence on the Catholic faith. In fact, it can even be considered as sabotage of the Catholic faith.”.

(7) Because the phenomenon is more complex than a simple dichotomy, some call it a [paradigm shift](#).<sup>4</sup> We liked to see it as a [metamorphosis](#) : the Church as a butterfly that hatches from a [pupa](#) state after a seemingly long period of invisible activity.

(8) We cannot solve problems by refusing to speak about them. The first step in every dialogue is to agree on what we are talking about. The Synod on Synodality is going to make a few fundamental things clear. It gives us hope that this battle turns into a dialogue. It acts as a signal for this metamorphosis and will trigger an avalanche of events, the extent of which is not yet foreseeable.

### Some definitions

(9) Because we are a diverse group with different backgrounds, we tried to formulate in [plain language](#) some basic definitions that are acceptable to each of us.

(10) A statement is **true** when it reflects *reality* in a given context. **Reality** is what remains true and real even if we fail to *know* or *believe* it. To **believe** something means to assume its *truth* without asking for a proof. To **know** something means to assume its truth because you consider it as proven. A **conviction** is a written or unwritten rule you assume to be true. Everybody, including people who refuse religious teachings, have a number of convictions they cannot prove. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” ([John 20:29](#))

(11) The **individual faith** of a human is his or her collection of convictions. It is a seemingly immutable part of your personality that you cannot change at will. But it evolves and changes continuously as long as you live. It is the current result of your life-long learning process. It is influenced by the culture and family you happen to live in, by your personal history, your individual skills and weaknesses, your thinking patterns, your metabolism and the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit. There are no two humans whose faiths are fully identical.

(12) The **common faith** ([sensus fidei](#)) of a community is the stored knowledge of her past and present members. It is the result of more than an individual human lifetime. While *individual faith* is stored in our *hearts*, common faith is mostly stored in **teachings**<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Private email 2022-03-03

<sup>4</sup> e.g. Johannes Brantl, <https://www.synodale-beitraege.de/de/synodalforen/synodalforum-iv/paradigmenwechsel-statt-weiterentwicklung>

<sup>5</sup> We use „teachings“ in a very general meaning, which includes any freely available published content. traditions,

(13) A **religion** is a system of teachings based on beliefs about the **invisible world**, i.e. the part of reality that is not measurable using the [scientific method](#). Science answers questions about the **visible world**, God gave us brains and we developed science to answer them.

(14) A **Christian** is anybody who professes belief in the *Gospel* and is confirmed as doing so by a *recognized institution of the Church*.

(15) The **Gospel** is the divine message brought to humanity through Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup> We experience the Gospel and sometimes Christ the incarnate Word in our own life and find that the teachings of the Church correctly express this experience. We live *through it, in it and with it*, we discover, observe and witness its truth. The Gospel is more than the *Bible*, it is revealed to us also in nature, in the thankful smile of a poor or in a personal experience of success or failure.

(16) The **Church** is the body of all Christians. It has been inspired by Jesus Christ as part of his plan for humanity. There is currently no single legal entity that represents the whole Church.

(17) The **Bible** is the Holy Scripture used by all *Christians*. It is an immutable and well-known collection of texts we venerate and use for cultivating our *faith*.

(18) The expression **Word of God** is sometimes used as a synonym for the *Bible*, sometimes as a synonym for the *Gospel*. Which causes confusion. At least since Second Vatican Council the Catholic church tries to avoid saying “Word of God” when they mean “Bible”.<sup>7</sup>

## The teachings of the Church

(19) In this document we use the word “teaching” in its most general meaning : a **teaching** is any [document](#) in human language<sup>8</sup> that teaches something. We need *teachings* when announcing the Gospel because no individual human can know the full truth about the *Gospel*.

(20) The teachings of the Church have different levels of maturity and hence authority:

- The *Bible* is the fundamental, historic, immutable and authoritative collection of texts used by all Christians as their *Holy Scripture*.
- The teachings of the [doctores ecclesiae universalis](#) are as historic and immutable as the Bible, and venerated as Scriptures by many Christians, but not by all.<sup>9</sup>
- The official teachings emitted by church institutions are a third type. They are authoritative interpretations of the Scriptures for the members of an institution but can be in contradiction with those of other institutions.
- And finally we have a never-ending stream of teachings published by independent organizations and individual Christians.

(21) The teachings of the Church are the biggest and most complex documentation library in the world, developed over more than 2000 years, with the biggest community of contributors, with document types ranging from letters, blog entries, news, homilies, prayers, songs, books,

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6 We have no more detailed definition of the Gospel. Some sources name it a “teaching”, others a “proclamation” or “revelation”. Some sources try to mention its basic elements (“redemption”, “Kingdom of God”, “salvation”, ...) but fail to consent on which of them is most important.

7 Dei Verbum, excerpts from no 9-10: “It is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. (...) Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church. (...) The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church. It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.”) [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html)

8 see National Center for Biotechnology Information <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5525259/>

9 Real-life illustration in [https://hw.saffre-rumma.net/blog/2022/0228\\_2000/](https://hw.saffre-rumma.net/blog/2022/0228_2000/)

films, to dogmatic constitutions, research reports and law collections, with and audience ranging from 2 year old children to experts of every branch of science. Maintaining this documentation library is a huge and never-ending responsibility of the Church.

## Vision: Naked Pope Leaves Rome

(22) The vision below is based on a real-life story<sup>10</sup> and inspired by the hope to “plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, 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.” ([PD] no. 32).

Pope Francis will take yet another important step during his lifetime. He will appoint another person as the apostolic leader of the Catholic church. This leader will have full authority over the Catholic church, under the authority of the Pope.

The Pope himself will leave Rome together with a dozen of friends. Not all of them will be Catholic. They will live in varying places of the world, similar to the first apostles. They will have no private property. Like St. Francis of Assisi when he left his parents they will be “naked” during a short moment.

They will receive support from friends to create a [foundation](#) having as goal „to announce the Gospel to everybody and to reconcile, unite and guide all communities that consider themselves as Christian“. They will call it the **Synodal Church Foundation (SCF)**. Her main activity will be to develop, publish and maintain *master teachings* about the *Gospel*. They will choose a country where this foundation will be registered and an existing language as their [lingua franca](#). The SCF will have clear rules according to the laws of this country. These rules can be reused by other communities.

The *master teachings* emitted by the SCF will be inspired by the existing *living teachings* of the different denominations. The Catholic church will align her teachings little by little to the master teachings of the SCF, as quickly or slowly as their apostolic leader decides. At the same time other denominations will unite in joy with the Synodal Church and do the same. Each of them will align their teachings more or less carefully, more or less quickly, as it is due. Also many of the Christians who left the visible Church during the last years will return. And even a series of corporations that have not called themselves “religious” until now, will join this choir, discover the Gospel as their root and align under the Synodal Church.

The Pope will also enter into dialogue with other religions and they will discover the Gospel in their Holy Scriptures. The Catholic church will find itself at the same level together with Protestant and Orthodox Christians.

Not every Christian community will join immediately because *human hearts are not elastic*. This is part of the learning process and rather a confirmation than an obstacle.

### Comments and reactions to the vision

(23) This is just a *vision*. Don’t ask whether it is realistic, but ask what it means. It helped us to enter into fraternal and creative dialogue with other denominations.

(24) “No single organization of the visible world will ever represent the whole Church because God calls each human individually.”<sup>11</sup>

(25) “See on utopia. Võim ja autoriteet on erinevad mehhanismid. Võim võetakse vägisi; autoriteet on kingitus. Kas Sa mõtled, et paavst loobub võimust ja juhib inimesi ainuüksi autoriteedi abil? Kui ta loobub võimust, pole tal autoriteeti nende silmis, kelle käes on võim. Kui ta kaotab võimu ja autoriteedi, pole ta enam paavst.” [private 20220204]

(26) “An exciting vision. We’ll see how much of a prophet you are-or future generations will. You’ve given us permission to live with our fears. This is wise and in itself is a symptom of synodical thinking.” [private 20211229]

<sup>10</sup>Details see [https://hw.saffre-rumma.net/blog/2021/1119\\_1421/](https://hw.saffre-rumma.net/blog/2021/1119_1421/)

<sup>11</sup>Real-life illustration in [https://hw.saffre-rumma.net/blog/2022/0228\\_2000/](https://hw.saffre-rumma.net/blog/2022/0228_2000/)

(27) This imaginative approach to the papacy didn't originate with Francis, but with Benedict when he retreated to the summer palace to pray with a community. [private 20220312]

(28) Creating a new institution is the **opposite of a schism**: it will reconcile all Christians and unite them back under one institution in the *visible world*. It is a step towards greater unity. No single Christian will get lost and no single community will be forced to change more than they are able to change.

(29) This vision enables us to increase diversity without breaking apart. Diversification is a natural part of every growth process. Most living beings grow by cell division. Diversification is not the problem of the Church, her problem is the lack of an institution that unites them all. Christians from all denominations have been working to prepare this step for more than 70 years.

(30) This vision indicates that every community needs a **leader**, a **superior authority**. This leader cannot be one of the siblings because that would lead to lynch justice when they disagree about something. The Catholic church cannot be this leader because a referee cannot participate in the game. The director of a big choir cannot stand in one of the voice groups and sing with them, she must leave the level of the singers and gain an elevated and impartial position. This is why despite all efforts, the unity of all Christians still steps on the spot.

(31) This vision reveals the problem that the Pope exercises two opposed orientations. He is both the **manager** (“What does the Gospel mean today?”, “Where to go?”) and the **engineer** (“How to get there?”, “How to explain this to our followers?”).<sup>12</sup>

(32) This step seems so simple and obvious that the only surprising thing is that we did not see it earlier. We feel like the disciples in Emmaus who exclaimed “Did not our *hearts* burn within us?” ([Luke 24:32](#))

## Section 1 : What does „synodal“ mean?

*A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, ‘journeys together’.*

### Together on our way

(33) For this document we assume the following definition: **Synodality** it is the awareness of being **together** and **on our way** as a community.

(34) **Together**: We cannot exclude anybody who follows the Gospel. When our interpretations of the Gospel conflict with each other, we must consent upon which differences are welcome and which are unacceptable. We obviously cannot include those who choose to exclude some.

(35) **On our way** : We are not yet there: our only knowledge is Jesus Christ. We *know* that we don't know for sure which interpretation is true. “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12). We acknowledge that mistakes are part of our learning process and that our *teachings* require continuous maintenance work.

### Who is together with us?

(36) Who is part of the Church? Who is a „true“ or „saved“ Christian? You recognize a prophet from his fruits ([Matthew 7:16](#)). The visible fruit of our (invisible) faith is our behaviour. While human science constantly evolves to measure these fruits, God's final decision may surprise both the righteous and those excluded ([Matthew 25:31-46](#)).

(37) There are humans and communities who don't call themselves “Christian”. They don't use the Bible as a primary tool of inspiration and their language is not biblical. But their mission may be in harmony with the Gospel, they work for the Kingdom of God, they help the Church “to do her job”. Compare [Mark 9:38-40](#). Can we consider them as “indirectly inspired”?

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12 See e.g. <https://www.differencebetween.com/difference-between-manager-and-vs-engineer/>

(38) Every legal entity must define clear rules to regulate how to become a member and how to terminate membership. Most Christian communities practise baptism with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit to effect the beginning of the life in Christ. It is difficult to explain why the baptism in one community is not accepted in all other communities.

(39) Every community needs an identity and has a natural self-confidence. It shows our diversity ([1 Corinthians 12:1](#)). If „love your neighbour and even your enemy“ applies to communities as well as to individual humans, we must carefully consider the teachings of other communities and learn to learn from each other.<sup>13</sup>

## Human hearts are not elastic

(40) When we see a way of interpreting or celebrating the Gospel that is not “as we were taught”, then we feel irritated and are tempted to say “this is wrong”<sup>14</sup>. It is important to enter into dialogue in such situations. True human dialogue is always led by **emotions**. Emotions are the primary reaction of our *heart* to an incoming signal. Emotions can be pleasant or unpleasant, but they are neither good nor bad as such.

(41) Emotions arise when an incoming signal meets our individual human **convictions**. Convictions are stored in our hearts. Every individual conviction deserves respect. Human hearts are not elastic: they rather grow slowly like a tree<sup>15</sup>. **Emotional intelligence** is the art of reading and interpreting our own emotions and those of others with respect and prudence in order to understand what God is telling us. True love can forgive even an obvious lack of emotional intelligence.

(42) A synodal dialogue can start only when all participants agree that respecting other people’s convictions does not require giving up your own convictions. Overcoming your unpleasant emotions does not mean that you personally must stop feeling or experiencing them. God never calls us to do something that we are not able to do.

(43) No human will ever be free from all fears. But by cultivating the Gospel, the risen Christ can little by little make himself at home in our heart where he calls us to move out of Hell into Heaven.

(44) As humans we cannot change our convictions by our own will, but the Church as an institution can change her teachings. Institutions have no emotions. Overcoming deprecated convictions means to adapt our teachings as needed. Position papers are more flexible than human hearts. This is why position papers must change first, human hearts will follow.

(45) A synodal attitude regarding some teaching means to decide at least in the conscious part of your mind: “Even though it remains my conviction, I decide to not teach this conviction to our children.” and to pray “I want to believe! Help my unbelief!” ([Mark 9:14-29](#))

## Section 2 : The Church in Estonia

*How is this ‘journeying together’ happening today in your local Church?*

### A Church in the underground

(46) The Christian communities in Estonia manage quite well. Estonians<sup>16</sup> are very liberal thinkers, they don’t get angry when their neighbour has a different *modus vivendi*. Christians

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13 Are there scientific studies that compare different denominations regarding the number of testimonies of salvation through the Gospel? And how would such studies define what means „salvation“?

14 Some participants expressed their conviction that the Eucharist needs both forms of bread and wine.

15 *Annosa arbor non transplantatur* – [Walter of Châtillon](#) (12th century)

16 It is of course a simplification to say “the Estonians”. Not all Estonians are as described here. The issues described for Estonia apply in many other countries.

in Estonia are allowed to celebrate in diverse ways and worship whatever they want. *As long as they remain in their private domain.*

(47) The majority of Estonians *refuse* to consider the Church as a reliable dialogue partner. And „Church“ means to Estonians „everybody who happens to speak about the Gospel“. The Estonian government refuses to cultivate any *teaching* that is explicitly based on the Gospel.

(48) Some actors love to propagate the image that Estonians are **the least religious people** in the world. This slogan is both true and false depending on your definition of the word „religious“<sup>17</sup>. Estonians refuse religious teachings that have certain features, which increases their interest for religious teachings that lack these features.

(49) Being ignored is in a certain sense worse than being repressed. Christians who grew up in more religious regions witness that life in Estonia is for their faith an experience of loneliness.

(50) As the authors of this document we are less worried about ourselves than about the majority of Estonians: those who do not know the Gospel. Most Estonians have no clue about what the Gospel is about. „When an Estonian knows that they have made a mistake, even when everybody else forgives them, they will never forgive it to themselves until the end of their life.“<sup>18</sup>

(51) This situation has complex causes. Our local history is certainly one of them. Another cause is certainly “a desensitized human conscience, a distancing from religious values and a prevailing individualism accompanied by materialistic philosophies that deify the human person and introduce worldly and material values in place of supreme and transcendental principles” [20190204].

(52) But it is easy to blame others. Let us rather look at our own sin ([Matthew 7:3-5](#)): Who is responsible when the pupil fails to hear what the teacher says – the teacher or the pupil? The Church in Estonia often fails to do her job, which is to announce the Gospel.

(53) How can we dare to say that our beloved mother Church fails to do her job? The following image encouraged us: When you are a child and go shopping with your mother, and when you see that your mother has put her coat inside-out, will you let her get exposed to laughter of other people? No! Of course you will help her to turn her coat right.<sup>19</sup>

(54) Yes, the Church happens to say things that are in contradiction with common sense. Estonians are reasonable and practical people. When you tell them something that is in contradiction with what they know about life, they simply turn away and stop listening to you for the rest of their life. Each time the Church is seen “wearing her coat inside-out”, people of good will turn away from the Church – and from Jesus.

(55) This might be the most important challenge of the Church in our time. Most representatives of [New Atheism](#) don't criticize the *ideal* Church, they criticize a Church that is wearing her coat inside-out. Similar observations are made in Germany ([Schumacher2016] page 15)

## Sheep in the midst of wolves

(56) Announcing the *Gospel* to everybody is the job of every Christian in their daily life. Every single Christian can get asked at any moment for their opinion on topics of the visible world („Why do you think that X?“, replace X with any controversial question) or the invisible world („What is this Gospel you are announcing?“ or „Why are you so focused on sins?“).<sup>20</sup>

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17 Compare Martti Kalda, Demokraatia kui usund (based on “The World Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations” by Ninian Smart. <https://kolleegium.ee/oktoober-2021/martti-kalda-demokraatia-kui-usund-elame-kriisis-kus-on-paasetee/>

18 [https://hw.saffre-rumma.net/blog/2022/0220\\_2316/](https://hw.saffre-rumma.net/blog/2022/0220_2316/)

19 Marie-Noëlle Thabut, une vie avec la Bible. <https://www.la-croix.com/Religion/Catholicisme/France/Marie-Noelle-Thabut-vie-Bible-2018-12-23-1200991349>

20 See also <https://belglane.saffre-rumma.net/blog/2020/0131/>

(57) There is no unique recipe and no ready-made answer to such questions. The answer depends on the situation, the audience and on the amount of available time. And every particular answer is like a seed that can potentially bring fruit ([Matthew 13](#)) and grow into a tree into which the birds made nests ([Luke 13:19](#)). But every answer –including the refusal to answer clearly, which is also an answer– can also bring harm to the speaker or to others. Announcing the Gospel is dangerous. „I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves“ ([Matthew 10:16](#)).

(58) Several participants witnessed the experience of having abandoned, at some point in their life, their personal fight for some idea they believed good and true. Some of them were faced with exhaustion, burnout or depression. They still believe in the idea as such, but they realized that their fight takes longer than a single human life. Those who found peace of heart after such an experience have difficulty in explaining what helped them, and this help occurred independently of whether they are “religious” or not.

## Presynodal images of the Church

(59) Most schools in Estonia teach to our future generations a picture of the Church that is obsolete by about 500 years<sup>21</sup>.

(60) Most people in Estonia, both followers and refusers of the Church, still believe that the Church sees the Bible as a “magic” book with “supernatural” power that gives “clear” instructions for “getting into Heaven”. The Gospel has nothing **magical** or **supernatural**. Christian faith is about right relationship to **reality**, not an idolatry of something “supernatural”.<sup>22</sup> The message of *Dei Verbum*, which explains that Jesus sheds a new light on the role of Scripture for our faith and that the Gospel is more than the Bible, is not yet well known in Estonia.

(61) The Church in Estonia often sees itself (and is seen by others) as what Daniel Vaarik<sup>23</sup> labelled a “**truth institution**”: “Truth institutions were obscenely convinced that they are always right. They never acknowledged any mistake, because this would have meant that they are no longer a *truth* institution. They were slow and introvert. For they feared to make mistakes or to admit them. That’s also why they spoke using the complicated Truth Language. But despite their convulsive efforts, people often misunderstood them.”

(62) The Church is working to get rid of this deprecated image. Theologian Toomas Jürgestein explains that “every teacher is always also a learner: these two go together” and that “teaching always includes learning.”<sup>24</sup> But there are still many convictions where a “temptation to escape into a pure teaching” persists and where the Church seems to forget that “faith must prove itself and grow in contact with reality”<sup>25</sup>.

(63) The Church in Estonia still has a very clerical image. “Speaking about faith must be reserved to priests and professional teachers” or “Mina ei ole raamatutest targem”.

(64) Getting baptized is still seen in Estonia as a “potential way to heaven”, a “why not?” opportunity, a mere “administrative step” to take, with no need for spiritual growth. “Luterlased on mõnus kirik, sest nad jätavad sind vähemalt rahul”.

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21 [https://hw.saffre-rumma.net/blog/2022/0225\\_1440/](https://hw.saffre-rumma.net/blog/2022/0225_1440/)

22 Benson Saler. Supernatural as a Western Category. 1977. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/640071>

23 Daniel Vaarik, Asutaja piinad. Tõe asemel koostöö. <https://www.levila.ee/tekstid/asutaja-piinad/asutaja-piinad-toe-aseemel-koostoo> : “Tõeasutused olid ropult veendunud, et neil on alati õigus. Nad polnud nõus vigu tunnistama, sest vea tunnistamine tähendaks ju, et nad pole enam TÕEasutused. Nad olid üsna aeglasel ja kinnised. Ikka samal põhjusel, et nad kartsid vigu teha või siis neid välja näidata. Sestap rääkisid nad ka keerulises Tõe Keeles. Hoolimata nende kramplikest pingutustest saadi neist asutustest aga pidevalt valesti aru! (...)“

24 Kirjutamisest ja õpetamisest. Intervjuu Toomas Jürgesteiniga. <https://kjt.ee/2022/01/kirjutamisest-ja-opetamisest-intervjuu-toomas-jurgensteiniga>

25 Papst em. Benedikt: „Lehre muss sich in und aus Glauben entwickeln“, <https://www.vaticannews.va/de/vatikan/news/2021-07/emeritiert-papst-benedikt-lehre-entwickelt-glaube-entweltlichung.html>

(65) The Church in Estonia is often seen as the major preserver of ancient buildings and cultural heritage.

## Christians are divided

(66) Christian communities in Estonia interpret the Gospel in different ways, their positions sometimes exclude each other dramatically and there is no way to embrace them both. “No one can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13). This division can be observed in every denomination. “They will be divided, father against son and son against father (...)” ([Luke 12:53](#)).

(67) Such situations might be a sign that the Church is about to learn something important. “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!” (Luke 12,49)

(68) The following table gives some examples. All statements in this table can be deduced from the Bible. Despite this they can cause fundamental division among Christians when it comes to which of them has priority in a given situation.

God is just and punishes a sinful life.	God is merciful and forgives our mistakes.
We are well-organized and obedient	We are creative and co-responsible
We speak carefully and with reverence.	We speak openly and without fear.
We make no compromises.	We are reconciling, embracing, inclusive.
We are strong because we hope in God.	We hope in God despite our weakness.
Our teachings are founded and true.	Our teachings are inspired and open-minded.
The Gospel is self-explaining	Our job is to explain the Gospel
God protects us from evil.	God protects the poor and weak from the rich and strong.
Love is laying down your life for the sake of someone else, seeking the absolute best for someone, no matter the personal cost. ( <a href="#">1 John 3:16</a> )	Love is patient and kind, it bears, believes and hopes all things. Love is not arrogant, rude, irritable or resentful. ( <a href="#">1 Corinthians 13</a> )
Only the baptized can be saved. „Extra ecclesiam nulla salus“	There are unbaptized people who follow the <i>Gospel</i> and do the will of God ( <a href="#">Matthew 7:21</a> )
„He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets“ ( <a href="#">Isaiah 42:2</a> ). Live hidden to live happily („vivons cachés pour vivre heureux“).	„You are the light of the world“ (Matthew 5:14), “if these were silent, the very stones would cry out” ( <a href="#">Luke 19:40</a> )
The Gospel calls us to follow the Church.	The Gospel makes us free to love our neighbour.
The Bible explains itself better than any tradition or dogma	The Bible isn't perfect and it says so itself <sup>26</sup>

## Unclear vocabulary promotes disorder

(69) Living and operating together as humans needs communication. Communication needs a human language. **Human language** is based on **vocabulary**. A **vocabulary** is a set of definitions. A **definition** is a name that has been assigned to a **concept** (it gives a **meaning** to a name). God does not assign names to concepts, he leaves that job to us ([Genesis 2:19](#)). Vocabulary definitions are human, not divine.

(70) A good definition provides a clear, concrete, complete, correct, coherent and concise<sup>27</sup> **description** of its meaning. It must be concise because all participants of a dialogue need to

<sup>26</sup> Zack Hunt, The Bible Isn't Perfect And It Says So Itself. 2013-05-31 blog post

<https://www.redletterchristians.org/the-bible-isnt-perfect-and-it-says-so-itself-innerancy/>

<sup>27</sup> 7C of communication see e.g. <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/seven-cs-of-effective-communication.htm>

be able to remember it. Speaking with unclear, vague, uncomplete, incorrect, incoherent or unconcise definitions can promote disorder. Some religious language remains “paradoxical” because the mysteries of the faith are beyond standard vocabulary designed for the visible world. The reality described is better experienced.

(71) (72) deleted

## Section 3 : Suggestions

*What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our ‘journeying together?’*

(73) deleted

### Step 1 : Introduce “master teachings”

(74) We recommend to develop a consistent documentation library that explains the teachings of the Church for our time using *plain language*. These master teachings will be maintained using principles inspired by [agile development](#) and receive frequent updates. They are used as directives to the concrete church institutions who will align their teachings with those of the master teachings in due time and as fast as possible.

### Step 2 : Introduce version control

(75) All teachings of the Church are authoritative **public content**<sup>28</sup> that should be available for everybody to use. “For everybody” implies that it must be available without a [license](#) fee. “To use” includes the right to share it with anybody you want, including mass distribution.

(76) All teachings of the Church evolve constantly. Even the different versions and translations of the Bible evolve. Also [dogms](#) are contextual, i.e. were written as an answer to a given historic situation. They can require [deprecation](#) or even [backward incompatible changes](#) when the historical context changes.

(77) Any teaching can turn out to be wrong, misleading or harmful. “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.” (Luke 17:2)

(78) Failing to maintain our teachings **promotes disorder**.

(79) The Church should learn to maintain her teachings using technologies developed by the [free and open-source software](#) community. [Version control](#) helps to discuss about every single word of a teaching when needed and to trace every change. [Quality management](#) helps to ensure that our teachings are consistent. [Creative Commons](#) have developed licenses that express synodality in a legally binding language.

### Step 3 : Introduce reliable technology for dialogue

(80) Many authors, ranging from independent bloggers to renowned communities, contribute to the teachings of the Church when they write about the Gospel on their websites. It is their human right to express their opinions. Also, nothing that has been published can be made undone. This is why no organization should have the power to control what is being said.

(81) Rather than controlling published content of individual contributors, the Church should develop a system to reliably manage comments about teachings so that every reader can see “What does the Church say about this particular teaching?”

(82) The fruits of a teaching, by which it is to be judged, are the *convictions* it cultivates and the deeds motivated by these convictions.

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<sup>28</sup>Public content means any published text, sound or image that is made public.

(83) To end users this system could be a browser plugin that tells them for every page they are viewing information of style “This content is approved by X and contested by Y”. End users could also have an option to explicitly request a review for a given teaching for which the Church has not yet published any comment.

## Step 4 : Declare the Gospel as our axiom

(84) The Church is sometimes still reluctant to recognize that the Gospel itself remains an axiom, a mystery of faith, which we cannot and do not want to prove.

(85) The presynodal Church has seen herself as a guardian of the Gospel and felt responsible for protecting it. The Gospel needs no guardian. We don't own the Gospel, the Gospel owns us.

(86) Sensus fidelium on kõigi usklike ühine usutunnistus. Ma tajume seda kõik üheskoos. Mitte ainult paavst. Paavst ainult väljendab seda.

(87) The Bible does not express **positions**, it inspires them. Positions are texts formulated in human language at a given time. They are always those of the community that publishes them. The first commandment is to love God and to not venerate any other idol. Saying that God is the Lord and that His name is hallowed means that no human position, no interpretation of the Bible, no teaching, can claim to be absolutely true or to have authority over others.

## Step 5 : Clean up presynodal language

(88) A *presynodal* teaching is one that bears a danger of getting misunderstood because language usage has evolved since it was formulated. „Eelsinodaalne keel“ tähendab ajaloolisi väljendeid, mida tuleks ümber sõnastada, sest nii inimeste keeletaju kui ka Kiriku arusaam Evangeeliumist muutuvad aja jooksul.

(89) Statements like the following can leave a presynodal impression of the Church:

- “The valid interpretation of the Gospel is the one Jesus taught his disciples and which those passed on to us, and which the church has taught throughout the centuries without change. This is the right interpretation, any different interpretation is wrong or distorted.”<sup>29</sup>
- “EKN peab (...) kõrgeimaks autoriteettekstiks Piiblis väljendatud seisukohti” või “Piibli järgi ...”<sup>30</sup>
- “Piibel määratleb (...) seega siin kaksipidi mõtlemist ei saa olla” [private dialogue]
- The doctrine of [Papal infallibility](#)

(90) There are presynodal summaries of the Gospel, not only in Estonia. “It should not surprise us that young people en masse are turning their backs on religion (...) when “the gospel”, God's supposed Great News for all of humanity, is reduced to this: An unnatural king who occasionally engages in unnatural acts sends his unnatural son to Earth in an unnatural way. He's born an unnatural birth, lives an unnatural life, performs unnatural deeds, and is killed and unnaturally rises from the dead in order to redeem humanity from an unnatural curse brought about by an unnaturally talking snake. After 40 days of unnatural appearances he unnaturally zooms off to heaven to return to his unnatural father, sit on an unnatural throne, and unnaturally judge the living and the dead. If you profess to believe in all this unnatural activity, you and your fellow believers get to spend an unnaturally long time in an unnaturally boring paradise while everyone else suffers an unnatural, torturous hell forever.”<sup>31</sup>

(91) Neoatheist [Richard Dawkins](#), in his letter to his daughter Juliet<sup>32</sup>, names observation and scientific evidence as the “good” reasons to “believe” something, while tradition, authority and revelation are “bad” reasons. He reacts to a presynodal image of the Church. The same

29 [Arne Hiob](#) on Facebook group “Kiriku sõbrad”, 10 October 2019

30 EKN, Seisukoht homoseksuaalsuse küsimuses, 16.10.2008. <http://ekn.ee/inc.lakitus.php?id=308>

31 [Michael Dowd](#), Thank God for Evolution. <https://www.thankgodforevolution.com/node/2010>

32 Richard Dawkins, A Devil's Chaplain. 2003.

does **Sam Harris** when he says “Tell a devout Christian that his wife is cheating on him, or that frozen yogurt can make a man invisible, and he is likely to require as much evidence as anyone else, and to be persuaded only to the extent that you give it. Tell him that the book he keeps by his bed was written by an invisible deity who will punish him with fire for eternity if he fails to accept its every incredible claim about the universe, and he seems to require no evidence whatsoever.”<sup>33</sup>

(92) While convictions are in our hearts and we cannot change them deliberately, teachings and traditions can change. In order to become synodal, the Church will have to identify presynodal teachings, traditions and rules and to formulate appropriate updates for them in plain language.

(93) We suggest to create an interconfessional institute that acts as a [language regulator](#): it publishes and maintains a *vocabulary* with concise definitions that suggest a [least common denominator](#) and references to Scriptures and other *teachings* of the Church.

## **Step 6 : Collaborate with language regulators**

(94) The Church should increase contributions to the work of language regulators.

(95) The [Institute of the Estonian Language](#) (EKI for *Eesti Keele Instituut*) is the **language authority** that regulates and maintains the vocabulary for the Estonian language.

(96) The [Wikimedia Foundation](#) is “the nonprofit that hosts Wikipedia and our other free knowledge projects”. It wants “to make it easier for everyone to share what they know” and invites us to imagine “a world in which every single human being can freely share in the sum of all knowledge”.

## **Step 7 : Assume our political role**

(97) Rather than trying to explain how to define “marriage”, that a *de facto* union is not a “family” why celibate life is better than living in a same-sex couple<sup>34</sup>, let us focus on the real problems that put into danger the survival of humanity.

(98) The mission of the Church is also to provide orientation to those who govern the visible world. [Fratelli Tutti](#) started to point out that the big issues of humanity have to do with money and industry. Private corporations can make profit by cultivating things that are harmful to the consumer or to the Earth.

- News industry benefits when people get excited and speak hatefully or tell lies.
- Medical industry benefits when sexual or cosmetic fantasies cause harmful wishes.
- Entertainment, technology and food industry benefits when people get addicted.

(99) God wants us to exercise responsible dominion in the world. Money and the “invisible hand” cannot do this job for us because they are just tools and infrastructures, which can be used for good or for evil purposes.

(100) We start to understand that those law systems that allow corporations to make profit in this way are sinful. We have a common guilt because our civilization created these laws.

(101) The Church should increase collaboration with regulators of the visible world to identify and condemn harmful law systems as collective sins, from which we must repent.

(102) In some cases we must repent urgently because these collective sins cause harm to the Earth as our common home or suffering to large groups of humans. Repenting from these sins will be difficult because they have deep roots and because much wealth depends on them.

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<sup>33</sup> Eric Lyons. 3 Things We Can Learn From Atheists <https://apologeticspress.org/3-things-we-can-learn-from-atheists-5967/>

<sup>34</sup> As seen in *Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church*, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html)

(103) We suggest that the Church develops her important role as a competent and trustworthy service provider who offers consultation and advice to those who rule the *visible world*.

## Conclusion

### What is a synodal Church?

(104) A synodal Church knows where it has come from and treasures the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament as a library created by individuals and faithful communities. The revelation given to Moses and the prophets is to be taken as it has been passed on to us.

(105) A synodal Church also cherishes all the teachings that have been evolved since then to unite those unavoidable differences of emphasis and the paradoxes that occur when human beings try to express their faith in God in words that are designed to be provable by science, logic and the best of human intelligence.

(106) A synodal Church knows where it is going to and prays that the kingdom of God will come, and God's will may be done. Just as Christian people may differ in the way that they remember where they are coming from, so too they may differ in how they envision the living out of the commandment of Jesus to love their neighbour and even their enemy as themselves. However they know that if God's reign on earth is to align with God's reign in heaven, they must look towards God, and fix their prayerful attention on his love, so that the divine love will cast out their fear and unforgiveness and patiently sanctify them.

(107) A synodal Church knows that when it is feeling defeated, disempowered and under threat, it will find transforming power in the victorious death of Jesus Christ, who is the human face of God, and also in the prophecy of Isaiah that anticipated and explains his self-sacrifice.

(108) A synodal Church knows that everything is a gift from God, and so, when it is inward-looking and backward-looking and talking only to itself, it will not behave as if it knows all the answers for all time. The synodal Church will be joined on its journey, by a stranger, whom, at first, it will not recognise. Jesus himself had taught that whoever feeds the hungry, refreshes the thirsty, visits the sick or the prisoner, will have met Jesus himself as he gives the gift of his risen presence to them. It is not that the stranger we meet on the journey just might turn out to be Jesus risen: he always is. In such a way, does the ordinary follower of Jesus meet him risen and glorified.

(109) A synodal Church will discover that forgiveness is not just a grace that Jesus asks us to give to one another, but also his gift of grace to us, as he walks beside us, even when we are walking in the wrong direction. Far from valuing the infallibility of the Church, he comes along beside us and loves us in our fallibility and refuses to be defeated by our mistakes. He shows the power of his risen life by coming especially to those who had betrayed and deserted him, and pardoning them, and he continues to do so.

(110) A synodal Church is a Church that is on the move and is accompanied by the risen Christ made known in a beloved stranger (Luke 24:13-35). A synodal Church will discover Jesus speaking through each stranger, warming their hearts, needing their attention, their care and their hospitality and such a Church will invite such a beloved stranger into their homes and lives, and call on him for prayer and blessing, as if himself is the host.

(111) A synodal Church will then find that, at the very moment when he breaks bread, and opens eyes, the risen Jesus is no longer seen, but his disappearing causes no troubling of the Church's heart. It is as if Jesus is calling the Church to behave as Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it, as a Church that has 'come of age'. As long as the Church recognises Jesus risen in the stranger, Jesus will be present in the Church.

(112) A synodal Church wishes that every human should believe in the gospel by its own free volition and refuse any form of power or violence to enforce this wish.

(113) In conclusion, a synodal Church is one that walks in the faithful expectation that the risen Christ will honour his promise to walk alongside, listen, break open the scriptures and break bread; namely the stranger who becomes the sacred host. To use the illustration of the mother who puts on her coat inside-out, a synodal Church will show her faithfulness, by displaying her vulnerability to the outsider, if she dares to.

# Appendices

## (A-1) Mistakes are good

(First reactions: “See on igav. Igaüks teab seda.”)

(114) We suggest that the Church reviews her teachings to clearly explain the difference between a **mistake** (a harmful deed or habit) and **sin** (the attitude of refusing God’s mercy).

(115) When you discover that you made a mistake, your normal first reaction is to feel ashamed. You try to *not* tell it to anybody. You try to repair it before anybody gets to know about it. You try to hide your mistake. And if you can’t hide it, you explain to yourself and to others that it actually isn’t a mistake. Such reactions shows that we believe that mistakes are *bad*.

(116) But there is another possible type of reaction. You can say: “Oh, a mistake! How did that happen? What can I learn from it? How can I avoid it next time?”. This type of reaction shows that you believe that mistakes are *good*.

(117) Of course we are not saying that mistakes are “pleasant”. But unpleasant things can be good, and pleasant things can be bad. There are mistakes that we cannot make undone, but we can learn from them.

(118) The problem with considering mistakes as something bad is that it “deactivates” their contribution to the process of life: they are a fundamental part of our learning process. We need them to grow, to become better.

(119) Nature shows us that mistakes are important. Evolution is based on the fact that mistakes can happen when DNA molecules replicate, leading to [mutations](#) in the genome of individual organisms. Without mistakes there would be no evolution.

(120) Considering mistakes as something good helps you to be honest with yourself and to grow. It’s easier to say “Indeed, I made a mistake!” when you know that mistakes are not a shame, when we don’t fear them. Social contacts are easier with people who discovered that mistakes are actually a good thing. “Shaming yourself is not constructive. Shame is toxic. It’s not how God thinks of you, and it’s not how God wants you to think of yourself.” says relationship counselor Alison Cook and gives helpful strategies to “fight” your shame [Cook202007]. She chose the words “to fight it”, but I guess she actually meant “to welcome and embrace it”.

(121) Considering mistakes as something good is a basic message of the **deliberate practice** concept which invites to “a life-long period of deliberate effort to improve performance in a specific domain” [Ericsson1993].

(122) Every mistake opens a new door. “Fear of making a mistake (...) undoubtedly causes upheaval and stress. But as surely as a door closes, another one opens. The objective is not to stay mired in the loss, but to look for the new door that is opening. They are always there if we learn to look for them.” [Schwartz2010]

(123) Considering mistakes as something good is a basic element of the Gospel. As Christians we practice the art of confessing our mistakes because it is a requirement for learning. We dare to confess them because we believe that God forgives them.

## (A-2) Individual versus common knowledge

(124) You cannot announce something without **knowing** it. But what is knowledge? What makes us say „I believe this and this?“

(125) **Individual knowledge** 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. It tells you in every concrete situation, spontaneously and without further reflection, whether a given choice is “good” or

“bad”. It says this with a varying degree of conviction, ranging from “vague feeling” to “doubtless belief”. This choice happens unconsciously and independently of how skilful you are for explaining it to others using words.

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

(127) 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? How to explain the unexplainable?

(128) 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.

(129) 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.

(130) Teachings evolve constantly. Teachings are neither eternal nor immutable. The Gospel is eternal, the Scriptures are immutable, but living teachings aren’t. The teachings of the Church need constant maintenance because they are our interpretation of the Gospel for now and here.

### **(A-3) Frequently asked questions**

(131) This section lists some frequently asked questions about the Church and the Gospel, and tries to answer them in an language that an average Estonian is able to understand. Our answers don’t claim to be „academic“, they are something we might answer for example to another guest on a wedding who says „Oh, you are a Christian! I always wanted to ask the following from a real Christian“. The problem with the answers in this section is that not all Christians agree upon them.

#### **Tell me the Gospel in 60 seconds**

(132) Christians among themselves do not agree upon how to answer this question. We tried to formulate two quite different summaries.

God is holy. That means: he’s perfect. And sin cannot live with Him. On the other hand, Man is sinful. I’ve lied and you’ve lied. I’ve stolen and you’ve stolen. I had fits of rage and you had fits of rage. The problem : If God is holy, and sin cannot live with him, but man is sinful, then we cannot live with him. We are cut off from God. Not only in this life, but when we die, we remain cut off from God for eternity in a place called hell. The solution: But this is not what God wants for us. So he sent His son Jesus Christ to die on the cross for our sin. While Jesus was hanging on the cross, God put all our sin on him, so that when Jesus died, all our sins were paid for.

See on rõõmusõnum. Headus võidab, kurjus kaotab. Jumal armastab inimkonda. Ja "armastab" tähendab, et ta soovib head. Jeesuse kaudu ta näitas, et heateod on õiged. Ja vägivald ja vihkamine ei ole õige. Kui sa tõesti seda usud, siis oledki juba taevas (jumalriigis). Muidugi me näeme et kahjuks meil ei õnnestu olla head kogu aeg. Kristlased julgavad eksimustest rääkida, sest me usume et need on meile andeks antud (Jumala poolt, mitte tigimata enda või teiste inimeste poolt).

And God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day. The response: If we admit that we are sinners, and believe that Jesus paid for our sin on the cross, then we will be saved.	
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## Do we need to repent from our mistakes?

(133) For Christians there is only one unforgivable **sin**, which is an attitude that refuses God's love. This is what we need to repent from. Jesus once calls it the "sin against the Spirit", The pharisee in the temple, the foolish virgins ([Matthew 25:1-13](#)), the merciless creditor ([Matthew 18:23-35](#)) and many others committed this sin and were excluded from the feast.

(134) But note that common language uses the word "sin" also for all kinds of mistakes, weaknesses, vices and trespasses against human laws and conventions. Christians dare to speak about these because we believe that God forgives them, even before you realized them yourself. These mistakes cause harm in the *visible world*, but they cannot separate you from God's love (cfr Luke 15:11-32 and many other stories).

(135) We get too easily into sins, especially other people's sins, while turning a blind eye to the collective sin of our particular culture, nation or church. Sin is more fundamental than sins, both in the harm that we cause collectively, but also in the way that Sin, as St Paul taught, underlines our dependence on divine grace for that reason is what the [Exultet](#) calls a 'happy fault'.

## (A-4) Local project ideas

(136) The "Thanks for your help" project: the Church might actively watch public life in Estonia and send "Thank you" messages ("benedictions") to organizations that are not explicitly Christian. Example: [Ühispalvus looduskaitsjatega Mustamäe kirikus](#).

(137) A commission to help institutions in Estonia to find more synodal language? A liturgical group responsible for the maintenance of liturgical texts and songs used by congregations in Estonia?

(138) Estonia has a practical and realistic regulation regarding abortion. But it is based on the assumption that a child becomes a human only when its heart starts to beat. Let us initiate an MTÜ or sihtasutus "pro care" that offers an alternative to abortion: you sign a contract that you renounce your parental right so that the child in your womb is available for adoption. And then you receive a "pregnancy salary" if you carry the child to term. The foundation takes your responsibility to care for the child. They care for it by finding a couple who adopts it. Yes, your friends and colleagues will see that you had an "accident". But so what? Let them know that you refused to kill that accidental child. This would shift the focus in our work against child **abandonment and abortion**. Traditional church approaches 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. Let us move some of the responsibility from the individual to the community. Instead of saying „pro life“ or „pro choice“, we say „pro care“. Questions like "Who is guilty?", "Who pays the bill?" or "How to avoid unwanted pregnancies?" are questions of the visible world and to be regulated by each nation, while the Church asks "How to save both the child and its parents?"

(139) Contact [Maavalla Koda](#) and write a joint statement inspired by [20190204] or [20220205] ?

(140) The Church should use some form of [peer review](#) to maintain quality standards, improve performance and provide credibility.

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## (A-6) Real-life stories

(141) Luc Saffre as the reporter of this document shares on his private website more detailed real-life stories he heard during the consultation phase. These can be valuable for the interested reader, but are not part of our common statement.

[MK20220226]

## (A-7) Independant content publishers

(142) The Church should provide a quality control system. Not every Christian content publisher produces “good” teachings.

(143) The Internet provides neutral tools for communication. But we also need a reliable way to communicate the opinion of the Church about any given document.

A list of content publishers that people in Estonia consult about the Gospel and the Church. The selection is not representative.

(144) [Catholic Answers](#) (founded in 1979 by [Karl Keating](#)) purports to be “the world’s largest database of answers about the beliefs and practices of the Catholic faith” it “is a media ministry that answers questions about what the Church really teaches”, it helps to “learn more about Catholicism through articles, books, videos and more” and claims to be “the largest organization of our kind.”

(145) The [Catholic University of America](#) is a [private research university](#) in [Washington, D.C.](#), a [pontifical university](#) of the [Catholic Church](#) in the United States and the only institution of higher education founded by [U.S. Catholic bishops](#).

(146) The [Wijngaards Institute](#) (founded in 1983 by laicized priest and theologian Dr [John Wijngaards](#)) is “one of the leading independent think tanks promoting gender equality, evidence-based sexual ethics, democratic governance and accountability in the Catholic Church.”

(147) [Stiftung Weltethos](#) (founded in 1990 by Swiss Catholic priest and theologian [Hans Küng](#)) Foundation for a Global Ethic. The [Parliament of the World's Religions](#) is

(148) [Eugen Drewermann](#) is a German church critic, theologian, peace activist and former Catholic priest.

(149) The [We Are Church](#) movement “advocates changing the teachings and the structures of responsibility and authority of the Catholic Church. It originated in German-speaking Austria, Germany and South Tyrol in 1995 under the title *Wir sind Kirche* and was organized as an international association in 1996.”

(150) The Journal “[Christian Psychology Around the World](#)” is published since 2011 as an online bilingual Journal. The authors of articles and comments are psychologists, psychotherapists and scientists from different countries of the world. It is published by the European Movement for Christian Anthropology, Psychology and Psychotherapy (EMCAPP) in cooperation with the IGNIS-Akademie für Christliche Psychologie.

(151) [Patheos.com](#) engages “in the global dialogue about religion and spirituality” and helps to “explore and experience the world’s beliefs”. It is for “people looking for credible and balanced information about religion” and “brings together faith communities, academics, and the broader public” to offer “insight, inspiration, and stimulating discussion”.

## **(A-8) Publishers that don’t call themselves „religious“**

(152) [PsychologyToday.com](#) is “the world’s largest portal to psychotherapy; it includes free access to hundreds of thousands of professionals. While Psychology Today has expanded its mission and reach across decades and continents, we never cease to delight in satisfying humans’ innate curiosity about our favorite subject: Ourselves.”

## **(A-9) Clarify the concept of apostolic governance**

(153) The Church has always been **apostolic** and can be proud of this *modus vivendi et operandi*, which deserves better documentation and integration into modern law systems. Apostolic governance unites democracy and monarchy and as such can be an answer to issues of these government forms. It might be useful also for organizations that aren’t religious.

(154) The basic idea behind **apostolic governance** is that a single individual person (not a group) gets *appointed* to do a given job. Any appointed person can herself appoint other persons to help her with that job, becoming their **apostolic leader**. The Pope is the top-level leader and gets appointed by the special procedure of papal succession.

(155) Some communities are based on a material object. For example the owners of a building or the government of a geographic area. Most communities are just based on an idea that is expressed by a constitutional text. These include associations, private corporations, foundations. Families are a special case of *informal* communities.

(156) Human beings respond to ‘personal’ leadership in a different way than we do to ‘committee rule’. This is one of the reasons why ‘rule from Brussels’ triggered Brexit. God, as Christians know him is personal, a Trinity of relationship. The monarchic style of rule from the Vatican retains this personal motif, even though the tiara was given away and the *sedes gestatoria* is gathering dust in the crypt. Even powerful symbols like the pope washing the feet of refugees impact our imaginations precisely because of the power that the pope is symbolically laying aside at that moment.

(157) The **indelibility** of roles like **priesthood, husband, wife, baptized** Christian does not always align well with human experience, or with the freedom in which the Spirit calls and calls again. The Spirit may send the desert fathers into the wilderness or a pope to retire to Castel Gandolfo and to prayer.

(158) Should the Church develop and apply **public accounting**? Basic idea in [Public money, public agreements](#).

## (A-10) Examples of collective sins

(159) We tried to formulate some examples of the serious issues of the visible world, which we designate as “collective sins”.

(160) The first of these collective sins are laws that **grant 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. The western 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](#)). It is a flagrant trespass of the seventh commandment. 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.

(161) The second of these collective sins are laws that **prevent the poor from using published content**. By **published content** 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 and the (illegitimate) right to control its usage. It causes benefit to some strong actors, allowing them to exploit the poor. It causes harm to most people by limiting their liberty. It causes social disorder. It tempts knowledge owners to use malicious strategies in order to increase their power. It reminds the poor man who would have desired “what fell from the rich man’s table” but the rich man didn’t care and “the dogs came and licked his sores” (Lukas 16:19-31)

(162) The idea that published knowledge should be considered a common 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. In 2010 Lawrence Lessig extended the idea to all forms of published content. They failed to consider the Church as their ally, and the Church failed to realize their work as important.

## (A-11) More about biblicism

(163) The Church has indeed always been tempted by **biblicism**. This belief is partly inherited from the Jewish faith culture, which saw the Holy Scripture as the “Word of God” revealed to Moses and the prophets in human language, carved into stone and later into Scripture. Another reason for biblicism is that the Bible is indeed one of God’s main tools for communicating with us. When you discover how much these texts help you to get a healing glimpse in the Gospel, then you are tempted to conclude that the texts themselves are the miraculous source of your salvation.

(164) The Bible does not express positions. Positions arise in us when we read the Bible.

(165) Biblicism is a form of idolatry that adores the Bible instead of adoring God.<sup>35</sup>

## (A-12) Unclassified and removed thoughts

(166) A controversial dialogue turns into a battle when the participants are convinced that their opinion is true.

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<sup>35</sup>private dialogue “Piibliitsimi probleem on arusaam, et Piibel kui tekst kõneleb ilma kontekstita. Piibel on tekst. Väljendamises on vaja konteksti. Kontekst sõltub ajast.”

(167) No church institution has priority over her siblings. We must differentiate between "the (ideal) Church" and "our church".

(168) We need to confess our sins – but why?

(169) Different opinions among Christians are just language issues

(170) An organization of the visible world is defined by its constitution.

(171) Our hearts and *teachings* still contain much **presynodal** stuff.

(172) The leader of every *community* has two important questions to consider: „What do we want?“ and „How do we get it?“. Neglecting one of them can be fatal. For a religious community these two questions are formulated as „Where does God want us to go?“ and „How does he want us to get there?“

(173) Restore communion in both bread and wine.

(174) The Church owns the Bible, but not the Word of God. The Gospel is more than the Bible.

(175) A fundamental problem is that there are many institutions that claim to represent the Church, and that their positions in the *visible world* contradict with each other.

(176) Also define **trust** (fides), **hope** (spes), **love**; **friend**, **humility**, ...?

(177) Akadeemilised tekstid on nii igavad! Nad ei tule südamest. Need teoloogid ja vaimulikud, kes püüavad piiblist leida mingi Jumala arvamust! Kui see ei tule südamest, siis see on lihtsalt igav. [private20220303]

(178) The following words are often used in *teachings* of the Church, but they have controversial or unclear, unconcise or unconcrete definitions in renowned independent sources and even among Christians.

(179) It is currently unclear what a **recognized institution of the Church** means. The Catholic church has its clear meaning, but there are other organizations that are generally recognized as part of the church despite the fact that they are not part of the Catholic church but. This situation is a fundamental cause of disorder.

(180) The word “entertainment” translates to Estonian as “meelelahutus” (“mind separation”), which has an obvious antonym “meeleparandus” (“mind repair”). “Meele laiali laotamise asemel võiksime igal päeval võtta endale aega, mil meelt tõeliselt parandada, koondada kogu oma tähelepanu Jumalale, koguda kokku oma meel ühele ja ainsale rõõmu allikale ja nii saab meie meel uuesti terveks.”<sup>36</sup>

(181) „*tunnistagem oma patud, et meid arvataks väärilisteks seda püha ohvrit tooma*“ on ametlik sõnastus Eesti roomakatolikus kirikus. See on eelsinodaalne. See erineb sisuliselt Vatikani ametlikust tekstist (“*agnoscamus peccata nostra, ut apti simus ad sacra mysteria celebranda*”, mille tõlege oleks „*et me oleksime võimelised seda püha saladust pühitseda*“). Kas peab olema „vääriline“ või „võimeline“? Kas „ohvri toomine“ või „saladuse pühitsemine“? vt ka [Kurg2022-01] Üks klassikaline EELK tekst on sinodaalne: „*Väga õnnis on inimene, kelle üleastumiune on andesks antud ja kelle patt on kinni kaetud. Sellepärast tunnistagem issandale oma patud üles, südames nõnda üteldes.*“

(182) There are things a community cannot accept as their common value. And there are values a community cannot give up without losing her identity.

(183) Humans always have right to mercy, ideas never. [private 2022-02-08] („ideas“ includes positions, corporations and institutions). Even Adolf Hitler can expect God’s mercy.

(184) [Extra ecclesiam nulla salus](#) → "Sinu eeldus, et kõik inimesed peaksid lõpuks jõudma kirikusse, on tülikas." → Cultures that refuse the Gospel will vanish in the long run. Change „*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*“ into „*Without the Gospel there is no salvation*“

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<sup>36</sup> Misjonikoor 2022-02-26, „Piiblimehe kokkuvõtte piiblitunnist 2020 a lõpust.“

(185) Most Estonians know Bishop [Philippe Jourdan](#) from radio or television<sup>37</sup>. They also know that he is a member of [Opus Dei](#). The image about Opus Dei of most Estonians is based on the novel [The Da Vinci Code](#). (...) (tegin mõned telefonikõned ja mulle tundub, et “Opus Dei” ei ütle paljudele midagi)

(186) The teachings of the Church cover different activities:

- (a) How to **interpret** and **explain** the Gospel in our time (**theology, morality, catechism**)
- (b) How to **celebrate** the Gospel (**traditions, practices, rites and sacraments**)
- (c) How to **behave** as a community in the *visible world* (**rules and laws**)

(187) 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 teachings of the Church do not say “everything is okay”. There are things in this world that are not good. It would be a lie to call them good.

(188) The word *faith* is also being used as a shortcut for “a faith based on the Gospel”. Many opponents of the Church use this confusing meaning of the word, for example Sam Harris in his book “[The End of Faith](#)”.

(189) Using the word **faithful** to designate a Christian is confusing because everybody is “full of *faith*”.

(190) A **tradition** is a rite or sacrament that is defined and regulated by the Church. While faith is an *individual* characteristic of a human, **religion** is a collective set of teachings used by its members to cultivate their faith.

Questions of the invisible world: “How can we imagine God?” “What does God want me to do?”	Questions of the visible world: “How old is the Earth?” “Is democracy better than monarchy?” “Should we enforce vaccination for every citizen?”
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But there are questions that lie “somewhere between” science and religion: “How can I be sustainably happy?”, “Do women and men have equal rights?”

loving God and your neighbour is more important than obeying the Scriptures. “The Sabbath is there for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Already the Old Testament announces that God will pour out his spirit into our hearts, change our “hearts of stone” into “hearts of flesh”.

(191) The Word of God became “flesh”, not “book” ([John 1:14](#)). The central authority of Christian religion is a person, not a book. And this person died on the cross before a single word of his message was written down. It took a few generations for the Church to understand that they need to somehow write down this message.

, but „the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head“ (Luke 9:58)

Some scholars differentiate between (immutable) “teachings” and (mutable) “behaviour”, but the broad public does not make this difference.

The Synodal Church won’t be “a kingdom of the visible world”. She won’t have executive power to force church institutions to align with her. Instead of enforcing new teachings, she will emit *master teachings*. The church institutions will observe and discuss every master teaching until they consent on it. Finding a consensus is not always urgent and not always immediately possible.

This vision suggests a small but fundamental change in the *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church.

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37 For example <https://www.err.ee/1608446972/katoliiklaste-jouluoo-missa-toimus-erandkorras-kaarli-kirikus>

The Church must create a new legal person that stands at a “higher” level, more spiritual and closer to the Christ, less burdened with earthen worries. The big question then is: what hinders the Catholic church from becoming a member of the [World Council of Churches](#).

(192) While the word “synod” has been widely used since ancient times to designate an ecclesiastical council, the adjective “synodal” (together with its derived noun “synodality”) is a [neologism](#). It has the same parents as „synod“ (both words come from Greek *συν* together and *ὁδός* way, journey), but saying „The Church is synodal“ does obviously not mean that the Church functions only in synods. This neologism emerged during the pontificate of Pope Francis. He spoke about it during a speech on [20151017]. It was later described in [ITC201803] as “the decision to journey together” that was „at the heart of the work of renewal the Council Vatican II was encouraging“, as the specific organization model („*modus vivendi et operandi*“) of the Church, as “a prophetic sign for the human family, which needs a shared project capable of pursuing the good of all”.

(193) Or to put it shortly: nobody knows what “synodality” exactly means.

(194) It reminds for example 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](#).

(195) The Christian denominations, when talking to each other, consider their own *teachings* as the true ones and differing *teachings* of other denomination as [heresy](#).

(196) Different **contexts** can have different *vocabulary*. For example the word „heart“ has a different definition when surgeons speak about their work than when lovers speak about their emotions. Humans are able to switch contexts: a surgeon is able to understand a text message „My heart is worried“ from her husband or his wife even when it arrives while he or she is working with colleagues.

(197) When we speak about the Gospel, our *context* is [catholic](#) (in its original meaning of „comprehensive and universal“) because the Church addresses all humans, independently of any human-made classification (race, culture, education level, gender, ...)

(198) The vision helped us to imagine the “ideal” Church without getting limited by the question “But how can we get there?” (which is of course important, but only at second place).

(199) Should apostolic leaders of a community of a certain size not be married and not own private property in order to avoid conflicts of interests? Celibate bishops have sometimes practised nepotism with relatives despite not being married themselves.