



Are We Protagonists Yet?

Examining the place of women in the synod's working document

Susan Bigelow Reynolds

DECEMBER 2022

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Reynolds finds that the Church tends to view women as “exactly the same...with an articulable essence, singular vocation, and narrow set of essentialized gifts.” Do you agree with Reynolds’s opinion? Where or how have you observed this?

2. The report from the Holy Land remarks that “women...seem to have realized not only that they had more to gain, but also more to offer by being relegated to a prophetic edge, from which they observe what happens in the life of the Church.” What does it mean that women occupy a role at a “prophetic edge”? How does this differ from male participation in the Church, if at all?

3. Reynolds uses the language of “protagonists” throughout the article. Who are the protagonists in the Church? Why? How is this changing, or how does it still need to change? Who would you like to see as a protagonist?

4. Should there be differences in sacramental functions between men and women in the Church? Why or why not? What should “full and equal participation of women” in the Church look like?

5. Has the Church done enough since Vatican II to “come to terms with how thoroughly its notions of sanctity and divinity had been conditioned by the normative status of European culture, aesthetics, language, music, art, and bodies”? How might this preference for European culture continue to linger today?

6. The document claims, “The call for a conversion of the Church’s culture...is linked in concrete terms to the possibility of establishing a new culture, with new practices and structures.” What would a new Church culture look like? What “new practices and structures” would you want to see? Finally, do you believe that the synodal process can accomplish this?

7. Have you had the opportunity to participate in local synodal processes, whether during the local stage or now? What helped or hindered your participation? How might such conversations be introduced to your community? Do you see yourself as a protagonist in the synodal process?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING & LISTENING:

Working Document for the Continental Stage:

<https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/dcs/Documento-Tappa-Continentale-EN.pdf>

Lisa Fullam, “What It Means to ‘Represent,’” August 2022: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/what-it-means-represent>

“Synodality: Catholicism’s Past, Present, and Future,” November 2022: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHHwSOQuV8E>

Claudia Avila Cosnahan, “Authority, Participation, and Women,” April 2022: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/authority-participation-and-women>

Rita Ferrone, “A Wonderful Complexity,” April 2022: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/wonderful-complexity>

Commonweal on Women in the Church: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/women-church>

Synodality & the Laity, Conversation Starter Series 2022-2023: <https://pages.commonwealmagazine.org/css>