



**Letter by Bishop Dr Georg Bätzing**  
**in response to the letter by Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila**  
**(Denver, Colorado – USA)**  
**on the Synodal Path**

*We document the reply written by Bishop Dr Georg Bätzing, President of the German Bishops' Conference, on 14 April 2022, to Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila (Denver, Colorado – USA) and the other co-signers:*

Your Excellency,

Thank you for your letter of 11 April 2022, in which you forward to me an Open Letter from a number of bishops who have come together for this purpose. I am pleased that you all are aware of the Synodal Path of the Catholic Church in Germany and take it seriously. Above all, I am grateful to you all for assuring me of your accompanying prayers for the Church in Germany.

The Synodal Path is our attempt in Germany to confront the systemic causes of abuse and its cover-up, which has caused untold suffering to so many people in the Church and through the Church. At the same time, this has obscured the witness of the Church. The Synodal Path is therefore also our approach to making a credible proclamation of the Gospel possible again. These reasons and the respective context are particularly important to us, but unfortunately, they are not mentioned in your letter at all. However, I would be completely surprised if you and the signatories of the Open Letter would not see the necessity to confront the question of abuse as Church and to draw the obvious conclusions also for the Church and its structures.

In this context we unfortunately have also to talk frankly about power and abuse of power in the church. Euphemistic paraphrases such as you try to implement in your letter are not really helpful. Regrettably such abuse of power – even by episcopal authorities – is not only a fact of the past but also of the present and leads to massive injuries of faithful and members of religious orders both in their rights and in their personal integrity. The participation of faithful in decisions on all levels of ecclesiastical acting (this is what we mean when talking about

separation of powers) will not at all damage the authority of the hierarchical ministry, it will give it a renewed acceptance among the people of God, I am convinced of that.

I do not want to conceal the fact that the reproaches against the Catholics in Germany mentioned in the letter cause some astonishment. This is particularly true because allegations are made here for which one might expect explanations in view of their importance. Unfortunately, however, you do not give us any. However, insofar as your objections, concerns and admonitions are expressions of genuine concern, I can reassure you open-heartedly: These fears with regard to the Synodal Path of the Catholic Church in Germany are not justified.

Thus, the Synodal Path in no way undermines Church authority, including that of Pope Francis, as you write. Several times I was able to speak with the Holy Father about the Synodal Path. In his letter to the pilgrim people of God in Germany, he explicitly invited us to walk the path as a search "for a frank response to the present situation" and at the same time as a spiritual path requesting the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We take this to heart in great seriousness. No one may claim the Holy Spirit for himself or deny others the serious attempt to listen to Him. But our common search and struggle is constantly shaped by the fact that we make room for His formative work in Holy Mass and prayer, in times of silence and in listening to the Holy Scriptures. You can see this, for example, in the way we organise our Synodal Assemblies.

With regard to your various concerns, I would like to refer you to the orientation text "On the Path of Conversion and Renewal" ([www.synodalerweg.de](http://www.synodalerweg.de)) adopted by the Synodal Assembly and recommend it for your reading. For all the necessary freedom of thought on the common search for conversion and reorientation in the face of the shameful and disastrous abuse problem, there is no doubt for all those involved in the Synodal Path: "At the same time, however, this freedom also calls us to the joint responsibility of the faith that has been handed down to us".(Orientation text No 9) In this intention, the Synodal Path, as presented in detail in the orientation text, is oriented precisely not towards short-lived sociological theories or secular ideologies, but towards the central sources of knowledge of the faith: Scripture and tradition, the Magisterium and theology, as well as the faith sense of the faithful and the signs of the times interpreted in the light of the Gospel. This basic orientation determines the considerations of the Synodal Path in careful theological reflection. Therefore, it is not correct to say that there is a danger of schism emanating from the Catholic Church in Germany.

In all considerations and decisions of the Synodal Path, on the other hand, very careful differentiation is made as to which changes and reforms can be realised within the framework of the diocesan responsibility of the members of the German Bishops' Conference and which questions, concerns and reform wishes must be brought into the context of the universal Church, in particular into the synodal journey of the universal Church. It is therefore with great expectations that Catholics in Germany will participate in this synodal journey of the universal Church and bring up their experiences, but also their concerns and worries. The thought that this could harm the process and the idea of synodality is in no way comprehensible against the background of what has been said. On the contrary, I am sure that many bishops of the universal Church and many baptised and confirmed are also participating in the synodal journey initiated

by Pope Francis with questions and concerns similar to ours – be it with regard to the topics we focus on with regard to the systemic causes of abuse "Power and separation of powers in the Church - joint participation and involvement in the mission", "Priestly existence today", "Women in ministries and offices in the Church" and "Succeeding relationships - living love in sexuality and partnership" or beyond. I am strengthened in this conviction by the concrete witness of many faithful - also in the priestly and episcopal ministry - who, instead of writing letters intended for the public, seek a real exchange, which our Synodal Committee is always ready to provide.

The Synodal Path is in search of life-giving potential in the life and work of the Church today, to which Pope Francis himself calls the whole Church. This search sometimes requires concentrated work on texts and resolutions, embedded in discussions, publications and media formats. Those who undertake this effort are united by their faith in the Triune God and the hope that the Good News of His loving care for people will continue to reach them in the future. Their commitment is fed by the joy of the Gospel and aims at the joy of the Gospel of all people. This can be felt not only at the Synodal Assemblies or in the Synodal Forums, but in the many encounters experienced along the Synodal Path.

As we approach the holy days together, I assure you that the Catholics in Germany, listening to the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is also Lord over history, together with the Church throughout the earth, as God's pilgrim people, are looking to find their way also through this time - united in the hope of Easter that He is waiting for them at the end of time.

Kindly asking for your prayer I would like to wish you a blessed and happy Easter  
Yours sincerely

Bishop Dr Georg Bätzing