

ORTHODOXY, NOT HETERODOXY, WORKS

The Synod on Synodality begins in Rome on October 4. To that end, we thought it would be fruitful to examine the data on orthodoxy v. heterodoxy within the Catholic Church. For a longer version, click [here](#).

Mass Attendance Globally

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) has found that major discrepancies exist on Mass attendance in different nations. Nations that score high on orthodoxy do a better job than those that are less orthodox.

Nigeria

Despite terrorist attacks, the Catholic Church in Nigeria remains strong. While approximately 20 million people (roughly 13 percent of the population) are Catholic, church attendance among Catholics in Nigeria is 94 percent. This is the highest rate of Mass attendance in the world. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria is noted for its adherence to Catholic orthodoxy, and the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, a more traditional Catholic society, flourishes in the African nation, as well.

Germany

Though it enjoys a strong financial base—the Catholic Church in Germany is generously subsidized by the taxpayers—it has been in rapid decline. While CARA averages Mass attendance for German Catholics between 2017 to 2022 to be approximately 14 percent, local statistics indicate that in 2022 only 5.7 percent of Catholics were weekly in the pews.

In 2019, the Central Committee of German Catholics and the

German bishops' conference began a collaborative effort known as "The Synodal Way." This provided a forum for activists with more heterodox views to promote making substantive changes to Church teachings. Throughout the process the heterodox advocates dominated the proceedings and called for more and more significant departures from Catholic traditions.

Ultimately, when the process concluded in March of 2023, "The Synodal Way" overwhelmingly endorsed measures changing Catholic practices on transgender ideology, accepting the ordination of women to the sacramental diaconate, approving the blessing of same-sex relationships, normalizing lay preaching, and asking Rome to reexamine the discipline of priestly celibacy.

Brazil

Following Vatican II, Latin America became a hotbed for liberation theology. As its name would suggest, liberation theology is a Christian theological approach emphasizing the liberation of the oppressed and downtrodden.

In practice, though, liberation theology replaces Catholic orthodoxy with strong Marxist overtones. As Friar Clodovis Boff, brother of renowned liberation theologian and former Catholic priest Leonardo Boff, warns in his new book, *The Crisis in the Catholic Church and Liberation Theology*, that adherents to this heterodoxy fall "into utilitarianism or functionalism in relation to the Word of God and to theology in general." In other words, political and socio-economic concerns trump spiritual ones under a liberation theology interpretation.

After several decades of liberation theology, Catholic Brazilians now count for 51 percent of the total population. Further, less than one in ten (eight percent) of Brazil's Catholics attend Mass weekly. This is one of the lowest levels of Mass attendance in the world.

American Seminaries

As a general rule, the more orthodox an institution is the more seminarians it attracts. Conversely, the more heterodox an institution has become the fewer candidates for the priesthood will attend.

For instance, the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University and the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry are two prominent seminaries that are more heterodox in their nature. Respectively, in the 2022-2023 academic year, their enrollments were 34 and 32 seminarians. Out of all 39 seminaries in the country, these are the 29th and 30th highest attended.

However, more orthodox seminaries attract significantly more seminarians. Institutions such as Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Maryland, Notre Dame Seminary in Louisiana, St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Colorado, St. Vincent de Paul Seminary in Florida, and St. Meinrad School of Theology in Indiana are all orthodox and in the 2022-2023 academic year all had over 100 seminarians in attendance.

Sisters of Charity

Founded by St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in New York City, the Sisters of Charity were once a prominent order of nuns that worked to help the poor and promote the Catholic faith. However, over the last two centuries, the Sisters of Charity began to embrace heterodoxy.

Ultimately, this led to their numbers dwindling. According to the current congregation president Sister Donna Dodge, "in 21 years, no one entered and stayed." The median age of the sisters today is 83 years old, and there are 154 members left in the community. Demographic statistics indicate that they may have approximately 35 members left in the next 15 years. As a result, in April of 2023, the Sisters of Charity voted to stop accepting new members and embark on a "path to

completion" of their mission.

Several traditional orders of nuns have thrived while maintaining Catholic orthodoxy. For instance, the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist was founded in 1997. Yet in just over a quarter of a century, these more traditional sisters have grown to 150 members with an average age of 35 and the average age of women joining the order is 21. Similarly, the Franciscan Sisters of Renewal and the Sisters of Life, founded in 1988 and 1991, respectively, continue to grow and thrive attracting new, younger members while remaining steadfast in upholding the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church.