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Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, speaks to reporters at the Vatican in this file photo from Sept. 19, 2024. (CNS/Justin McLellan)



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The Vatican's doctrine chief warned that blogs and online commentators increasingly claim a theological authority they do not possess, narrowing the church's ability to holistically engage faith and reality.

Opening the plenary assembly of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith on Jan. 27, Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, dicastery prefect, said theologians risk "losing the breath of our perspective" when their work becomes narrowly focused on isolated topics.

"But the issue is even more serious since today, on any blog, anyone — even without having studied much theology — can express his or her opinion and condemn others as if speaking *ex cathedra*," or with infallibility, he said.

Fernández framed the problem as a failure to recognize the limits of human knowledge.

"The more science and technology advance, the more we must keep alive the awareness of our limits and our need for God, so as not to fall into a terrible deception," he said. "Indeed, the very same one that led to the excesses of the Inquisition, the world wars, the Shoah, and the massacres in Gaza: all of which rely on fallacious arguments for their justification."

Fernández, who has often been a target of Catholic blogs since his appointment as prefect in 2023, urged dicastery members to acknowledge those limits, invoke God's guidance in illuminating them and remain open to the perspectives of others.



Pope Leo XIV, with regional representatives of synod teams, listens to and answers questions from participants in the Jubilee of Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies in the Vatican audience hall Oct. 24, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

The cardinal cited Pope Leo XIV's October homily for the Jubilee of Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies, in which the pope called for "a church that does not close in on itself, but remains attentive to God so that it can similarly listen to everyone."

Several Catholic blogs have been sharply critical of synodality, the shift toward a more participatory and listening church championed by Pope Francis, often arguing that it risks drifting from Catholic doctrine and blurring distinctions between clergy and laity in church decision-making.

Fernández's call for the dicastery members to "reflect, think, and analyze reality, but while also listening to others" echoed the language of synodality promoted by the pope.

Leo, who promoted synodality as a diocesan bishop in Peru and later participated in the Synod of Bishops on synodality as a Vatican official, has continued his predecessor's focus on pushing for a more participatory church.

And that direction appears to have broad support among the world's cardinals.

At an extraordinary consistory convened by Leo in early January, the 170 participating cardinals selected synodality as one of the priorities to be developed during the first two years of his pontificate. They also chose to focus on the church's mission in light of Francis' apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, sidelining discussion of curial reform and the liturgy in a move criticized by traditionalist Catholic blogs.

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One cardinal who participated in the consistory told the National Catholic Reporter that the liturgy was widely not considered a priority in the discussions among cardinals, and that curial reform was seen as having been substantially addressed following Francis' 2022 apostolic constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*.

Asked at the end of the consistory how synodality safeguards against doctrinal drift, Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David of Kalookan, Philippines, said that "synodality has been there since the beginning of church history, we are just retrieving the vocabulary."

"The listening [in synodality] is not just listening to one another, but most of all to the Holy Spirit speaking through one another," he said at a press conference following the consistory. "That requires discernment, and the rules of discernment are still being refined in the process of experiencing synodality."

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