

Document of the Continental Stage (DCS)

Chapter Three Section 4

Before you to continue the ongoing work for the Synod please take time to read the first 2 chapters of the working document.

The accompanying Summary provided by the Cardiff Contact Team is for use in conjunction with the DCS to enable you to form a clearer understanding (should you need it) of the document. Many have criticised the working document for its length, language, and phraseology. The Summary hopefully will be of use to you in this regard.

Below you will find the relevant text of the DCS pertinent to section 4 of chapter 3 which you have chosen and the Summary. The 3 questions posed by the Continental Phase of the process are attached to the email you have received. These too have been kindly been reworded by the Cardiff Team and we use them with their blessing.

SYNODALITY TAKES SHAPE

71. The synodal journey has brought out a number of tensions, made explicit in the preceding paragraphs. We should not be afraid of them but articulate them in a process of constant communal discernment, so as to harness them as a source of energy without them becoming destructive: only in this way will it be possible to continue walking together, rather than each going their own way. This is why the Church also needs to give a synodal form and way of proceeding to its own institutions and structures, particularly with regard to governance. Canon law will need to accompany this process of structural renewal creating the necessary changes to the arrangements currently in place.

72. However, to function in a truly synodal way, structures will need to be inhabited by people who are well-formed, in terms of vision and skills: *“The entire synodal exercise was one of active participation at diverse levels. For this process to continue, a change of mindset and a renewal of existing structures are needed”* (EC India). This new vision will need to be supported by a spirituality that will sustain the practice of synodality, avoiding reducing this reality to technical organizational issues. Living this vision, as a common mission, can only happen through encounter with the Lord and listening to the Spirit. For there to be synodality, the presence of the Spirit is necessary, and there is no Spirit without prayer.

Structures and institutions

73. In terms of global-local tension- which in ecclesial language refers to the relationships of local Churches among themselves and with the universal Church - the dynamic of the synodal process places before us a novelty that is constituted precisely by the Continental Stage that we are currently living. Apart from a few regions characterized by a particular historical dynamic, so far the Church lacks established synodal practices at the continental level. The introduction of a specific Continental Stage in the process of the Synod does not constitute a mere organizational ploy but corresponds to the dynamics of

the incarnation of the Gospel which, taking root in areas characterised by a certain cultural cohesion and homogeneity, produces ecclesial communities with particular features, linked to the traits of each culture. In the context of a world that is both globalised and fragmented, each continent, because of its common historical roots, its tendency towards socio-cultural commonality and the fact that it presents the same challenges for the mission of evangelisation, constitutes a privileged sphere for stirring up a synodal dynamic that strengthens links between the Churches, encourages the sharing of experiences and the exchange of gifts, and helps to imagine new pastoral options.

74. Moreover, the dynamic of synodality challenges the Roman Curia itself: *“It is necessary to recall the collaboration with the other Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, with which we consult regularly [...]. It is felt, however, that in this area more means should be found to encourage the growth of a more synodal practice and spirit to be implemented in the Roman Curia, as desired by the Holy Father with the new Apostolic Constitution Praedicate Evangelium”* (Contribution of the Secretariat of State – Section for Relations with States and International Organisations).

75. Episcopal Conferences are also questioning what synodality means for them: *“The bishops too have prayed and debated the question: ‘How to make an Episcopal Conference more synodal? And how to live it in a more synodal way?’”* (EC Paraguay). For example, *“While maintaining their collegiality and freedom of decision-making that is devoid of any kind of pressure, the Episcopal Conferences should include representatives of the clergy and laity of the various dioceses in their debates and meetings, in the name of synodality”* (Contribution of the Secretariat of State – Section for the Diplomatic Staff of the Holy See).

76. During the Continental Stage, Episcopal Conferences will be able to experience a new role, related not only to the promotion of communion within themselves, but also of dialogue between Churches linked by geographical and cultural proximity. In addition, the Continental Stage, through the proposed ecclesial and episcopal assemblies, will offer the opportunity to work out in grounded and practical terms how to articulate ecclesial synodality and episcopal collegiality. It will also offer the chance to reflect on ways to improve the harmony between the ordinary ways of exercising episcopal ministry and the assumption of a fully synodal style, a point on which some reports register a certain lack of energy. Revisiting the experience gained during the Continental Stage will help discern how to proceed more smoothly.

77. Far more than the Latin Church, the Oriental Churches offer a wealth of synodal structures, which are called to renewal today: *“The ancient synodal structures and ecclesial processes existing in the Syro-Malabar Church (Prathinidhiyogam, Palliyogam and Desayogam) express the synodal nature of the Church at the local, regional, and universal levels, and are useful for forming us to synodality. They are at the service of the parishes and communities, which discover collaborative exercise of the pastoral ministries to move forward by listening to the Holy Spirit. Moreover, there are some new initiatives and attempts which try to empower the synodal structures of the Church”* (Syro-Malabar Catholic Church).

78. The dynamic of co-responsibility, with a view to and in service of the common mission and not as an organizational way of allocating roles and powers, runs through all levels of Church life. At the local level, it calls into question the bodies of participation already envisaged at the various levels and with the specificities proper to the various rites, and those that may possibly be appropriate to set up in service to a strengthened synodal dynamic: *“it was discussed to have structure and organization which sincerely reflects the spirit of synodality”* (EC Korea). These are first and foremost pastoral councils, called to be increasingly institutional places of inclusion, dialogue, transparency, discernment, evaluation, and empowerment of all. In our time they are indispensable. Economic, diocesan and parish councils should then be added, taking note also of the episcopal and presbyteral councils around the bishop. Many reports show the need for these bodies to be not only consultative, but places where decisions are made on the basis of processes of communal discernment rather than on the majority principle used in democratic regimes.

79. In different parts of the world, transparency is seen as an essential practice for a Church growing into a more authentic synodality: *“The Catholic Church needs to become more open and transparent; everything is done in secret. Parish Council agendas and minutes are never published, financial committee decisions never discussed, or balance sheets shared”* (individual observation from UK). Transparency will propel toward true accountability of all decision-making processes, including the criteria used for discernment. A style of leadership anchored in a synodal way of proceeding will produce trust and credibility: *“On some issues, the exercise of authority is effectively collegial, through consultation with the bodies embedded in the various structures of administration, management and pastoral animation [...]. But it is sometimes sad to note that in our Catholic Church there are bishops, priests, catechists, community leaders ..., who are very authoritarian. [...] Instead of serving the community, some serve themselves with unilateral decisions, and this hinders our synodal journey”* (EC Chad). In addition, many reports note the need to involve people with adequate professional competence in the management of economic and governance issues.

80. All Church institutions, as fully participatory bodies, are called to consider how they might integrate the call to synodality into the ways in which they exercise their functions and their mission, renewing their structures and procedures. A special case in point is represented by universities and academic institutions, which will be able to develop research addressing questions of synodality, helping to innovate in the design of educational and formation programmes. In particular, theological faculties will be able to deepen the ecclesiological, Christological and Pneumatological insights that synodal experiences and practices bring.

81. The adoption of an authentically synodal style also challenges consecrated life, beginning precisely with those practices that already emphasize the importance of the participation of all members in the life of the community to which they belong: *“Synodality in consecrated life affects discernment and decision-making. Although communal discernment has been practised in our Institutes, there is room for improvement.*

Membership in a body requires participation. [...] A shared desire is the establishment – both in the life of the Church and in the consecrated life – of a circular (participative) and less hierarchical and pyramidal style of governance” (USG/UISG).

Formation

82. The overwhelming majority of reports indicate the need to provide for formation in synodality. Structures alone are not enough: there is a need for ongoing formation to support a widespread synodal culture. This formation must articulate itself in relationship to the local context so as to facilitate synodal conversion in the way participation, authority and leadership are exercised in view of more effectively fulfilling the common mission. It is not simply a matter of providing specific technical or methodological skills. Formation for synodality intersects all dimensions of Christian life and can only be *“an integral formation that includes personal, spiritual, theological, social, and practical dimensions. For this, a community of reference is essential, because one principle of ‘walking together’ is the formation of the heart, which transcends concrete knowledge and embraces the whole of life. It is necessary to incorporate in the Christian life a continuous and permanent formation to put synodality into practice, to mature and grow in faith, to participate in public life, to increase the love and participation of the faithful in the Eucharist, to assume stable ministries, to exercise real co-responsibility in the governance of the Church, to dialogue with other Churches and with society in order to bring those who are far away closer in a spirit of fraternity”* (EC Spain). This training will have to be addressed to all members of the People of God: *“For the realization of the said elements of synodality, there is an urgent need for the education and formation programmes for clergy and lay people for developing a shared understanding of synodality that is so vital for journeying together in the local Churches”* (EC Myanmar). In this way, the perspective of synodality will converge with catechesis and pastoral care, helping to keep them anchored in a mission perspective.

83. However, the need for more specific formation in listening and dialogue is also emphasised, for example through the establishment of synodality agents and teams. Many reports point to the need to ensure formation in synodality for those who will be called to assume leadership roles, especially priests: *“Though long, seminary formation is geared toward preparing the clergy for a priestly lifestyle and devoid of forming them for pastoral coordination. The formation and training on working together, listening to one another and participation in the mission together is essential in priestly formation”* (EC Sri Lanka).

Spirituality

84. A culture of synodality, which is indispensable for animating structures and institutions, requires adequate formation, and, above all, needs to be nurtured by familiarity with the Lord and the capacity to listen to the voice of the Spirit: *“spiritual discernment must accompany strategic planning and decision-making, so that each project is welcomed and accompanied by the Holy Spirit”* (Greek Melkite Catholic Church). For this we must grow in a synodal spirituality that is based on attention to interiority and conscience. *“In personal spirituality and in the message of the Church, the joy of the risen Christ must prevail and not*

the fear of a God who punishes” (EC Czech Republic). 85. As has already been stressed many times, a synodal Church first of all needs to deal with the many tensions that emerge from encountering diversity. Therefore, a synodal spirituality can only be one that welcomes differences and promotes harmony and draws from the tensions the energies to continue on the journey. To achieve this, it will have to move from accentuating the individual dimension to the collective dimension: a spirituality of “we,” which can enhance the contributions of each person.

86. The first year of the synodal journey has already offered stimulating experiences in this direction, through the proposed method of spiritual conversation. This method has enabled the People of God to savour the flavour of an interpersonal encounter around the Word of God and the varied resonances it arouses in the heart of each person. In addition to making, it an ordinary practice in the life of the Church, as is demanded by many, this method must evolve in the direction of communal discernment, particularly within the bodies of participation. This entails a greater effort to integrate the spiritual dimension within the ordinary life of ecclesial institutions and of their governance structures, articulating discernment within decision-making processes. Prayer and silence cannot remain extraneous to these processes, as if it were a preamble or an appendix.

87. Christian spirituality is expressed in different ways, related both to the multiplicity of traditions between East and West and to the variety of charisms in consecrated life and ecclesial movements. A synodal Church is built around diversity, and the encounter between different spiritual traditions can be a formative “gymnasium” insofar as it is capable of promoting communion and harmony, contributing to overcoming the polarizations that many Churches experience.

SUMMARY

3.4 Synodality takes shape

71. The synodal journey has brought out a number of tensions, made explicit in the preceding. We should not be afraid of them, but them in consider them carefully, so as to harness them as a source of energy. This is why the Church also needs to oversee its own institutions and structures, particularly with regard to governance. Canon law will need to adapt to any change.

72. However, structures will need to be inhabited by people who are well-formed, in terms of vision and skills. This new vision will need to be a spiritual renewal and not simply dealing with technical or organizational issues. For there to be synodality, the presence of the Spirit is necessary, and there is no Spirit without prayer.

Structures and institutions

73. The Church is facing a new challenge- the relation of the local [national] church with the Universal Church. There are only a few communities with a long history of working in synodality. This new Continental Stage is new territory for most. It recognises the differences between parts of the world even as we proclaim a common Gospel message. Some challenges are common and some unique to particular regions.

74. This synodal process is a challenge for the Roman Curia itself. The Holy Father has encouraged the Roman Curia to adopt a culture of greater synodality.

75. The Conferences of Bishops around the world are also questioning what synodality means for them. What is to be their role in such a Church? How does this impact on their role as pastor?

76. During the Continental Stage, these Conferences will be able to experience a new role based on their dialogue with their local Churches and their reaching out to others within their area. In addition, this Continental Stage will offer the opportunity to work out how to express this way of being Church and of being a pastor within it.

77. Dioceses of the Eastern Churches offer a wealth of synodal structures, which are called to renewal today. There is an experience of synodality which has helped to shape the local and regional churches and contributed to their ministry.

78. The Church is supported by the energy that clergy and laity bring to their ministry. Different structures are at the service of the Church. Many reports show the need for these bodies to be not only consultative, but places where decisions are made on the basis of processes of communal discernment rather than on the majority principle used in democratic regimes.

79. In different parts of the world, transparency is seen as an essential practice for a Church growing into a more authentic synodality. A style of leadership anchored in a synodal way of proceeding will produce trust and credibility: In addition, many reports note the need to involve people with adequate professional competence in the management of economic and governance issues.

80. All Church institutions are called to consider how they might become more synodal. Teaching establishments might reflect on the need for greater formation for synodality.

81. Those in consecrated life will also face the challenge of synodality. Their life is centred around the need for the participation of all members in the life of the community to which they belong. Their experience of discernment is important as is their active involvement with their community.

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Formation

82. The overwhelming majority of reports indicate the need to provide for formation in synodality. Structures alone are not enough: there is a need for ongoing formation to support a widespread synodal culture. It is not a matter of providing specific skills. Training in synodality affects the whole of all of a Christian life. It is necessary to:

- live life in a spirit of synodality
- mature and grow in faith
- participate in public life
- exercise real co-responsibility as a member of the Church

83. However, the need for more specific formation in listening and dialogue is also emphasised, for example through the establishment of synodality agents and teams.

Spirituality

84. Synodality requires adequate formation, and, above all, needs to be nurtured by familiarity with the Lord and the capacity to listen to the voice of the Spirit

85. A synodal Church first of all needs to deal with the many tensions that emerge from encountering diversity. Therefore, a synodal spirituality can only be one that welcomes differences and celebrates variety. .

86. The first year of the synodal journey has already offered stimulating experiences in this direction, through the proposed method of spiritual conversation. This method has enabled the People of God to share an interpersonal encounter around the Word of God.

87 A synodal Church is built around diversity, and the encounter between different spiritual traditions can be challenging but of great benefit.
