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Press Conference to present the conclusion of the second stage of the synodal process 2021-2024: the Continental Phase

At 11.30 this morning, at the Holy See Press Office, Pius X Hall, Via dell'Ospedale 1, a press conference was held at the conclusion of the second stage of the synodal process 2021-2024: the Continental Phase.

The speakers were: Archbishop Timothy John Costelloe, S.D.B., of Perth, and president of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference; the Reverend Sr. Nathalie Becquart, X.M.C.J., under-secretary of the General Secretariat of the Synod; the Reverend Msgr. Lucio Adrián Ruiz, secretary general of the Dicastery for Communication; and the Reverend Fr. Hyacinthe Destivelle, O.P., official of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity.

The following are their interventions:

Intervention of the Reverend Sr. Nathalie Becquart, X.M.C.J.

1. The Continental Stage

This continental stage that we are concluding is one of the most innovative aspect of the synodal process.

To open the Continental Stage last October 28, the General Secretariat has published a Document for the Continental Stage that has been written after careful reflection on the fruits of the first stage from syntheses of all of the Episcopal Conferences of the Universal Church, as well as the Eastern Churches, and groups such as Religious Institutes, Lay Movements and so on. This Document was the support of the Continental Stage consisting of a time of listening and discernment of all of the People of God and of all local Churches on a continental basis, leading to a series of 7 continental assemblies.

With the idea of circularity among all levels of the Church and the vision of a dialogical

Movement that characterize synodality, the perspective of the Continental stage was a deepening of that discernment process by the people identified to represent the local Churches in the preassembly processes prior to each Continental Assembly.

To take into account the diversity of the experience and ways of proceeding of the continental ecclesial bodies that were in charge of the organization of the continental assemblies – FABC for Asia, CELAM for Latin America, USCCB and CCCB for North America, APEC for Middle-East, SECAM for Africa, CCEE for Europe and FCBCO for Oceania, It was proposed to have a flexible approach with common guidelines given by our Continental Task-Force – for example the request to use the methodology of spiritual conversation in all assemblies and to have an ecclesial assembly with the diversity of the People of God - and differences in approach by each continental task-force settled for each continent that takes account of the established practices, cultural and language elements, geography, and logistics of each continent.

The current synodal process, through the effective integration of the various levels of synodality and their articulation in a circular dynamic of listening, dialogue and discernment, is highlighting the necessity, the specificity but at the same time the interaction between the exercise of synodality at the local, regional, national, continental and universal levels. The continental stage intended to encourage the creation or strengthening of links of neighboring Churches and at the same time to foster relationships between the Universal Church and the Particular Churches. In this regard, in each continental assembly, some members of the General Secretariat came to take part in this “walking together” in a spirit of listening and learning from the experience of the Continental Assemblies for the next stage of the Synod.

2- the experience of the continental assemblies

- The centrality of the experience beyond the documents

Need and fruits to gather together, especially when the issues are huge

Example of the Assembly of Middle-East in Lebanon just after the earthquake in Turkey and Syria A spiritual process of transformation that led to consolation. Joy and frustration, step by step.

The impact of synodality : listening, parrhesia freedom of speech, communion and solidarity, more closeness, empowerment. At the end of the assembly of Middle East a patriarch : “listening to this young people, women who really love the church and share their thoughts and idea, really gives me new energy and hope”

- The blessing of taking part to 4 continental assemblies: the experience of the beauty of the diversity of the Church and the learning through this continental stage that diversity can also be a path to unity. Pluralism/polyhedron, multipolar world

- The joy of this new type of ecclesial assembly at the level of continents, the fruits of sharing together bishops, priests, lay men and women, religious ... and among different local churches. For some people in Africa coming to Addis Ababa in Etiopa for the first time they travelled out of their own country

- The synodal path as an exchange of gifts : the gift/charism of each continent highlighting more one important aspect for synodality : Care for Creation in Oceania, Ecumenism and liturgy in Middle-East, Church as Family of God and importance of listening in Africa. In each culture, contexts there are seeds of synodality and obstacles for synodality : for instance in some countries in Asia/Africa/Oceania the experience of Small Christian Communities, the traditional values of Africa Ubuntu, Family, Palaver, the emphasize on interiority and harmony in Asia, Interreligious dialogue and human fraternity with muslims in Middle East +
- the emphasize on local churches but with the increase phenomenon of migrations the fact that no longer any local church can think of herself only with native local catholics. New paradigm to integrate. I was particularly struck in the Assembly of Middle East by the experience of the Arabian Peninsula, the delegate from the Vicariate of Southern Arabia, A lay man from Abu Dhabi where they have done a wonderful synodal process: one parish 99 nationalities and 7 rites.
- How the participants in the synodal continental assembly were so touched to see “Rome coming to them” to listen and just be with them in this synodal spirit of “walking together”, I realized more that it is really another experience to meet bishops and people in their own context or to meet them at the Vatican. A new way to relate between the center/roman curia and the local churches in the spirit of Predicate Evangelium

Intervention of Archbishop Timothy John Costelloe, S.D.B.

Following on from Sr. Nathalie’s presentation of the journey we have undertaken so far, especially in regard to the Continental Stage, I would like to say a few words on the actual experience of the Continental Assemblies.

Although I only attended one of them, the Oceania Assembly, my understanding from speaking with those who attended others, and also from reading each of the Assembly documents, is that each Assembly was quite different in style and content. This was only to be expected, given the very different ecclesial and social contexts in which the various Churches of each continent live.

This points to a very important aspect of synodality, especially as we think about it in the context of a global, a universal Church: there is more than one way of being the Church. One of the most important things we are experiencing on this journey into a greater and deeper experience of synodality is that we recognise and celebrate the great diversity which is already a reality in the Church; we are actually experiencing a profound unity which is not only not grounded on uniformity but actually invites us to abandon any search for a rigid uniformity. This points to the reality that universal principles have to be “incarnated” in the context of the local culture and situation. And this is a key point: there are universal principles (and there is a form of uniformity in this) but the principles must be incarnated in local contexts.

This was the case in the Oceania experience. Oceania is made up of a great variety of cultures (largely Western cultures marked by great cultural diversity and significant indigenous cultures, Polynesian, Macronesian, Micronesian and, within that, very particular island cultures). It is also a continent which contains both economically and politically stable nations, and other nations much less stable in either or both aspects. And further it is what we might call a “water continent” more than a land continent, in the sense that if we drew a circle on a map around all the nations that make up the Oceania continent, most of what would be contained in that circle would be the Pacific Ocean. And lastly it is a continent which contains a significant number of relatively young nations and young Churches.

All these factors taken together meant that, in practice, the ideal of a fully realised continental ecclesial assembly in Fiji was not possible. What was possible was that the great majority of bishops from Oceania were able to come together in Fiji, with a small but significant representative presence of the People of God. These people carried with them into the Fiji Assembly the voice of the People of God, as a last step in an organic ecclesial experience of receiving the results of the synodal hearing of the voice of the People of God throughout the world (the Frascati document) in order to recognise their own voice coming through the voice of the whole People of God as well as the challenges and invitations from the whole People of God to the People of God in Oceania.

This is, I think, a part of the Synodal journey: that we are led to recognise ourselves as an essential part of the reality of the Church - to attend to the echoes of our own experience, our own hopes and dreams, our own convictions about the Church, which we hear in the voices of the other continental assemblies, and at the same time be open to other dreams, other hopes and other convictions – and in all this to listen carefully and attentively, and expectantly, for the voice and the call of the Holy Spirit coming through all these voices: to find the harmony which is there, if we look carefully enough, in what at times might initially look like disharmony.

A key part of this process has been the practice of spiritual conversation, or conversation in the Spirit, in which each one is invited to speak openly and honestly of what he or she is discovering as life and faith unfolds, and equally to listen attentively and “non-defensively” to the other who also speaks. We are being invited to recognise each other as a fellow companion on the journey of life and faith and certainly not as antagonists or combatants. Certainly in the Oceania assembly this was crucial in creating a climate of respect, and I would say a presumption of goodwill and sincerity in the other, even if what the other was saying was challenging or confronting. And this in turn helps to create an attitude of openness to the other which makes it possible to consider that “there might be more to this or that issue than I have previously seen”. This opens a way forward for everyone.

St Nathalie was able to attend a number of the other assemblies so perhaps, St Nathalie, you might want to also reflect on this and also on the final documents which were the outcome of the Continental assemblies.

As you know the meetings which concluded yesterday were really focussed two things: a reflection on, and a sharing of impressions about, the experience of the continental stage of the synod journey, which really began with the publication of the document for the Continental Stage -

“Enlarge the Space of your Tent” - and then on a careful reading of the seven documents which emerged from the continental assemblies, which sought to gather together the work of reflection and discernment which had been undertaken at the Continental level.

The process we followed was very similar to that we have used throughout this journey:

conversations in the Spirit. We gave ourselves time to pray, to reflect on what we were reading, to speak openly with each other, and listen attentively to each other, in relation to what we were emerging and then to begin to discern together themes, and priorities and points of tension which can be offered as a contribution to the drafting of the *Instrumentum laboris*. In this sense the meetings of the last week or so have been conducted in such a way as to contribute to the ongoing journey of the synod. Our work represents a further step, but in no way the final step, in this journey. One very important element is the week's meetings have been our encounter with the Prefects and/or general secretaries of some of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia. These encounters have been in themselves good examples of something at the heart of the synodal journey: open, honest attentive, and respectful speaking and listening. It is never good for people to operate “in a bubble”: we need to come into this synodal journey with eyes, ears and hearts that are open. This was certainly my experience of the time we were able to spend with the members of the dicasteries.

Perhaps I might conclude with a simple reflection on what comes next. From now until the First Assembly begins in October the synodal journey, hopefully, will continue to unfold at the grass-roots level. We have a wealth of material which all forms part of our journey together. We have the all the praying, sharing and reflecting which went on in communities of all kinds right across the world. And all of this was brought together in the documents

which came, primarily though not only, through the agency of the bishops Conferences. From these emerged the Document for the continental stage (the Frascati document) which itself was given back to the local Churches, that is to the whole Church, for further and deeper reflection at a continental level. As we now begin to look with anticipation to the next stage of the journey, the First Assembly in October, I would hope that at the local level of parish, of diocese, of religious community, of Church agency, the reflection, through the practice of Spiritual conversation, around all of this material and in a particular way around the Documents from the seven Continental assemblies, would continue. The more we are able to deepen our understanding of what the Church has done so far in this synodal journey launched by Pope Francis, the better placed will we be to continue to accompany each other as the journey unfolds. But if we stand on the sidelines we could well miss the opportunity that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus didn't miss: the opportunity to have Jesus join us on the journey, listen to us and speak with us, and cause our hearts to burn within us. The synodal journey has the potential to light a fire within our hearts that will become a source of the energy, enthusiasm, courage and trusting faith that we will need to become the missionary Church Pope Francis is dreaming of.

Intervention of the Reverend Msgr. Lucio Adrián Ruiz

Context: 7 people out of 10 use a mobile phone, 64% of the world population is online, and 4.5 billion people use the social networks the world over, 60%.

1- *What is the "digital Synod"?*

It is the same Synod of the Church, with the same aim, the same methodology as the rest of the Church, but carried out in "digital spaces".

It is important to underline that it is not "digital" because "digital instruments" are used, because they have been used in many contexts, but rather on account of the *place* where it took place, the *times*, the *targets*, the *language*, how it was born and the *way* in which it was carried out, which is the way in which one lives there, in the "digital spaces".

2- *How was it born?*

It comes from the People of God themselves, present on the networks. They were the digital missionaries and evangelizers who, listening to Pope Francis' call to hold the Synod on Synodality, with the aim of listening to the People of God, discerning in the Spirit, wanted to achieve this to reach all those people who do not participate in the ecclesial institutions, but who are in the networks and want to follow this journey of the Church. Therefore it is confirmed as a missionary experience.

3- *Chi ha partecipato?*

On the one hand, digital missionaries and evangelizers and Catholic influencers, who are those people, especially but not only young, who hear the call to evangelization and the mission in the networks and digital spaces, and develop their Christian vocation there, by helping, accompanying, preaching, giving their time to those who are in need. They are very diverse in terms of style, sensibility and way of carrying forward the mission. In the first phase, carried out over two and a half months, 250 digital missionaries participated; now

there are over 1000.

On the other hand, there are those who follow them, who are people who want to cultivate their faith, who want to know more, or who have a first approach to the faith... there are those who are in need of help, who have doubts; in short, the wealth and variety of the People of God in the world. The peculiarity is that they are not linked to languages, cultures or places.

4- *Who was reached?*

An extensive population, of all ages, especially between 18 and 40, and above all a large youth population. Among these, 30% are non-believers or distant from the Church, but interested in this journey. In the first phase, we received 150,000 completed questionnaires, from 115 countries, in seven languages. These digital missionaries have a potential 20,000,000 followers.

I giovani hanno trovato una dinamica, in termini di tempi, forme e metodologie, più consona a loro. I non credenti e i lontani dalla Chiesa hanno trovato un percorso di avvicinamento e dialogo che ha permesso loro di esprimersi e avvicinarsi in modo più libero.

Young people found a dynamic that is more consonant with them, in terms of time, forms and methodologies. Non-believers and those who are distant from the Church found a path of rapprochement and dialogue that allowed them to express themselves and to approach more freely.

5- *Main conclusions?*

- Digital reality, and the communicative reality in general, are not simply a tool, but a culture, because tools are merely “used”, whereas culture is to be evangelized and missioned, and the Church inculturated.

- We discovered many missionaries and evangelizers in digital environments, who carry out very important work with all types of people; they need to be accompanied, helped, supported and formed, to be able to live their faith and accompany their followers, and in this way “walk together” in the world, which is one that is now both presential and digital.

Intervention of Fr. Hyacinthe Destivelle, O.P.

If the ecumenical path is intended as an “exchange of gifts”, then one of the gifts Catholics could perhaps receive from other Christians is indeed their synodal experience. It is with this conviction that the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity has proposed to the General Secretariat of the Synod to organize conferences on synodality in the different Christian traditions. These conferences were intended as an ecumenical contribution to the ongoing synodal process, especially in its continental phase.

With the help of the Institute for Ecumenical Studies of the *Angelicum* and the *Pro-Oriente* Foundation of Vienna, four international conferences were therefore organized in 2022 and 2023, focusing on understanding and the practice of synodality in the four great Christian traditions: Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, historical Protestants and new ecclesial realities.

The methodology of these conferences was itself synodal. Based on listening, they were entitled “Listening to

the East” and “Listening to the West”. More than a hundred theologians, historians and canonists from the various Christian traditions and from the various continents were sent to present the synodal experience of their Churches, in particular on the three main themes of the ongoing Synod: communion, participation, and mission.

The role of the Catholic theologians sent, professors from various countries and members of the General Secretariat of the Synod, was that of listening. At the end of each day, some of them, called “Catholic listeners”, summarized what they had perceived and what, in their opinion, the Catholic Church could learn. A synthesis of these summaries was sent to the Secretariat of the Synod and will shortly be published, together with the conference proceedings, by the *Vatican Publishing House*.

The main conclusion is perhaps found in a phrase pronounced by the Holy Father precisely with regard to these conferences: “The path of synodality, which the Catholic Church is undertaking, is and must be ecumenical, just as the ecumenical path is synodal”. On the one hand, *the path of synodality is ecumenical*, because synodality is a challenge that must be faced with other Christians. On the other hand, *the ecumenical path is synodal*, because ecumenism is first and foremost a *syn/odos*, a pilgrimage made together with other Christians.

In other words, it can be said not only that the ecumenical movement contributes to the ongoing synodal process, in all its phases, but also that the synodal process of the Catholic Church is a contribution to the ecumenical movement. Synodality and ecumenism are indeed two journeys that have a common aim: better witness of Christians today, “that the world may believe” (*Jn 17:21*).
