

Discussion on the forthcoming *Letter to the People of God*

Sixteenth General Congregation of the Synod

Dr Ruffini announced the *Letter to the People of God*; it was then presented and discussed.

Cardinal Schönborn: *Faith, hope and charity in communion*

THE DOMINICAN CARDINAL CHRISTOPH SCHÖNBORN, Archbishop of Vienna, member of the Ordinary Council of the Synod Secretariat, delved into his experience in past assemblies and recalled a memory from 1965, at the end of Vatican II, when he was a 20-year-old theology student. He said he listened to a lecture by Karl Rahner and the last sentence remained in his heart:

‘If an increase in faith, hope and charity does not come out of this Council, everything is in vain’.

Therefore, the Cardinal added, he would say the same of the Synod currently underway. As a theologian, Schönborn also participated in 1985 in the extraordinary Synod convened by John Paul II twenty years after the conclusion of Vatican II. With regard to the fundamental concept of communion, he said he had the impression that

‘what we are doing now, after the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Synod’, is precisely asking

‘how to live communion in the Church. It is communion of faith; communion with the one and triune God; communion among the faithful and communion open to all men’.

How to live it? ‘Synodality is the best way’ is Cardinal Schönborn’s answer. It is a matter of rethinking the vision of *Lumen Gentium*, where it speaks of the great mystery of the Church. So the Church is mystery, then it is the people of God, and only then does it speak of the hierarchical constitution of its members.

The Cardinal also voiced a criticism of Europe, “which,” he said, “is no longer the main centre of the Church.” as can be seen daily at the Synod. Latin America, Asia, Africa and their continental conferences are protagonists, while the European episcopate has failed to have the potential developed by, for example, FABC and CELAM. In the old continent, he admitted, “we have lagged a little behind in lived synodality. A stimulus is needed.”

And he brought as an example the fact that the European Bishops’ Conferences have never voiced a unified word on the drama of migrants.

Finally, he made a reference to the Eastern Churches that have always experienced how synodality does not exist without liturgy. Hence the

invitation to cherish a faith that is celebrated, then discussed.

Cardinal Aguiar Retes: *Synodal continuity*

CARDINAL CARLOS AGUIAR RETES, Archbishop of México, one of the assembly's president delegates and a member by pontifical appointment, recalled, in Spanish, the 2012 Synod commissioned by Benedict XVI on the new evangelisation, which concluded that the transmission of the faith was "fractured": "Families were no longer able to address the new generations". This is why Pope Francis' first Synod was dedicated to families, which are fundamental in this regard. And it is important to work with them in order to reach young people, to whom the next Synod in 2018 was then dedicated. Speaking of his own experience with the new generations in the Archdiocese of Tlalnepantla, where he was a pastor before moving to the capital of Mexico, he reported having had meetings with young people from different social classes, with a view to dialogue aimed at promoting friendship beyond class boundaries. Therefore, the yearning for faith must be transmitted through young people living the faith.

Then, the Mexican Cardinal continued in his reconstruction, Pope Francis called him for the Synod ded-

icated to Amazonia. And reflecting on the importance of climate change and the protection of creation, it was realised that it was important to be able to count on the ecological sensitivity of children and young people. Therefore they must be helped to understand the Word of God on these issues. Finally, the Cardinal spoke about the Synod process in the Archdiocese of Mexico City, which he would have liked to have done before the pandemic but which, due to Covid-19, was postponed, starting in October 2021. An experience of visiting local realities, with a method based on consensus, dialogue and mutual listening, the fruits of which were pooled to meet the needs of society; because, he concluded, "the path of the Church is synodality."

Cardinal Aveline: *listening, silence, prayer and freedom*

CARDINAL JEAN-MARC AVELINE, Archbishop of Marseille, at the Synod as a member by pontifical appointment, elected to the Commission for the Synthesis Report, began by expressing the feelings that accompanied him in his first experience at the Synod:

"Joy for a new adventure, curiosity for meeting people from all over the world, with whom there was a mutual exchange of experiences; but also concern for

the news of war that arrived here at the beginning of the work and that continued as the days went by”.

In the face of such dramatic events, Cardinal Aveline emphasised,

“the Church must take responsibility for spreading God’s message of love even more strongly in the world.”

Another feeling was one of apprehension due to the fact that ‘

‘in my country, not everyone has joined the synodal process and therefore there is room for progress..

to get more people to participate in this shared journey. It, the cardinal reiterated,

“...is raising many expectations about our final decisions that will reflect our common responsibility.”

This, he concluded, will be

“a decisive week, in which we will experience important stages, trying to agree on various issues and iron out differences. The coming months will be the months in which we will reap the fruits we have sown.”

**Sister Rigon:
what can I do to make the world
a better place for everyone?**

SISTER SAMUELA MARIA RIGON, Superior General of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University, who is participating in the Synod as a pontifically appointed member, then took the floor.

“In prayer, I accepted as a call from God to be called to the Synod, as a baptised, Christian, consecrated woman,”

she said. And the Synod is proving to be

“a very enriching experience, in which I am touching the universality of the Church.”

An experience, she continued, that is

“an invitation to humility; and my point of view is just a window on the horizon that can help build a beautiful mosaic.”

“Since yesterday, I have been carrying with me three words from the Eucharistic liturgy where the Apostle Paul spoke to us of hard-working faith, hard work in charity, firmness in hope in Jesus Christ. If this were to come out of this Synod, we would have already made a real revolution in a positive sense,”

said the religious sister. This is because, she added,

“we have received an important seed that God will make grow in spite of us or with us.”

On this principle, the nun referred to the thought of Saint Francis:

“Today I begin again to be a different Christian.”

If everyone did this, she underscored,

“we would have a transformation.”

The ‘Synthesis Document’ will be released on Saturday evening

Responding to a question, Prefect Ruffini said that the vote, with modalities yet to be defined, and the dissemination of the Synthesis

Document is scheduled for Saturday evening.

Regarding the second question, whether in a future conclave, the current Synod will have to be taken into account in terms of content and form, Cardinal Aguilar Retes explained that if what has been discussed and experienced is put into practice, there will be a way forward. Everything, he added, depends on what will be achieved when people return to their dioceses.

Another question referred to the method chosen for the Assembly and the possibility of applying it in the Church at all levels, also broadening the participation of lay people and women. Cardinal Schönborn recalled his speech in 2015 on the topic of synodality, when, starting from the Council of Jerusalem, he had explained that, first and foremost, the method is listening, that is, listening to what God shows through the experience of walking. The conclusion of the Synod comes from this listening, from common discernment. The Cardinal said that he was already accustomed to a similar method, practised in the Archdiocese of Vienna; and he recalled, in this regard, that from 2015 until today there have been five diocesan assemblies with 1400 participants, an expression of the entire people of God. Even if no vote was taken, he said, listening and communion were experienced. The important thing, he emphasised, is that in the end decisions must be reached. In

fact, the Council of Jerusalem made a fundamental decision for the history of the Church; and the way to get there is as we read in the Acts of the Apostles. This method is characterised by the three stages: listening, silence, and discussion.

He was echoed by Sister Rigon, who pointed out that the one used in the Synod is a method, but the essential aspect is listening. Everyone, she said, needs to rediscover this dimension, in the workplace, in families, in religious communities. Everyone must have the opportunity to share and to be listened to.

In response to criticism questioning the integrity of the Synod of Bishops because it includes lay people as delegates, Cardinal Schönborn pointed out that in his opinion this is not a problem, as it remains an episcopal Synod even though it has a real participation of non-bishops. It constitutes a body that serves to exercise collegial responsibility. Its nature has not changed; it has only been enlarged and the experience is definitely positive. On the other hand, said the Cardinal, there have always been lay experts, with some very important interventions, but now there is a much closer relationship: a Synod of Bishops with enlarged participation.

With respect to the doubt as to whether the loss of synodality has led the Church to division and to what extent

all the Churches can be invited to a common path, the same Dominican Cardinal pointed out that the division of Christians is an obstacle to witness; but, he said referring to the words of a Coptic Orthodox monk, perhaps God allows this “shame” because one is not yet capable of making good use of unity for the good of humanity.

Cardinal Aguiar Retes then referred to the experience of the Mexican Bishops’ Conference, in a country with 180 million inhabitants, 80% of whom are Catholic, united around a religiosity anchored to Our Lady of Guadalupe. There are, however, different conditions between the north, south and centre of Mexico. In his Apostolic Visit in 2016, the Pope called for a safe process in response to the needs of the socio-cultural context. And in this, diversity should not be an obstacle: there are different *modus operandi*, but they all focus their efforts for the good of the Church.

For his part, Cardinal Aveline emphasised that a great moment of unity of the Synod was the ecumenical prayer vigil ‘Together’: everyone was present around Christ Crucified, because the desire for unity grows in the contemplation of the Crucified, as the weakness of Christ is the only sure path to unity.

Regarding the fact that some LGBT people may feel hurt by the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

referring to moral ‘disorder,’ Cardinal Schönborn recalled that he was secretary of the drafting of the *Catechism* itself. It, he said, is the work of the Church, promulgated by the Pope. And since then there has only been one change, when Pope Francis intervened on the death penalty. Whether there will be others depends solely on the Pontiff’s decision. The Cardinal then recommended always reading the texts as a whole. These are issues, he added, that concern moral theology, but the principle is that there is an objective order and there are human persons. They always have the right to respect, even if they sin, and the right to be accepted, as they are by God.

Finally, on the relationship between the topicality of the magisterium and the contribution of theologians and the “*sensum fidelium*”, it was again Cardinal Schönborn who explained that we need to look at St John XXIII and what he said at the beginning of the Second Vatican Council about the immutability of doctrine and the way it is presented. There are, he added, great developments at the level of understanding, but there is also the immutability of faith: one cannot change the doctrine on the Trinity, the Incarnation or the institution of the Eucharist. On this is founded a creed that is valid everywhere in the world, he suggested, noting that even if cultures differ, the substance of the faith cannot be changed, even if it has developed so much since the time of the Apostles.