

Document of the Continental Stage (DCS)

Chapter Three Section 2

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 2 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.

SISTERS AND BROTHERS FOR MISSION

41. The Church is the bearer of a proclamation of fullness of life: *“I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly”* (Jn10:10). The Gospels present the fullness of life and the fullness of the Kingdom of God not as separate realities or spheres of action, but always as dynamically intertwined movements. The Church’s mission is to make Christ present in the midst of His People through reading the Word, the celebration of the Sacraments and through all actions that care for the wounded and suffering. *“It is necessary for all of us in the Church to enter into a process of conversion in order to respond to this need, which would imply proposing the kerygma as the fundamental proclamation and listening to Christ crucified and risen for us. [...] Hence the importance of returning to the essence of Christian life and of our first love and returning to our roots as the first communities; that is to say, where all things were held in common”* (EC Costa Rica).

42. Fulfilling our mission we grow to the measure of our Christian vocation. ‘Enlarging our tent’ is at the heart of this missionary activity. Therefore, a Church that practises synodality offers a potent Gospel witness to the world: *“The Holy Spirit is pushing for the renewal of our strategies, commitments, dedication and motivation so that we can walk together and reach those who are farthest away: by spreading the Word of God with enthusiasm and joy, by putting our talents, gifts and skill to use, by accepting the new challenges and by producing cultural changes in the light of the Gospel and the life of the Church”* (EC Venezuela). Contained in the reports is the dream of such a Church: one deeply involved with the world’s challenges, and capable of responding to these through concrete transformations. *“The world needs a ‘Church that goes forth’, that rejects the division between believers and non-believers, that looks at humanity and offers it more than a doctrine or a strategy, an experience of salvation, a ‘coup of gift’ that responds to the cry of humanity and nature”* (EC Portugal).

The Church's mission in today's world

43. Synodality is a call from God to walk together with the whole human family. In many places, Christians live in the midst of people of other faiths or non-believers and are engaged in a dialogue formed in the exchanges of everyday life and common living: *“A social climate of dialogue is cultivated with those who practice traditional African religion, too, and with every other person or community, whatever religious denomination they belong to”* (EC Senegal, Mauritania, Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau). However, the reports indicate that there is still a long way to go in terms of social, cultural, spiritual, and intellectual exchange and collaboration.

44. The wounds of the Church are intimately connected to those of the world. The reports speak of the challenges of tribalism, sectarianism, racism, poverty, and gender inequality within the life of the Church, as well as the world. Uganda echoes many other countries in noting that in the structures of the Church *“the rich and the educated are listened to more than others”*. The Philippines report notes that *“many of the underprivileged and those who were marginalised in society felt that they are also left out in the Church”*. Other reports note the influence that ethnic discrimination and a culture based on tribalism has on the life of ecclesial communities. These realities form not just the background context of our mission but also define its focus and purpose: the message of the Gospel that the Church is charged to proclaim must also convert the structures of sin that hold humanity and creation captive.

45. The People of God express a deep desire to hear the cry of the poor and that of the earth. In particular, the reports invite us to recognize the interconnectedness of social and environmental challenges and to respond to them by collaborating and forming alliances with other Christian confessions, believers of other religions and all people of good will. This call for renewed ecumenism and interfaith engagement is particularly strong in regions marked by greater vulnerability to socio-environmental damage and more pronounced inequalities. For example, many African and Pacific Rim reports call on Churches around the world to recognize that addressing socio-environmental challenges is no longer optional: *“It is our desire to protect this part of God's creation, as the wellbeing of our people depends on the ocean in so many ways. In some of our countries the major threat is the ocean as changes in climate have drastic outcomes for the actual survival of these countries”* (EC Pacific)

46. Some reports also noted the importance of the role of the Church in the public sphere, particularly in relation to processes of peace-building and reconciliation. In heavily divided societies this is often seen as a crucial part of mission. Other reports called for the Church to be more confident in contributing to debate and action for justice in the public sphere. The desire was for greater formation in the Church's social teaching. *“[O]ur Church is not called to confrontation, but to dialogue and cooperation on all levels [...]. Our dialogue cannot be an apologetic dialogue with useless arguments, but a dialogue of life and solidarity”* (Catholic Armenian Church).

47. A further theme common to many reports is the weakness of deep ecumenical engagement and the desire to learn how to breathe new life into the ecumenical journey, starting with concrete, daily collaboration on common concerns for social and environmental justice. A more united witness among Christians and between faith communities is expressed as an ardent desire.

Walking together with all Christians

48. The call to ecumenism is not, however, merely aimed at common social engagement. Many reports emphasize that there is no complete synodality without unity among Christians. This begins with the call for closer communion between Churches of different rites. Since the Second Vatican Council, ecumenical dialogue has made progress: *“In the real life of the Central African Republic, ‘living together’ between Christians of different confessions is self-evident. Our neighbourhoods, our families, our mortuary places, our workplaces are real places of ecumenism”* (EC Republic of Central Africa). However, many ecumenical issues related to synodal structures and ministries in the Church are still not well-articulated. The reports also note that there is an ‘ecumenism of martyrdom’ where persecution continues to unite Christians. The reports request greater attention to divisive realities, for example the question of sharing the Eucharist.

49. The reports also point to the sensitive phenomenon of the growth in the number of inter-church and interfaith families, with their specific needs in terms of accompaniment. Revitalizing the commitment to dialogue and accompaniment as a witness in a fragmented world requires targeted formation that increases confidence, capacity and motivation for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue among bishops, priests, consecrated women and men, lay men and women. *“Although the Catholic Church in India has attempted to foster ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, there is a feeling that the mission in this realm is minimal. The dialogue efforts drew only a handful of elites and remained mostly as cerebral exercises limited to the realm of ideas and concepts rather than becoming a movement of the masses and becoming also a dialogue of life, love and action at the base, by getting people of various faiths and ideologies to discern, plan and work together for common causes”* (EC India)

Cultural contexts

50. Numerous reports highlight the importance of recognizing that the Church fulfils its mission of proclaiming the Gospel within specific cultural contexts and is influenced by profound and rapid social changes. The factors vary but create significant challenges for participation and shape the reality of the Church’s mission. Legacies of sectarianism, tribalism, ethno-nationalisms – differently expressed and experienced in diverse places - share the same characteristic threat: to narrow the Church’s expression of its catholicity.

51. Many local Churches express concern about the impact of a lack of trust and credibility resulting from the abuse crises. Others point to individualism and consumerism as critical cultural factors: *“Every day we can feel that even in our country the proclamation of the Gospel is challenged by growing secularization, individualism and indifference to the*

institutional forms of religion” (EC Hungary). Malta’s report, like many others, underscores how historical entanglements between Church and political power continue to have an effect on the mission context. Many Churches feel they face all these cultural challenges simultaneously but wish to grow more and more confident in proclaiming the Gospel in “*a consumerist society that has failed to ensure sustainability, equity or life satisfaction*” (EC Ireland). Others experience a pluralism of positions within themselves: “*Southern Africa is also impacted by the international trends of secularisation, individualisation, and relativism. Issues such as the Church’s teaching on abortion, contraception, ordination of women, married clergy, celibacy, divorce and remarriage, Holy Communion, homosexuality, LGBTQIA+ were raised up across the Dioceses both rural and urban. There were of course differing views on these and it is not possible to give a definitive community stance on any of these issues*” (EC South Africa). Many reports express particular regret and concern for the pressures experienced by families and the resulting impact on intergenerational relationships and faith transmission. Many Asian reports ask for better accompaniment and formation for families, as they negotiate changing cultural conditions.

52. In some contexts, the witness of the faith is lived to the point of martyrdom. There are countries where Christians, especially young people, face the challenge of systematic forced conversion to other religions. There are many reports that emphasize the insecurity and violence with which persecuted Christian minorities must contend. In such cases, walking together with people of other faiths, instead of retreating behind the wall of separation, requires the courage of prophecy.

Cultures, religions, and dialogue

53. An essential element of a synodal Church, one which still needs significant deepening and better understanding, is the call to a more meaningful inter-cultural approach. This approach begins by walking together with others, appreciating cultural differences, understanding those particularities as elements which help us to grow: “*The encounter between the Catholic Church in Cambodia and the Buddhist Monks and lay Cambodian Buddhists ‘creates a new culture.’ All our activities affect each other and affect the whole world. We may differ in religion, but we all seek the common good*” (EC Laos and Cambodia). It is the Churches that represent a small minority in the context in which they live that experience this most intensely: “*For example [there is] what we might call the ‘porosity’ of our Churches, whose line of demarcation with civil society is paradoxically less marked than elsewhere [...]. There is no problem of doing things ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the Church. We are an outgoing Church by definition, because we are always ‘in the home of others’ and this has taught us listening, flexibility, and creativity in forms, language, and practices*” (EC North African Region - CERNA).

54. However, even when we come to acceptance or even appreciation of the other, the journey is still incomplete. The Church’s intercultural approach aims at the horizon to which Christ calls us: the Kingdom of God. In the embrace of an enriching diversity, we can find our deeper unity and the opportunity to cooperate with God’s grace: “*We should also take heed of the thoughts and ideas of the extended family and companions in the journey;*

non-Catholics, Politicians and non-believers. These are voices in our neighbourhood we cannot afford to avoid lest we miss out God's whispers through them!" (EC Zimbabwe). This constitutes a witness within a world that struggles to see diversity in unity as a true vocation: *"The community [...] must take greater account of diversity, aspirations, needs and ways of living the faith. The universal Church must remain the guarantor of unity, but Dioceses can inculturate the faith locally: decentralization is necessary"* (Archdiocese of Luxembourg).

55. In a good number of reports, there is a call to better recognize, engage, integrate, and respond to the richness of local cultures, many of which have worldviews and styles of action that are synodal. People express a desire to promote (and in some cases recover and deepen) local culture, to integrate it with faith, and to incorporate it into the liturgy. *"In this context, Christians are called to offer their own contribution starting from their own vision of faith in order to enculturate it in the new cultural contexts [...]. This diversity of approaches should be seen as the implementation of a model of interculturality, where the different proposals complement and enrich each other, going beyond that of multiculturalism, which consists in the simple juxtaposition of cultures, closed within their perimeters"* (Contribution of the Pontifical Council for Culture).

56. In many cases, the reports call especially for attention to the situation of indigenous peoples. Their spirituality, wisdom, and culture have much to teach. We need to reread history together with these peoples, to draw inspiration from those situations in which the Church's action has been at the service of their integral human development, and to ask forgiveness for the times when it has instead been complicit in their oppression. At the same time, some reports highlight the need to reconcile the apparent contradictions that exist between cultural practices or traditional beliefs and the teachings of the Church. On a more general level, the practice of synodality – communion, participation, and mission – needs to be articulated within local cultures and contexts, in a tension that promotes discernment and generativity.

SUMMARY

41. The Church proclaims the fullness of life: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn10:10). The Church's mission is to make Christ present in the midst of His People through reading the Word, the celebration of the Sacraments and through all actions that care for the wounded and suffering.

42. 'Enlarging our tent' is at the heart of this missionary activity. A synodal Church offers a powerful witness to the world. Contained in the reports is the dream of such a Church: one deeply involved with the world's challenges, and capable of responding to them.

The Church's mission in today's world.

43. Synodality is a call from God to walk together with the whole human family. In many places, Christians live in the midst of people of other faiths or non-believers and are engaged in a dialogue formed in the exchanges of everyday life and common living.

44. The wounds of the Church are connected to those of the world. The reports speak of the challenges of racism, poverty, and gender inequality within the life of the Church, as well as the world. In the structures of the Church "the rich and the educated are listened to more than others". The Gospel that the Church is charged to proclaim must also convert the structures of sin that hold humanity and creation captive.

45. The People of God express a deep desire to hear the cry of the poor and that of the earth. The reports invite us to recognise the connections between challenges facing society and the environment, and to respond to them by working with other Christians, with other faiths and all people of good will.

46. Some reports also noted the role of the Church in relation to processes of peace-building and reconciliation. In heavily divided societies this is often seen as a crucial part of mission.

47. A theme common to many reports is the weakness of engagement with other faiths. Starting with concrete, daily collaboration on common concerns for social and environmental justice.

48. Many reports emphasize that there is no complete synodality without unity among Christians. This begins with the call for closer communion between Churches of different rites. The reports request greater attention to the question of sharing the Eucharist.

49. The reports point to the growth in the number of inter-church and interfaith families, with their specific needs.

Cultural contexts

50. Many reports note that the Church proclaims the Gospel within specific cultures and is influenced by profound and rapid social changes. The Church must remain alert to the need to be universal.

51. Many reports expressed concern about the impact of a lack of trust and credibility resulting from the abuse crises.

52. In some contexts, the witness of the faith is lived to the point of martyrdom. There are countries where Christians face the challenge of systematic forced conversion to other religions.

Cultures, religions and dialogue

53. An essential element of a synodal Church is the call to a more meaningful approach towards other faiths and cultures. This approach begins by walking together with others, with appreciating and understanding cultural differences,

54. The Church's approach to diverse cultures is to see them as a part of the Kingdom of God. In this diversity, we can find unity and the opportunity to cooperate with God's grace. The universal Church must remain the guarantor of unity, but Dioceses should be able to adapt the faith to local need.

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56. The reports call especially for attention to the situation of indigenous peoples. Their spirituality, wisdom, and culture have much to teach. We need to reread history together with these peoples, to draw inspiration from those situations in which the Church's action has been at the service of their integral human development, and to ask forgiveness for the times when it has instead been complicit in their oppression.