



EMBARGO UNTIL SPEECH DELIVERED

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Participation, governance and authority Introduction to Module B3

Jean-Claude Card. Hollerich
General Rapporteur

Good morning, everyone, and welcome. I think we all agree when I say that we are tired. It is understandable, after the work we have done together, beautiful, exciting, but also demanding. Today we begin the fourth Module of our Assembly, the last one dedicated to examining the contents of the *Instrumentum laboris*. Subtly, this reminds us that we are approaching the end. But beware: this must not become a reason to lessen our commitment to our work, as if it were the last week of school. In fact, the end of this first session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops coincides with the beginning of an equally important phase of the process: the time between the two sessions, which will see us committed to returning to the Churches from which we come the fruits of our work, collected in the Synthesis Report, and above all to accompanying those local processes that will provide us with the elements to conclude our discernment next year. Thus, once back home, we will be called to a twofold task. On the one hand, we will have to disseminate the results of this first session, involving our Bishops' Conferences, reconvening the synodal teams, activating the appropriate forms of communication in the media available to our communities, preparing the paths of experimentation and in-depth study that we will identify together as appropriate, and so on. On the other hand, we will immediately have to start planning how to collect the feedback from the local Churches, the fruits of the exchanges and the experimentation and deepening paths, so as to arrive 'prepared' for the second session, that is, loaded with a clearer awareness of the People of God as to what it means to be a synodal Church and above all what steps the Lord is asking us to take to become one and thus better proclaim His Gospel.

All this has much to do with the fourth Module, which deals with the themes of Section B3 of the *Instrumentum laboris*, the one dedicated to participation. As always, the title and accompanying question guides us: "Participation, governance and authority. What processes, structures and institutions are there in a missionary synodal Church?"

We are well aware that this Synod will be evaluated on the basis of the perceivable changes that will result from it. The big media, especially those furthest away from the Church, are interested in possible changes on a very limited number of subjects. I am not going to list them because we all know them. But even the people closest to us, our collaborators, members of pastoral councils, people who are involved in parishes are wondering what will change for them, how they will be able to concretely experience in their lives that missionary discipleship and co-responsibility on which we have reflected in our work. And they are wondering how this is possible in a Church that is still not very synodal, where they feel that their opinion does not count and a few or just one person decides everything. These people are especially

interested in the small but sensitive changes to the issues we are preparing to tackle in this Module.

Let us take a closer look at these issues, i.e. the five work sheets our Working Groups will be working on. The first concerns the renewal of the service of authority. It is certainly not intended to question the authority of ordained ministers and pastors: as successors of the apostles, we pastors have a special mission in the Church. But we are pastors of men and women who have received baptism, who want to participate and be co-responsible in the mission of the Church. Where clericalism reigns, there is a Church that does not move, a Church without mission. Clericalism can affect the clergy and also the laity, when they claim to be in charge forever. Clericals only want to maintain the 'status quo', because only the 'status quo' cements their power. Mission... impossible!

The second tab concerns the practice of discernment in common. We have personally experienced, on our own skin, or rather in our hearts, the power of such a simple tool as conversation in the Spirit. How can we introduce its dynamism into the decision-making processes of the Church, at different levels? How can we learn to build a consensus that does not polarise, and at the same time respects the distinctive role of authority, without it becoming isolated from the community? This is the challenge of common discernment.

The third tab reminds us that the life of human communities, and therefore also of the Church, inevitably passes through the building of structures and institutions, which persist over time and offer people opportunities for participation and growth. Each institution may offer some opportunities, but not others? Which ones are more in line with a synodal Church? Thinking concretely, let us start with the institutions that already exist, such as pastoral councils, and check their degree of effective synodality.

The fourth tab makes us look at a particular type of structures, those in which groupings of local churches come together. The continental level was a happy novelty and a highlight of the 2021-2024 Synod process. What do we learn from that experience? What role can the continental level play, also to realise the “healthy decentralisation” the Holy Father often invites us to. And what is the potential of an instrument like the Ecclesial Assemblies, in which not only bishops are present? I experienced the one in Prague first hand: without the participation of priests, deacons, consecrated men and women and lay people, I believe it would have been much more confrontational. How can we build networks between local Churches? And how is the Bishop of Rome's ministry of unity configured in a healthy decentralised Church?

The last card touches us very closely, because it invites us to reflect on the potential of the institution of the Synod itself as a place in which to experiment in a special way the dynamic relationship that links synodality, episcopal collegiality and Petrine primacy. And it asks the groups that will address it to also express an evaluation on the experiment of the participatory extension to a group of non-bishops, chosen as witnesses of the listening and consultation phase.

These are delicate issues, which require careful discernment: in this session we begin to approach them, then we will have a year to continue to deepen them in view of the work we will do in the second session. They are delicate because they touch the concrete life of the Church and also the growth dynamism of the tradition: a wrong discernment could sever it, or freeze it. In both cases it would kill it. These are questions that need to be addressed with

precision of language and categories. Among the experts who accompany us, and whom I take this opportunity to thank, are theologians and also canonists, both Latin and Eastern. If they can help our reflection, we are not afraid to call on them. The facilitators know how.

In No. 44, the *Instrumentum laboris* reminds us that participation brings with it the humility of concreteness. This is why the questions concerning it come after those concerning communion and mission: it is through participation that we can make the inspirational vision come to land and give continuity over time to the momentum of the mission. However, concreteness also brings with it the risk of dispersion into details, anecdotes, individual cases. In this fourth module we must therefore make a special effort to keep our focus on the goal we are aiming for, the one indicated by the “Question for discernment” in each sheet. Sidebar considerations that set us off on a tangent do not help us. I would also like to remind you that the objective of each group, with respect to the question it deals with, is to arrive at expressing convergences, divergences, questions to be explored and concrete proposals for moving forward. I ask the facilitators, whom I thank again, not to be afraid to push us, even with a bit of decisiveness, when we need to be helped not to lose focus.

I now give the floor to the President Delegate who will lead us through the session. Fr. Timothy Radcliffe and Fr. Dario Vitali will help us frame the themes of our work from a biblical-spiritual and theological point of view respectively, interspersed with moments of silence to encourage interiorisation. As in previous Modules, we will also hear some testimonies from members of the Synod who can share significant experiences on these topics.

I wish everyone fruitful work in this Module, which will benefit the whole Church. Missionary discipleship and co-responsibility are not just catchphrases, but a call that we can only realise together, with the support of concrete processes, structures and institutions that truly work in the spirit of synodality.