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## Synod. Card. Schönborn: “Europe is no longer the centre of the Church”

“Europe is no longer the main centre of the Church: there are other centres such as Latin America, Africa, Asia and the continental Conferences.” This is the “very strong impression” of the Synod on Synodality, now drawing to a close, in the words of Cardinal **Christoph Schönborn**. In a briefing with journalists in the Vatican press room today, the Archbishop of Vienna, who has participated in eight Synods, said that “the methodology and the process are the best I have personally experienced.” However, he said, “I have one complaint: the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CCEE) has not managed to widen its scope, as the Bishops' Conferences of Asia and Latin America have done. We lag somewhat behind in the synodality experienced by the Churches in Europe, and we need an impetus to move forward.”

“The European Bishops' Conferences have never been able to speak with one voice on the plight of migrants and refugees. This is very sad”,

denounced the Cardinal: “Politicians are not doing this, they are not capable of doing this, and we, the Catholic Church, are unable to have a common and weighty word on this.” As for the outcome of this first phase of the synodal assembly, Schönborn quoted a phrase he heard at the end of the Second Vatican Council in 1965: “If this Council does not lead to an increase in faith, hope and charity, the whole Council will have been in vain. The same can be said of this Synod.” “The Church is communion, synodality is the way to experience communion,” the Cardinal continued, referring to his participation as a theologian in the 1985 Synod on Communion and to Pope Francis' speech on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops. For Schönborn, it is necessary to “rethink the great vision of the Church of Lumen Gentium, which refers first of all to the Church as mystery, then to the Church as the People of God, and only afterwards to the hierarchical structure of the Church and the role of the lay faithful and of consecrated persons. The vision of synodality is that of walking together, it is the life of the ecclesial ‘communion.’ Underlying all this is baptism.” “What the Oriental Churches have always experienced” is another powerful insight that the Archbishop of Vienna drew from the Synod, namely that “there is no synodality without liturgy.” The assembly of the faithful, which is not a place of discussion but of common celebration, is at the heart of synodality. To treasure the liturgy is to treasure the faith celebrated before the faith discussed.”

“There is an objective order, and then there are human persons who always deserve respect, even when they sin, which we all do”,

Cardinal Schönborn said answering journalists' questions regarding **LGBTQ persons**, specifically with regard to the section on them in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, of which the cardinal was editorial assistant of. “We all have the right to be respected, to be accepted. A human person is accepted by God, then the journey of that person has a personal history that deserves to be accompanied and respected.” Regarding the possibility of changes to the Catechism of the Catholic Church on this issue, Schönborn recalled that “the Catechism is a work of the Church, promulgated by the Pope. Since its publication it has only been changed once, by Pope Francis, on the subject of the death penalty. It is no secret that John Paul II wanted the death penalty to be explicitly condemned, and Mother Teresa had also urged John Paul II to condemn it. Two saints urged this change and the current Pope had it changed.” Will there be further changes? “I don't know, the Pope promulgated it and he has the last word, only he can change it. Theologically, Schönborn said we should “consider what John XXIII said at the beginning of Vatican II about the immutability of doctrine and how it should be presented. While there have been important developments at the level of a

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profound reflection on the issues, there is also the immutability of our faith. We cannot change the fact that we believe in the Holy Trinity, or the Incarnation of the Word, or the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus. They are valid everywhere in the world: even if the cultures are different, the essence of the faith cannot be changed.” **Paolo Ruffini**, Prefect of the Holy See's Dicastery for Communication and President of the Information Commission of the Synodal Assembly, said that a draft of the "Open Letter" to all the People of God was read out today at the Synod, now in its final week, and was greeted with applause. The final text of the Letter will be published next Wednesday, while the final document of the Synod will be voted on in sections and approved on Saturday evening. The other participants in the briefing held today in the Vatican Press Room spoke about how they experienced the Synod. Card. **Carlos Aguiar Retes**, Bishop of Mexico, praised the method “based on consensus, dialogue and mutual listening”: “If we live synodality,” he said, “we can move forward; if not, we will become small Catholic groups, as is already happening in some places.” “The world is in crisis, it was already in crisis when we arrived, then the crisis became more serious,” said Cardinal **Jean-Marc Aveline**, Archbishop of Marseille: “We talk about things that may seem closely related to the life of the faith community, but the concerns of the world remind us that we cannot remain focused on secondary matters; the Church must face up to her responsibilities.” “The Synod has a mission,” stressed Sister **Samuela Maria Rigon**: “To evangelise, to offer the merciful and friendly face of Jesus. We can speak words of encouragement, words of hope for all, in a Church on the move, with its beauties and hardships, or we can speak words of poison. It is up to us to choose, to ask ourselves what each of us can do to make the world a better place.”

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