

At the Synod's Close:

Bishops Happy, Newsmen Glum

By FATHER ROBERT A. GRAHAM SJ

Vatican City (RNS) — The fifth world Synod of Bishops, called by Pope Paul to advise him on the catechetical, or religious instruction, ministry, especially among children and youth, closed on schedule without surprises.

The bishops themselves were happy, but not the journalists who have been complaining during the whole month-long session about the lack of news.

Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio, prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops, presiding at a final press conference, whimsically excused the synod for not having produced its expected tension and controversy.

"It is," he said, "grotesque to have to defend an ecclesial assembly against the charge of having finished its work in harmony."

The tranquility that reigned, according to the cardinal, was not due to any timidity or lapse into backwardness, but simply to the seriousness with which the pastors met to listen prayerfully to the word of God. He pointed out that the average age of the participants was five or six

years younger than those of the last synod (in 1974). And it was the first synod for half of the bishops.

The bishops obviously quickly discovered basic agreement. Just what this agreement consists of in catechetical terms we shall not really know until the Pope has digested the material turned over to the Holy See by the synod. The "Message" to the People of God issued by the body at the close had the disadvantage of not being able to anticipate what the eventual papal document will say.

It is known that the United States' bishops were not entirely satisfied with the first draft of this message and submitted their own revisions, apparently to no effect. Maybe, their observations will make their appearance eventually in the expected papal document.

The synodal concert or tranquility probably resulted from the diversity that each part of the Catholic world represented. This was a pastoral assembly. Cardinal Baggio himself highlighted the specific emphases of the groups represented.

The Africans, he said, came to express their confidence in the ac-

culturation program they have already initiated adapting their own native and tribal customs to Catholic ritual.

The Latin Americans were interested in liberation theology. The Asians in the fight against poverty. Bishops from Eastern Europe stressed liberty to teach — denied them today.

Bishops from the developed and industrial countries brought out the inadequacy of modern technology to meet the human needs of mankind. No bishop seemed disposed to impose his ideas on the pastors from another world and another culture.

Strange as it may seem, specific catechetical texts received hardly any mention. Ongoing controversies in some countries over official or unofficial versions were ignored, perhaps, considered as "local" problems that the national hierarchies should take care of by themselves. But the widespread insistence on the importance of "authentic" doctrine and "complete" exposition of Catholic doctrine can be interpreted as the Synod's indirect way of referring to a serious dispute no one wanted to bring into the open.

One catechist observer

perative to take account of the social dimension of human existence, showing the relationship of man's eternal calling to his earthly existence, and underscoring the importance of the witness the Christian must bear before the world.

Also, for some countries, the phenomenon of Marxism, according to some speakers, has to be taken into account, as a "reality." Here is a concept of human existence in direct contrast with the Christian life-view. The young must be taught, during catechesis, how to cope with aggressive anti-Christian and anti-spiritual ideologies coming from this sector.

These and others like them are synodal thoughts whose further development will appear in the later papal document in one form or another. As is known, from the last synod, the pope was asked to draw up a statement based on the debates in the assembly. The result was the much praised exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi, on evangelization.

The bishops at the 1977 synod, really quite pleased with themselves at the developments of discussions on catechetics, expect the pope will perform equally well this time and provide possibly a classic statement on catechesis in our time.

They spurred Jerusalem to revolt against Rome. "The time is at hand," they proclaimed. Jerusalem listened and rebelled. And eagle Rome under Titus and Vespasian swooped down on the dove Israel — and "not one stone was left upon another."

Jesus gave another piece of advice. It applies to us. It was this: "I bid you resolve not to worry about your defense beforehand, I will give you (at the time) words and a wisdom no adversary can oppose."

Jesus was saying, "Don't cross your bridges until you come to them."

The reason is because of actual grace. Actual grace is a help God gives us at the time of an act — not before it! I hate Management by Objectives in the Church, because it does not take into account actual grace. When one projects into the future, it is without actual grace. For the grace is given only at the time of the act. An act without actual grace is like trying to do a job without food or sleep. It's difficult, if not impossible.

As a result, many a good resolution dies aborning. "The strong hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." What Hamlet meant was that too much thinking about the future immobilizes one and snuffs out endeavor. Statistics, projections, polls, forecasts have killed more than one good proposal. How many Catholic schools were closed on the basis of projections! Christ said, "Don't worry about the future." Pray for daily bread. "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." And in Sunday's reading: "Don't worry beforehand: when the time comes, sufficient grace will be given you what to say and what to do." The man of faith goes gaily in the dark — assured that God always keeps His promises.

World Synod Ends

Pope Agrees to Issue Catechesis Statement

Vatican City (RNS) — Fidelity to traditional doctrine and freedom everywhere to teach religion were the points stressed by Pope Paul in his closing address to the fifth World Synod of Bishops, which deliberated through October on modern religious instruction.

The pope accepted an invitation to prepare in his own name and in the name of the synod a formal statement on catechesis in our time. The bishops had presented 34 propositions embodying their conclusions.

"We rejoice," Pope Paul said, "over the emphasis placed upon the bishops' responsibility of being vigilant and seeing to it that, in all of catechesis, full fidelity towards the word of God might always be preserved, just as it was

made known to us by divine revelation and has been handed down throughout the centuries by the Magisterium of the Church."

Referring to countries where the teaching of religion is impeded, the pontiff declared, "We recognize now more than ever the urgency and necessity to appeal for the liberty of the Church to fulfill its duty of instructing its own children in the Christian faith. Unfortunately, there are not a few countries in which the right of individual men to liberty, the right of families to educate their own members, is either entirely suppressed or at least unjustly limited."

He appealed to the leaders of government "to respect the rights of men and of religious communities to liberty, both

social and political, in the religious field."

These words were seen as directed to the conference at Belgrade called to review the declarations on human rights of the 1975 Helsinki conference.

The pope's stress on "sound doctrine" and "vigilance" referred to complaints against certain catechetical texts.

During the synod, a group of prominent French Catholics appealed against contemporary French catechesis. They said that the official catechism, not yet approved by the Holy See, deliberately "waters down" Christian doctrine, softening its more austere points, such as the reality of sin, the need of self-sacrifice, the redemption of man by the sufferings of Christ and the obligation to obey the laws of God.

Pope Paul commended the synod on its "pastoral approach"

"Because of this pastoral approach," he said, "this synodal assembly has a joyous and happy outcome. The dual purpose of sharing information with one another and deliberating on the important topic of announcing the Lord's word to men of our time has been achieved and thus the catechetical activity throughout the Church can become more effective."

After his discourse Oct. 29 in the Vatican Audience Hall, the pope gave each of the delegates a special edition of the letters of St. Paul and a medal commemorating the synod.

Cancer in the Family To Be Nov. 15 Topic

A group discussion about methods to cope better with cancer in the family will be on the agenda of the Nov. 15 meeting of the Monroe County Chapter of Make Today Count at the Monroe Developmental Center, 620 Westfall Road at 7:30 p.m.

Following a brief general meeting, members will break up into groups of about six, each overseen by an experienced discussion leader, and have a chance

to share experiences and helpful information about their disease related problems.

Make Today Count, sponsored by the United Cancer Council, is an organization of cancer patients, persons with chronic illnesses, their families and health professionals. Its aim is to build morale and to offer an opportunity for people to make a contribution to others.

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