

Church Looks Toward November's Extraordinary Synod

By Father Kevin McKenna
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At a Mass in the Basilica of St. Paul-Outside-the-Walls in Rome on January 25, 1985, Pope John Paul II announced the convening of an "Extraordinary Synod" to study the effects of the Second Vatican Council. With particular significance, this news was declared in the same church where Pope John XXIII 25 years earlier proclaimed his desire for a council of the entire Church which unfolded as the 21st Ecumenical Council. Declaring the Second Vatican Council the "fundamental event in the life of the contemporary Church," John Paul II outlined three general purposes for the synod of patriarchs and presidents of Episcopal Conferences, which will take place from November 25 through December 8 of this year:

- To revive in some way the extraordinary atmosphere of ecclesial communion created during the council,
- to exchange and deepen experiences and information concerning the applications of the council, and
- to further deepen and "engraft" the Second Vatican Council into the Church's life.

The assembly which John Paul II will gather together to review these questions is a structure with long roots and tradition within the Church. From its history, synods — or gatherings of bishops from a province or region — took place to discuss or decide on matters pertaining to doctrine, liturgy or discipline under their jurisdiction: The earliest recorded gathering to debate ecclesiastical policy and doctrine was that of the Apostles and presbyters with Paul and Barnabas in the Council of Jerusalem in 54 A.D.

At the Council of Trent, a synod referred to a diocesan assembly the council decreed should be held once every year. The "Synod of Bishops" was an innovation of the Second Vatican Council's spirit of collegiality in which an ongoing gathering of bishops representing the Catholic world's hierarchy would render assistance to the pope (cf. Decree on the Bishop's Pastoral Office in the Church, #50).

The first meeting of the synod of bishops took place in 1967, and meetings have been scheduled with some regularity, approximately every three years. Subjects given focus by the synods have ranged from ministerial priesthood, justice in the world (1971) to reconciliation (1983). The revised

Code of Canon Law (1983) in Chapter II of Book II (The People of God) outlines a general description of this emerging Church body, dealing with the authority of the synod and the pope's role in it (Canons 342-348). Three types of synods are detailed: "ordinary sessions," which deal with matters that directly concern the good of the Church; "extraordinary" sessions, designed to give special attention to a subject of great and immediate concern to the universal Church; and "special" sessions, designed for issues affecting one or more particular regions.

The synod scheduled for November has been termed an extraordinary session. The last extraordinary session was gathered in 1969 to explore the relationship between the bishops and the pope, and produced some practical recommendations to improve communication between the Vatican and bishops throughout the world.

Much speculation has recently surfaced concerning the possible thrust of the deliberations of the November synod as well as the aim of the pope in arranging for a synod centered on such a delicate topic as evaluating Vatican Council II. Perhaps some indications of the pope's reflections on the council can be found in "Sources of Renewal — The Implementation of Vatican II" (Harper & Row, 1980), a book published by the pope in 1972 while he was archbishop of Cracow on the 10th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. In this work, a synthesis of the main points of the teaching of Vatican II, the then-Cardinal Wojtyla attempted to provide a background for the guidance of a Pastoral Synod of the Archdiocese of Cracow, which was then beginning its task.

In his introduction, the cardinal declared his respect for the fruits of the historic council: "During the council and by way of it, the word of the Spirit became particularly expressive and decisive for the Church. The bishops ... are bound in a special way to be conscious of the debt contracted 'towards the work of the Holy Spirit,' since it was they who translated the divine message into human language ... Through the council, the Church has not only shown itself clearly what it thinks of itself, but also in what way it wishes itself to be realized." ("Sources of Renewal," pp. 10-11.) With such statements, Pope John Paul II clearly indicated the overarching importance of continual reference to the decrees and spirit of the council.

In a statement issued in February of this year, Archbishop, now-Cardinal Tomko, former general secretary of the Synod of Bishops, provided a contemporary rationale for such an evaluation: "The Church follows the sensible logic of every healthy institution, religious or secular, of taking an estimate of the situation in which are found her major programs. This is especially so when it is a question of an event of such richness as the Second Vatican Council and above all if it is a question of the 20th anniversary of its closing." ("Origins," Vol. 14, no. 38, p. 622.)

In a recent address, Bishop James Malone,

president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and future participant at the synod, similarly delineated an attitude of hope toward the deliberations ("Origins," Vol. 15, no. 7, p. 102): "The synod called by the Holy Father is an opportunity for both the bishops and the Church at large to take a fresh look at the council — what it set out to do and what it actually did, what has been accomplished and what remains to be done. I propose to reaffirm this fall the fundamental rightness of the program of Vatican II and the directions to which it still points. Perhaps after two decades our serious work is only now beginning."

Pope Urges Chinese To Employ Gospel Virtues for Common Good

By John Thavis
Vatican City (NC) — Pope John Paul II greeted Chinese Christians July 24 and urged them to contribute to the "common good" of the country by practicing the Gospel virtues.

Speaking at his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square, the pope said the Gospel virtues of justice, charity, moderation, wisdom and loyalty were highly esteemed in Chinese tradition.

A Vatican official described the talk as a step toward better relations with China.

"The Catholic Church looks upon China as one great family, the birthplace of lofty traditions and vital energies, rooted in the antiquity of her history and culture," the pope said in English.

"The church is sympathetic to the commitment to modernization and progress in which the Chinese people are engaged," he added. "This was the attitude of the famous Father Matteo Ricci when he came into contact with China."

Father Ricci, a Jesuit missionary in the 16th century, is largely credited with bringing Christianity to China.

"I pray that Almighty God may abundantly bless the Chinese people and their worthy aspirations for peace and progress," the pope said.

The pope's message came in a special greeting to a U.S. television crew, which filmed the talk for inclusion in a TV series scheduled to be shown in China in 1986. The producer of the series, Alice Herb of New York, said the pope's remarks would be translated and broadcast during a segment

planned for airing on Chinese national television.

The pope's talk was "a small, positive step in a series of small steps" regarding Vatican relations with Communist China, a Vatican official said afterward.

"The pope saw an opportunity here. In this delicate climate, any expression of cordiality is of value," said the official, who asked not to be identified.

Last year, Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Agostino Casaroli said that despite papal initiatives, the Vatican had not yet been able to establish direct contact with the Chinese government.

Even unofficial relations have been difficult, largely because of the government-approved National Association of Patriotic Catholics which rejects ties to the Vatican. The pope and others have accused China of persecuting some Catholics who refuse to join the association, which has its own hierarchy.

During the audience, the pope repeated his prayers for victims of a mud and water avalanche in northern Italy. More than 200 people lost their lives after a dam burst July 19 near Stava in the Dolomite Mountains.

In the main talk, the pope continued his catechesis on the creed. God the Father, he told an estimated 10,000 people in bright sunshine, is "a personal God who is very near to us," and not merely "a mysterious being that transcends all that exists."

After the audience, the pope traveled by helicopter to Castelgandolfo, 15 miles south of Rome, where he was resting at the papal summer villa.

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