

Extraordinary Synod

In this four-page pull-out section, we take a look at the speeches and events of the first week of the extraordinary Synod of Bishops, which continues in Rome through December 8.



Flanked by cardinals and bishops, Pope John Paul II walks in procession through St. Peter's Square for the opening of the extraordinary synod. (NC photo)

Pope says synod aims to promote Vatican II

By Sister Mary Ann Walsh

Vatican City (NC) — The extraordinary Synod of Bishops aims "to promote" the Second Vatican Council in the light of council documents and the past 20 years of Church experience, Pope John Paul II said, opening the Nov. 24-Dec. 8 meeting at a Mass in St. Peter's Square.

The pope also said at his Angelus address that he hoped the synod would contribute "to the enrichment, growth and deepening of the faith."

In the address, given immediately after the Mass, Pope John Paul said that the heart of the Second Vatican Council, was the Church's "one, holy, Catholic, apostolic faith."

"Faith is the basic principle, is the foundation, the essential criterion for the renewal desired by the Church," he said, addressing a crowd in the square.

"From this faith," he added, "come the moral norms, style of life, and the practical orientation for every circumstance."

The pope celebrated the Mass with about 450 bishops and priests before thousands of people, including the Vatican's diplomatic corps which was dressed formally for the event.

Vatican press spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls was quoted as saying that the pope's remarks to the synod participants were general because he "did not want to push them in any way."

The synod, which marks the 20th anniversary of the close of Vatican II, sets out "to relieve the spiritual climate of that great ecclesial event," the pope said at the Mass.

It also aims "to promote" Vatican II, he

added, "in the light of the fundamental documents that were then issued, and in light of the experience which has matured in the course of the subsequent 20 years."

At the Mass, which took place on the last Sunday of the liturgical year, the Feast of Christ the King, the pope said that the council teachings highlight the proper understanding of the "kingdom of man" and the kingdom of God.

"In this time of ours, when from various sides the primacy of man is set up in opposition to the primacy of God," the pope said, "the council in a convincing manner makes all aware that the 'kingdom of man' can find its proper dimension only in the kingdom of God."

During the homily, the pope also noted the growth of ecumenism since Vatican II and addressed the 10 Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox Church observers invited to the synod.

He greeted "with intense affection the brethren of the other Christian churches and communions."

Their presence, he added, calls to mind their colleagues at Vatican II and "the ecumenical path travelled since then."

Several nuns, seminarians, and lay persons participated in the Mass, including Virgil Dechant, supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus.

Dechant, one of 15 auditors at the synod, is also a member of the Pontifical Council for the Family.

The pope met privately with Dechant Nov. 25. As is customary, the Vatican released no details of the meeting.

Synod provides forum for wide range of issues

By Agostino Bono

Vatican City (NC) — Although the world Synod of Bishops has only advisory powers, the Nov. 24-Dec. 8 extraordinary session quickly developed as a forum for open debate on a wide range of Church issues.

From the start, delegates from around the world began outlining their views on topics as diverse as collegiality and religious persecution in the Soviet Union.

At the first working session, Ukrainian Archbishop Maxim Hermaniuk of Winnipeg, Manitoba, urged sweeping reform of the Church's decision-making process. He called for formation of a permanent Synod of Bishops that would exercise legislative powers with the pope.

The pope with the synod should decide questions on the life of the Church that are currently decided by the pope and his advisers in the Curia, the Church's central administrative offices, he said. The archbishop proposed that the synod be composed of bishops elected to six-year terms.

The extraordinary synod is intended to provide an "extremely free" forum of views, said Cardinal Godfried Danneels of Malines-Brussels, Belgium, at a Nov. 25 press conference which included Cardinal John Krol of Philadelphia.

The Church seeks "unity not uniformity," said Cardinal Krol.

Both cardinals are synod officials. Cardinal Krol is one of the three synod co-presidents. Cardinal Danneels is the recording secretary.

Cardinal Danneels said Pope John Paul II is largely responsible for the synod's openness because he let the synod delegates form the agenda.

The pope called the synod to reflect on the Church 20 years after the Second Vatican Council closed.

Since calling the council in a surprise announcement last January, the pope has avoided publicly proposing synod topics.

At the Nov. 24 Mass opening the synod, the pope said the purpose was to promote Vatican II teachings "in the light of the experience which has matured in the course of the subsequent 20 years."

Joaquin Navarro-Valls, Vatican press spokesman, said the pope's remarks were general to synod delegates because he "did not want to push them in any way."

The issues before the synod have been determined by the delegates in a series of presynod reports, which were summarized by Cardinal Danneels in an official report to the synod.

The report said the post-conciliar Church is "intensely alive" and rejected any "pessimism, resignation or discouragement" over the status of contemporary Catholicism.

The report listed the positive and negative aspects of Church life presented in the presynod reports sent to the Vatican by more than 100 of the 136 national hierarchies which received questionnaires.

Positive aspects most cited were liturgical renewal, better understanding of the gospel, clear Church witness in human rights and social problems, a more dynamic missionary spirit and dialogue with Christians and non-Christians, said the summary report.

Negative points included a "subjectivism" regarding the liturgy and Church moral teachings, "superficial and ideological" interpretations of the Church, and religious indifference in rich countries, the report added.

At the press conference both cardinals said conflicting views on the status of the Church are needed for the synod to properly do its job.

At the same time, it "is not a boxing match" between optimistic and pessimistic assessments of the Church, said Cardinal

Krol.

The aim of the synod is a "realistic interpretation of the world beginning with objective truth," he added.

At the press conference, Cardinal Danneels said that collegiality and the role of women in the Church were also raised as issues by many hierarchies in the developed countries of North America and Europe, but less so in the Third World and in communist-bloc countries.

"In Latin America the liberation of man and human rights are problems of greater intensity," said Cardinal Danneels. In Africa and Asia, the issue is inculturation, he added, with reference to the adaptation of Christianity to local culture and customs.

About 60 percent of the synod delegates came from Third World countries, Cardinal Danneels noted.

By Nov. 26, 161 of the 164 delegates had arrived at the Vatican for the synod meetings.

The central issue of the bishops in the communist-bloc countries is freedom to express their religion, said Cardinal Danneels.

Reports from those bishops' conferences "are less explicit" because of their situations, he added.

In the opening days of the synod, collegiality was a key issue of many speeches, although none of the speakers during the first two working days went as far as Archbishop Hermaniuk in asking for sweeping changes in the Church's decision-making apparatus.

Collegiality refers to the shared responsibility and authority in the Church of the pope and all the world's bishops.

Bishop James Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, head of the U.S. bishops' conference, asked for a strengthening of the impetus collegiality has given to national bishops' conferences. He favored a growing role for bishops' conferences in Church affairs.

Archbishop Denis Hurley of Durban, South Africa, said greater responsibility for Church matters should be exercised at the local level.

Retired Bishop John W. Gran of Oslo, Norway, asked for a greater local Church role in choosing bishops.

Regarding collegiality, Cardinals Danneels and Krol said at the press conference that it was an important theological issue, which involves finding a practical balance between the authority of the pope over the universal Church and the authority of the bishop in his own diocese.

"The bishop who rules his diocese rules not as a delegate or as a vicar of the pope, but by divine authority," said Cardinal Krol.

"Finding a balance requires sensitivity," he said.

Several delegates used the synod as a forum to condemn persecution of Catholics.

Cardinal Antoine Pierre Khoraiiche, patriarch of Lebanon's Maronite Catholics, said the situation of Christians in the Middle East is particularly grave because of persecutions. He cited Lebanon where Christian and Moslem-led militias have been fighting a bloody civil war since 1975.

Cardinal Myroslav Lubachivsky, chief archbishop of the world's Ukrainian Catholics, asked the synod not to ignore the "cruel realities" of religious persecution in the Soviet Union. For Ukrainian Catholics, the Second Vatican Council never really occurred, he said. In the Ukraine, he said, no Catholic bishop, priest or lay person is allowed to function religiously.

While the "bloody persecutions" of the post-World War II period have ended, he said, blatant denial of religious freedom is stronger than ever. This fact cannot be ignored in "diplomatic silence," he said.

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