



At St. Peter's Basilica, Pope John Paul II with four world leaders celebrates the opening Mass of the extraordinary Synod of Bishops. (NC photo)

Bishops call for more attention to families, rules on sacraments

By John Thavis

Vatican City (NC) — Several bishops addressing the 1985 extraordinary synod Nov. 27 said the Church should be more attentive to the pastoral problems of Catholics, which include the Church's prohibition on contraception.

Archbishop Karl Berg of Salzburg, Austria, speaking for the Austrian bishops' conference, said a deeper study is needed of the Church's birth control teaching "in the light of medical progress." He added that the Church should "think again" about the term "natural" in regard to birth control.

Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical "Humanae Vitae" (Of Human Life) prohibited Catholic couples from using contraception, but allowed for "natural" methods that rely on sexual abstinence during certain times of a woman's fertility cycle.

Archbishop Berg told National Catholic News Service after his speech that he was suggesting "possible modifications in this teaching could be studied, and should be studied."

He said pastoral problems have "greatly increased" in the area of marriage and the family and that the Church should stress greater pastoral formation among married couples.

"We must also think in terms of a more merciful approach to the divorced and remarried," he said. The archbishop said the Church should consider admitting Catholics in those situations to the sacraments after an appropriate "period of penance."

Church policy bars Catholics who divorce and remarry from participating in the sacraments.

Archbishop Thomas Winning of Glasgow, Scotland, said the Church should aim

particular pastoral attention at "those who have lost their faith, or live as though they have lost it." He said the Church should develop a "programmed strategy of spiritual renewal" that reaches out to fallen-away Catholics.

The same theme was taken up by Archbishop Gabino Diaz Merchan of Oviedo, Spain. He told the synod that the Church should carry on a "humble dialogue" with those who have drifted away.

He also suggested that young people get better instruction in the Second Vatican Council, that seminary texts have a more pastoral orientation and that national bishops' conferences be strengthened.

The Church should lead the way in respecting the role of women, Bishop Anthony Mayala of Musoma, Tanzania, told the synod. He added that a key problem facing the modern Church is dealing with diversity of local churches and cultures.

On one hand, he said, open theological disagreement on moral issues has confused the faithful, and so has diversity in pastoral practices. But he added that the "rigid application" of new liturgical norms has set back honest attempts at inculturation.

The synod, called by Pope John Paul II to examine the results of Vatican II, also heard from Archbishop James M. Hayes of Halifax, Nova Scotia, who spoke of joint Communion between Catholics and other Christians.

"We would like to see this synod or some similar group consider the full consequences of the formal recognition of baptism in other churches at Vatican II. Does it not open the way to certain rights and responsibilities, including the Eucharist?" said Archbishop Hayes, who is also vice president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Cardinal Krol asserts synod not effort to turn back clock

By Agostino Bono

Vatican City (NC) — The Nov. 24-Dec. 8 extraordinary Synod of Bishops is not an effort to turn back the Church clock to preconciliar days, Cardinal John Krol of Philadelphia, a synod official, said Nov. 25.

Nor is it an effort to determine whether the post-conciliar era has been positive or negative, he said at a press conference held jointly with Cardinal Godfried Danneels of Malines-Brussels, Belgium.

The aim is to learn how to better implement council teachings, they said.

Cardinal Krol is one of the three synod co-presidents. Cardinal Danneels is the recording secretary responsible for preparing the official reports of synod proceedings.

"Even from a juridical standpoint, there is no way that the synod can overturn the ecumenical council," said Cardinal Krol.

"We are seeking information from the world and suggestions on how to better implement" council teachings, he added.

Cardinal Danneels said collegiality and the role of national bishops' conferences is a main topic proposed for discussion by hierarchies from the developed countries of North America and Europe.

Some hierarchies requested a discussion of the role of women, he added.

But most of those requests came from the developed countries, said Cardinal Danneels, who prepared a summary for the synod delegates of the more than 100 presynod reports submitted by bishops' conferences.

These are less a priority for the Third World and communist-bloc hierarchies, he said.

"In Latin America the liberation of man and human rights are problems of greater intensity," he said.

In Africa and Asia the key issue is inculturation, he added.

Inculturation refers to the adaptation of Christianity to local culture and customs.

Cardinal Danneels said an African bishop once told him it was hard for him to understand why Christ is always depicted as a white man.

About 60 percent of the synod delegates came from the developing countries, said Cardinal Danneels.

The central issue of the hierarchies of the communist-bloc nations is freedom to express their religion, he added.

Reports from those bishops' conferences "are less explicit" because of their situations, said Cardinal Danneels. "How can they preach the Gospel except in martyrdom?"

Regarding collegiality, the two cardinals said the effort is to find a balance between papal authority over the universal Church and the authority of a 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.

The problem is not theological, but finding the practical relationship between the pope and the local bishop, said Cardinal Danneels.

"I don't believe we will find a solution before Christ comes back," said Cardinal Danneels.

Cardinal Krol called national bishops' conferences "useful and necessary pastoral instruments." Conferences have a collegial dimension, but not everything they do is, "strictly speaking, collegial because this refers to the relationship of the pope to all the bishops," he added. The primary purpose of conferences is pastoral, to handle issues at a national level or which go beyond the scope of a single diocese, Cardinal Krol said.

Regarding application of council teachings, Cardinal Krol said that over the past 20 years "implementation has exceeded the great hopes of many of the members of the council."

At the same time, there have been some problems because "change always brings some dust."

Post-conciliar problems include insufficient preparation for people to accept liturgical changes, and laxity on moral issues regarding sex, said Cardinal Danneels.

Both cardinals were asked what they thought of conflicting assessments of the post-conciliar Church offered by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and Bishop James Malone, president of the U.S. bishops' conference.

In a book published earlier this year, Cardinal Ratzinger said the Church has followed a course of self-destruction since Vatican II. Bishop Malone has said the Church is basically "on track."

The synod "is not a boxing match" between the two, said Cardinal Krol.

"Both views are valid, and both are necessary to carry on the role of the synod," he added.

"Two people are expressing judgments based on their experiences," he said.

"I don't expect the synod to canonize Cardinal Ratzinger or Bishop Malone. We don't make sinners either," said Cardinal Danneels.

Both cardinals said the question is not who is right, but what are the facts.

The aim of the synod is a "realistic interpretation of the world beginning with objective truth," said Cardinal Danneels.

"The important thing is, what did the council say," Cardinal Krol said. He said reading all the council documents is more important than trying to discover a "spirit of the council" or reading a few phrases out of context.

Synod Information

The Catholic University of America is offering free information over the phone to those interested in learning more about the extraordinary Synod of Bishops in Rome, which started Sunday, Nov. 24, and will continue until Sunday, Dec. 8.

Sources of information at the university include:

Monsignor John Tracy Ellis, professorial lecturer in Church history, (202)635-5640;

Father Ladislav Orsy, SJ, professor of canon law, (202)635-5492 or (202)635-5662;

Father Carl J. Peter, CUA professor of theology, (202)635-5658 or (202)635-5683.


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