

# Leaders must read 'new signs of times,' Third World bishops say

By Agostino Bono  
**Vatican City (NC)** — Church authorities must learn how to read the "new signs of the times" caused by the emergence of the Third World as the home of most Catholics, said bishops from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

"The greater majority of the Catholic Church lives outside Europe, outside the First World," said Archbishop Henry Sebastian D'Souza of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar, India, secretary of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.

"There are new signs of the times in the world today, particularly in Asia, as the axis of the world moves toward the Third World and toward the continents of the East," he said at a Nov. 31 press conference during the Nov. 24-Dec. 5 extraordinary synod of Bishops.

Also at the press conference were Cardinal Joseph Malula of Kinshasa, Zaire, synod co-president, and Bishop Dario Castrillon Hoyos of Panama, Colombia, secretary general of the Latin American Catholic Bishops' Council. All three were papally appointed delegates to the synod.

About 55 percent of the world's 840 million Catholics live in the developing countries of the Third World. About 60 percent of the 100 delegates attending the opening week of the synod were from the Third World.

Archbishop D'Souza said the Second Vatican Council helped Asian church leaders understand the signs of the times by its openness to non-Christian religions and by

liturgical reforms, which made it easier to adapt worship services to the local culture.

Asia "is the cradle of the great non-Christian religions of the world," he said.

"Vatican II allowed the church to be open to these treasures of the East," he added.

"We are evangelizing people not by trying only to bring them to the faith, but by, we hope, getting them to recognize the fruits within their faith," he said.

Archbishop D'Souza said this openness has caused the Catholic Church to be an effective social influence through cooperation on issues with people of other faiths.

"Catholics are small in number in Asia. We cannot make an impact on our own. We must work with others," he said.

There are 69 million Catholics in Asia, about 2.5 percent of the region's population.

Cardinal Malula said that "Africa is of growing importance on the world's chess board" and asked church authorities "to pay more attention to the problems of Africa."

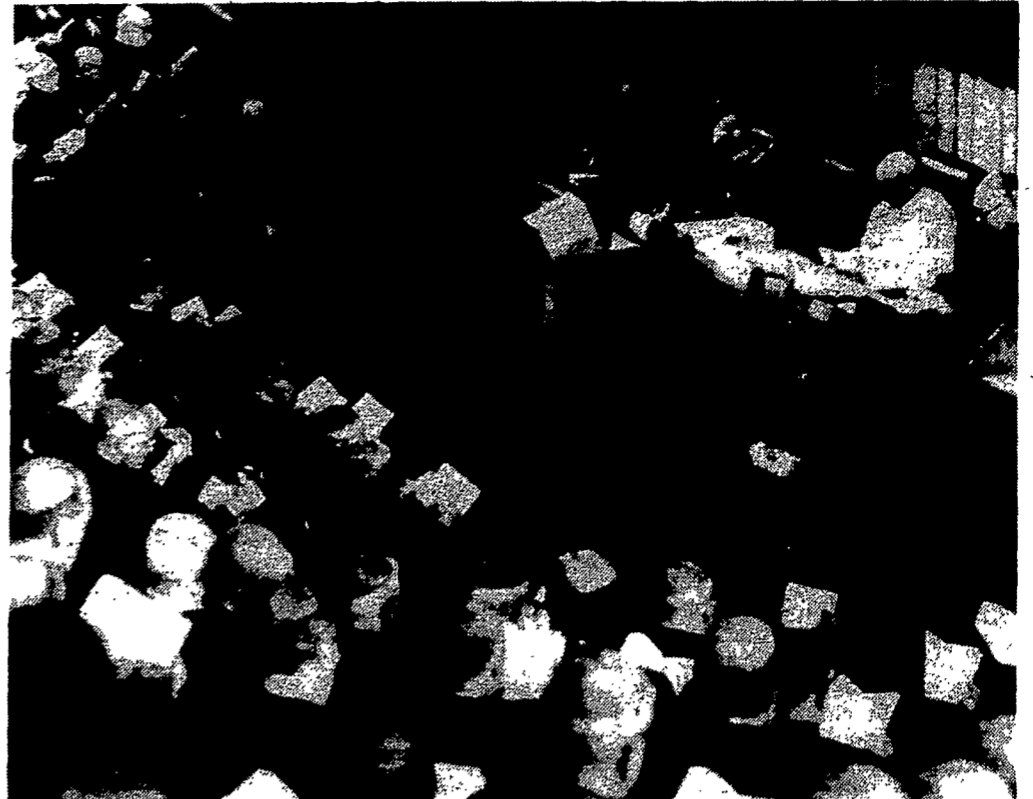
He cited inculturation, the adaptation of Christianity to local customs and cultures.

"African bishops are doing everything to bring the Curia's attention to inculturation. We should be doing more and more," he said.

Cardinal Malula said much has been done since Vatican II regarding inculturation and asked that the process continue.

"There is no obstacle now to having people baptized with a native name," he said.

There are 66 million Catholics in Africa, almost 13 percent of region's population.



In the Vatican Synod Hall, Pope John Paul II and bishops and cardinals from throughout the world are busy during a working session of the extraordinary synod. (NC photo)

Bishop Castrillon Hoyos said that since Vatican II, in Latin America the church has a growing awareness of the need to overcome

basic social problems of poverty and injustice.

## Bishop Malone urges greater role for national bishops' conferences

By John Thavis  
**Vatican City (NC)** — Bishop James Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, strongly defended collegiality among U.S. bishops and called for a greater role for national bishops' conferences in a Nov. 26 talk to the extraordinary Synod of Bishops.

He said expressions of collegiality in the United States are not merely pragmatic "gimmicks." They follow directly from the Second Vatican Council's teaching about the authority and role of bishops acting together, he said.

Actions taken by national bishops' conferences, he added, involve "no abdication of authority" by individual bishops, but instead help promote a sense of Church unity.

Some Church leaders have been critical of the growing role played by bishops' conferences since Second Vatican Council.

"The teaching of the Second Vatican Council on collegiality and the impetus which this teaching gave to episcopal conferences should be reinforced," Bishop Malone said.

He noted that the council spelled out the collegial authority of bishops when they act with the pope — for example, in an ecumenical council. He said collegiality can also be applied to bishops' conferences in "an analogous sense."

The council's decree on the role of bishops "spoke of an episcopal conference as a kind of council in which bishops jointly exercise their pastoral office," he said.

"Thus some extension of the term col-

legiality in the direction of episcopal conferences seems warranted," Bishop Malone said.

The Church should also reconsider the weight of teaching by bishops' conferences, he said.

"Whether, to what extent, and in what circumstances they may teach with authority" are questions that require "greater clarity," he said.

One of the strongest critics of the growing role of national bishops' conferences has

been Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In a book published this year, "The Ratzinger Report," he said they had no teaching authority, no theological basis and only a "practical, concrete function." He said the role of the individual bishop "risks being smothered" by the conferences.

Bishop Malone's comments about greater collegiality or shared authority were echoed by other synod speakers Nov. 26, sometimes in stronger terms.

## Bishop Malone denies trying to 'seize power' for bishops' conferences

By John Thavis  
**Rome (NC)** — Bishop James W. Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said Nov. 29 that he thinks bishops' conferences "may indeed teach with authority."

But he added that he was not trying to "seize power" for the conferences at the extraordinary Synod of Bishops.

The role and teaching authority of bishops' conferences is a complex theological issue that "is certainly not going to be settled here in the next week," Bishop Malone said. He spoke at a press conference on the sixth day of the two-week synod.

"Neither I nor anyone else," he said, "is spearheading a drive to seize power, for bishops or bishops' conferences." He said he saw the synod as a chance to begin clarifying the role of the conferences and the weight of

their teaching, such as in national pastoral documents.

"My own opinion is that bishops' conferences do have a teaching role, and may indeed teach with authority," Bishop Malone said. But he said the limits on such authority are unclear.

"I believe the synod is going extremely well," he said. "It's clear that the synod is insisting on the need for a return to Vatican II, on a closer study of its teachings" and on better efforts to put the teachings into practice, he said.

"That, in essence, is the necessary program for the church in the United States and elsewhere after the synod," he said.

Bishop Malone said that while he and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, had some differences about the post-conciliar church, they should not be

Bishop John W. Gran, head of the Scandinavian bishops' conference and retired bishop of Oslo, Norway, said the council's teaching on collegiality "has borne little fruit, compared with the expectations."

He said there was "a return to the mentality that diocesan bishops are representatives of Rome, rather than administrators with their own rights." Current emphasis on the Church's universality "unfortunately also brings signs of centralization," he said.

portrayed as "two political antagonists who are struggling over the same turf."

Cardinal Ratzinger, he said, had made a "rather downbeat evaluation" of the church since the council in a lengthy interview published as a book earlier this year. Bishop Malone said his own evaluation was "upbeat," but that both of them were looking at the same basic problems.

"Where we may differ is in interpretation or, more precisely, in tone," he said.

Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston said at the press conference that the synod should not be seen as a "Malone-Ratzinger tussle."

"I don't read Cardinal Ratzinger as being pessimistic at all. I think he's quite appropriately hopeful," Cardinal Law said. He added that while the synod was often portrayed in terms of "polarities," the experience in the synod hall was one of church unity.

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