

# Synod observers applaud ecumenism, seek continued dialogue

Vatican City (NC) — Here is the text of a statement on the extraordinary Synod of Bishops issued Dec. 3 by the 10 observers from Christian organizations in theological dialogue with the Catholic Church.

1. You have generously invited us, as representatives of churches and Christian world communions with whom the Roman Catholic Church is in active dialogue, to be observers at this synod, thereby renewing the experience of Vatican II. We want to thank you for the confidence you place in our churches. You have not seen us to be outsiders or rivals, and we have not felt ourselves to be so. You have received us as brothers in Christ through faith and baptism, though not yet in perfect communion. Your invitation is to be seen as a sign of the fellowship which has developed and continues to grow. Observers are not detached spectators: we are deeply engaged in your discussions. All Christian bodies face the need for reconciliation of diversity and unity, the testing of our moral judgment in face of modern scientific advances and the challenges of atheism and secularism.

2. We admire the fearless courage with which the synod looks into the future, especially in places where Christians are few, poor or persecuted. In listening to those who have spoken from such places we have heard echoes of our own situation too.

3. We have rejoiced to hear solid support for the work of the Second Vatican Council, with its ecclesiology and ecumenical dimensions. We are gladdened by reports of renewed liturgical life, of the renewed commitment to the Scriptures and of increasing lay participation in the life and witness of the church. We are very happy to note the reaffirmations of the Decree on Ecumenism, as well as of closely related themes such as collegiality and the shared responsibility, within an ordered unity, of episcopal conferences. These conferences and other collegial structures at the local and parochial level are significant for ecumenism in enhancing the possibilities of cooperation. The emphasis placed, both at Vatican II and in this synod, on communion ("koinonia") as a key to the understanding of the nature of

the church is important for ecumenism. This communion is created for us, not by us: it draws us to the Father in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

We also share the synod's concerns both for the primacy of repentance and the spiritual life, and for justice, peace and the poor. In all these concerns the Gospel of Christ speaks powerfully to us today.

4. The synod has made it very clear that ecumenism is an essential part of the way forward, and that it does not involve a betrayal of divine truth and faith. Those who have taken an active part in it know that it requires patience, attentive listening and much toil. There are bound to be moments of discouragement.

5. But we venture to make five affirmations:

1) At the heart of the movement toward unity lies the prayer of the Lord, that they all may be one. We are sustained by the countless prayers of the faithful, especially in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

2) We give thanks to God for the work in the last 25 years of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, through whose efforts the bilateral dialogues have begun and continued and through whom the Joint Working Group with the World Council of Churches has been established.

3) Such dialogue is of crucial importance, both at the level of expert theological commissions, and at the level of local and parish cooperation. Each spurs the other on. Each has something to learn from the other.

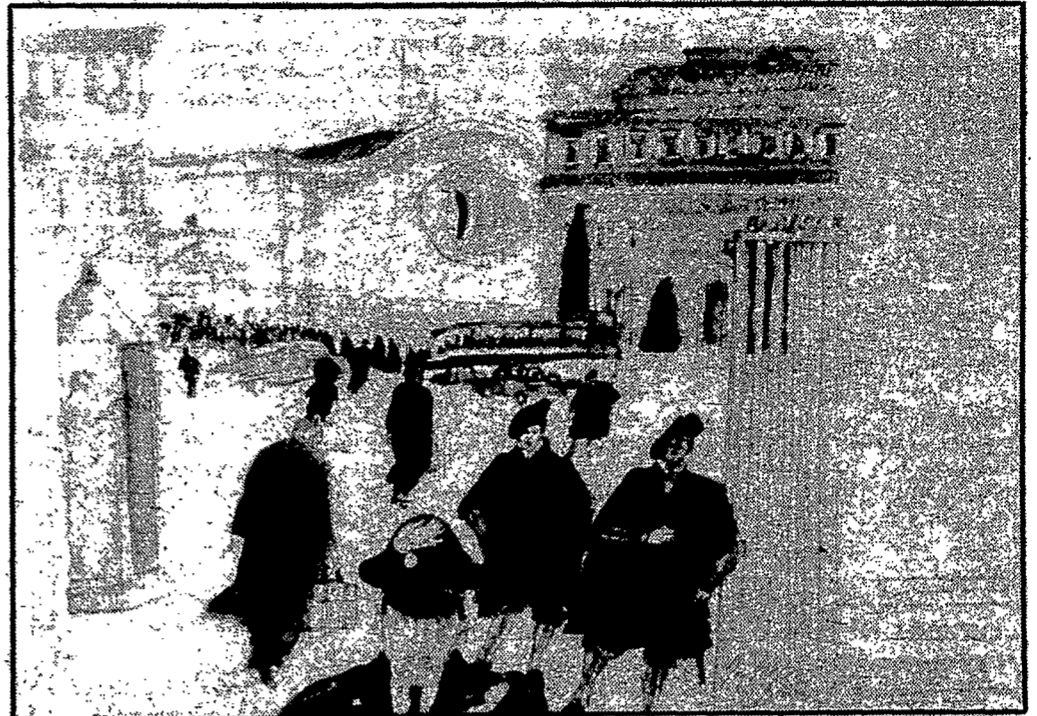
4) Notwithstanding doctrinal differences which still exist, some questions which were once divisive have come in time to be seen in a different perspective, not now as church-dividing questions. We all need to learn how to take account of these new insights and act upon them so that the divisions of the church may be healed, and also that new difficulties are not created.

5) Only part of our divisions has had theological causes. We represent:

(a) The pre-Chalcedonian churches of the East, isolated and vulnerable in an unsympathetic environment.

(b) The Orthodox churches which became separated from Rome at the time of the

with every nation and thus with each of you. Still, because it carries in its heart the love of Christ, dead and risen, the message of Vatican II presents with new vigor for our day the hope of the Gospel. Once again we repeat it. And through you we say it to all the men and women of our day, with humility but certitude: "We are not made for death but for life. We are not condemned to divisions and wars, but called to fraternity and peace. God did not create man for hate and distrust; rather, he is made to love God. He is made for God himself. Man responds to this vocation by renewing his heart. For mankind there is a path -- and we already see the signs of it -- which leads to a civilization of sharing, solidarity and love; to the only



Under heavy security by Vatican Swiss Guards and police, bishops stroll toward the Vatican audience hall for an 8 a.m. session of the extraordinary world synod of Bishops. (NC drawing by Franklin McMahon)

medieval division between East and West.

(c) The bodies separated from Rome at the Reformation, sometimes for political, sometimes for religious reasons.

(d) Those bodies which came into being as a result of reforming or renewal movements among Protestants in more recent times, not separated by formal anathemas but by separate development.

We are all in some way part of the wider ecumenical movement, and we recognize with gratitude the achievements of ecumenical instruments of cooperation such as the World Council of Churches with its Faith and Order Commission, and others, where the cooperation of the Roman Catholic Church is well-established.

6. Ecumenism, understood as directed towards the reconciliation of communions or churches rather than of individuals, is a civilization worthy of man. We propose to work with all of you toward the realization of this civilization of love, which is God's design for humanity as it awaits the coming of the Lord."

While fraternally encouraging you to travel this path we already direct our gaze toward the synod of 1987 on "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and the World, 20 Years After Vatican II." This synod concerns the whole church: bishops, priests, deacons, men and women Religious, the laity. It must also mark a decisive stage toward the reception of the grace of Vatican II on the part of all Catholics.

We invite you to prepare yourselves in your particular churches. In this way we will all live our Christian vocation and our

process and a growth. The churches we represent are at different points along the road to unity, and as observers we are not a homogeneous group. But the synod may seem better served by one report in the name of all 10 of us than by independent responses. What we have said in this report is agreed among us.

7. As we have listened to your discussions we have been reminded how much of fundamental importance we have in common. As we have relived the experience of the Second Vatican Council with you, the hope that the council gave the observers then has been rekindled among us. With you in synod we pray in God's presence that we may be granted the way to that unity and communion which are grounded in both truth and love; and that we may together share in the mystery of salvation.

of the council.

At the conclusion of this gathering the synod gives thanks, from the depths of our hearts, to God the Father, through his Son, in the Holy Spirit, for the great grace of this century which was the Second Vatican Council. It also gives thanks for the spiritual experience of this 20th-anniversary celebration. As he taught the apostles gathered with Mary in the Cenacle, so the Holy Spirit teaches us what he wishes to say to the church on her pilgrimage toward the third millennium.

May the Spirit grant that in this century, with the intercession of Mary, "the church be able to celebrate the mysteries of Christ for the salvation of the world."

## Pastoral statement

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also stem from man's incapacity to dominate his conquests when he closes in upon himself.

From Vatican II the church received with certitude a new light: The joy and hope which come from God can help mankind already on this Earth to overcome every sadness and anguish, if men lift their gaze to the heavenly city. We hope to be able to communicate to you what we ourselves have received from this synod.

During these days of meetings and of dialogue, we share even more intensely the burden of man's sufferings. Through each bishop we are directly united in solidarity

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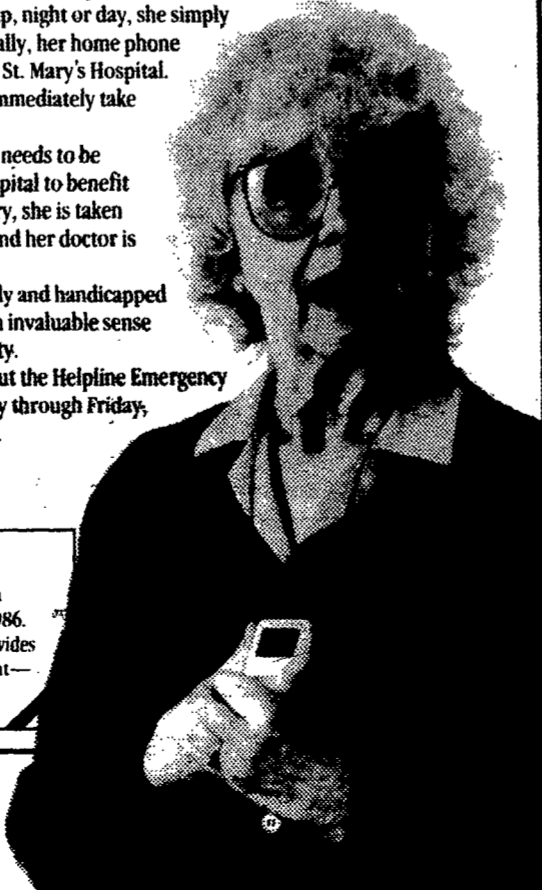
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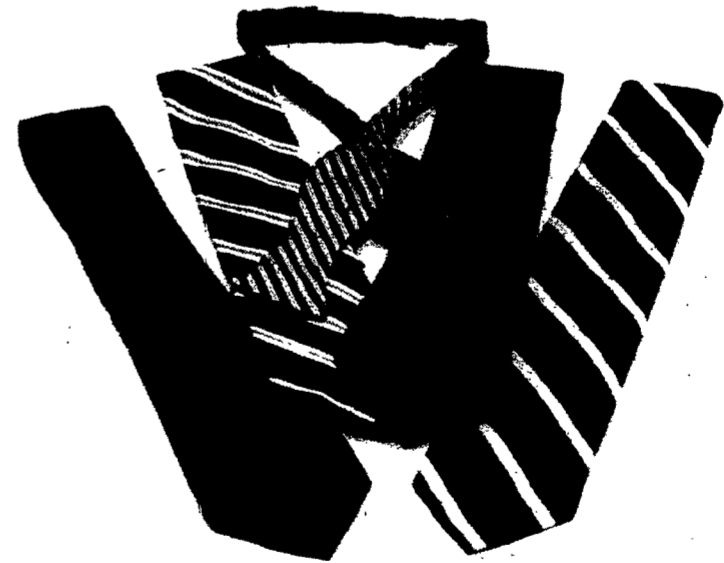
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