

Synod releases document on Church's celebration of the

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Vatican City (NC) — The following is the Vatican translation of the final document of the extraordinary Synod of Bishops. The document, titled "The Church, in the Word of God, Celebrates the Mysteries of Christ for the Salvation of the World," was released in Latin Dec. 9.

I. Central theme of this synod: Celebration, verification, promotion of the Second Vatican Council

1. Spiritual experience of this synod
At the conclusion of this second extraordinary synod we must first of all give great thanks to the benevolence of God, who deigned to lead the sovereign pontiff to convoke this synod. We are also grateful to the Holy Father John Paul II, who called us to this 20th anniversary celebration of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. The synod has been for us an occasion which has allowed us once again to experience communion in the one Spirit, in the one faith and hope, and in the one Catholic Church, as well as in the unanimous will to translate the council into the practice and the life of the Church. We likewise have participated in one another's joys and hopes, as well as in the sufferings and anguish too often undergone by the Church throughout the world.

2. Attainment of the synod's aim
The end for which this synod was convoked was the celebration, verification and promotion of Vatican Council II. With grateful hearts, we feel that we have truly obtained this fruit, with God's assistance. Unanimously we have celebrated the Second Vatican Council as a grace of God and a gift of the Holy Spirit, from which have come forth many spiritual fruits for the universal Church and the particular churches, as well as for the men of our time. Unanimously and joyfully we also verify that the council is a legitimate and valid expression and interpretation of the deposit of faith as it is found in sacred Scripture and in the living tradition of the Church. Therefore we are determined to progress further along the path indicated to us by the council. There has been full consensus among us regarding the need to further promote the knowledge and application of the council, both in its letter and in its spirit. In this way new progress will be achieved in the reception of the council, that is, in its spiritual interiorization and practical application.

3. Lights and shadows in the reception of the council
The large majority of the faithful received the Second Vatican Council with zeal; a few, here and there, showed resistance to it. There is no doubt, therefore, that the council was embraced with heartfelt adherence, because the Holy Spirit was prompting his Church to do so. Moreover, even outside the Catholic Church many people paid careful attention to the Second Vatican Council.

Nonetheless, although great fruits have been obtained from the council, we have at the same time recognized, with great sincerity, deficiencies and difficulties in the acceptance of the council. In truth, there certainly have also been shadows in the post-conciliar period, in part due to an incomplete understanding and application of the council, in part to other causes. However, in no way can it be affirmed that everything which took place after the council was caused by the council.

In a particular way, the question must be posed as to why, in the so-called "First World," following a doctrine of the Church which has been so extensively and profoundly explained, quite often a certain estrangement is manifested toward the Church, even though in this area of the world the fruits of the council abound. Instead, where the Church is oppressed by totalitarian ideologies or where the Church raises her voice against social injustices, she seems to be accepted in a more positive way. Yet it cannot be denied that even in such places not all the faithful fully and totally identify with the Church and her primary mission.

4. External and internal causes of the difficulties
In many areas of the world the Church lacks the material means and the personnel for carrying out her mission. To this must be added the fact that not infrequently the Church is forcibly impeded from exercising her mission. In the wealthy nations we see the constant growth of an ideology characterized by pride in technical advances and a certain immanentism that leads to the idolatry of material goods (so-called "consumerism"). From this can follow a certain blindness to spiritual realities and values. In addition, we

cannot deny the existence in society of forces capable of great influence which act with a certain hostile spirit towards the Church. All of these things manifest the work of the "Prince of this World" and of the "mystery of iniquity" even in our day.

Among the internal causes, there must be noted a partial and selective reading of the council, as well as a superficial interpretation of its doctrine in one sense or another. On the one hand, there have been disappointments because we have been too hesitant in the application of the true doctrine of the council. On the other hand, because of a partial reading of the council, a unilateral presentation of the Church as a purely institutional structure devoid of her mystery has been made. We are probably not immune from all responsibility for the fact that especially the young critically consider the Church a pure institution. Have we not perhaps favored this opinion in them by speaking too much of the renewal of the Church's external structures and too little of God and of Christ? From time to time there has also been a lack of the discernment of spirits, with the failure to correctly distinguish between a legitimate openness of the council to the world and the acceptance of a secularized world's mentality and order of values.

5. A deeper reception of the council
These and other deficiencies show the need for a deeper reception of the council. And this requires four successive phases: a deeper and more extensive knowledge of the council, its interior assimilation, its loving reaffirmation and its implementation. Only interior assimilation and practical implementation can make the conciliar documents alive and life-giving.

The theological interpretation of the conciliar doctrine must show attention to all the documents, in themselves and in their close interrelationship, in such a way that the integral meaning of the council's affirmations — often very complex — might be understood and expressed. Special attention must be paid to the four major constitutions of the council, which contain the interpretative key for the other decrees and declarations. It is not licit to separate the pastoral character from the doctrinal vigor of the documents. In the same way, it is not legitimate to separate the spirit and the letter of the council. Moreover, the council must be understood in continuity with the great tradition of the Church, and at the same time we must receive light from the council's own doctrine for today's Church and the men of our time. The Church is one and the same throughout all the councils.

6. Suggestions
It is suggested that a pastoral program be implemented in the particular churches for the years to come, having as its objective a new, more extensive and deeper knowledge and reception of the council. This can be attained above all through a new diffusion of the documents themselves, through the publication of studies that explain the documents and bring them closer to the understanding of the faithful. The conciliar doctrine must be proposed in a suitable and continued way by means of conferences and courses in the permanent formation of priests and seminarians, in the formation of men and women Religious, and also in the catechesis of adults. Diocesan synods and other ecclesial conferences can be very useful for the application of the council. The opportune use of the means of social communication (mass media) is recommended. For a correct understanding and implementation of the council's doctrine, great help will be had from the reading and the practical implementation of what is found in the various apostolic exhortations, which are, as it were, the fruit of the ordinary synods held beginning in 1969.

II. Particular themes of the synod

A. The mystery of the Church

1. Secularism and signs of a return to the sacred
The brief 20-year period that separates us from the conclusion of the council has brought with it accelerated changes in history. In this sense, the signs of our times do not exactly coincide, in some points, with those of the time of the council. From among these, special attention must be paid to the phenomenon of secularism. Without any doubt the council has affirmed the legitimate autonomy of temporal realities (cf. "Gaudium et Spes" 36 and elsewhere). In this sense, a correctly understood secularization must be admitted. But we are speaking of something totally different from the secularism that consists of an autonomist vision of man and the world, one which leaves aside the dimension of mystery, indeed neglects and denies it. This immanent-

tism is a reduction of the integral vision of man, a reduction which leads not to his true liberation but to a new idolatry, to the slavery of ideologies, to life in reductive and often oppressive structures of this world.

Despite secularism, signs of a return to the sacred also exist. Today, in fact, there are signs of a new hunger and thirst for the transcendent and divine. In order to favor this return to the sacred and to overcome secularism we must open the way to the dimension of the "divine" or of mystery and offer the preambles of faith to mankind today. Because, as the council affirms, man is a question to himself and only God can give him the full and ultimate answer (cf. "Gaudium et Spes" 21). Does not the spread of sects perhaps lead us to ask whether we have sometimes failed to sufficiently manifest the sense of the sacred?

2. The mystery of God through Jesus in the Holy Spirit

The primary mission of the Church, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, is to preach and to witness to the good and joyful news of the election; the mercy and the charity of God which manifest themselves in salvation history, which through Jesus Christ reach their culmination in the fullness of time, and which communicate and offer salvation to man by virtue of the Holy Spirit. Christ is the light of humanity. The Church, proclaiming the Gospel, must see to it that this light clearly shines out from her countenance (cf. "Lumen Gentium"). The Church makes herself more credible if she speaks less of herself and ever more preaches Christ crucified (cf. 1 Cor 2:2) and witnesses with her own life. In this way the Church is sacrament, that is, sign and instrument of communion with God and also of communion and reconciliation of men with one another. The message of the Church, as described in the Second Vatican Council, is Trinitarian and Christocentric.

Because Jesus Christ is the son of God and the new Adam, he at once manifests the mystery of God and the mystery of man and his exalted vocation (cf. "Gaudium et Spes" 22). The son of God became man in order to make men children of God. Through this familiarity with God, man is raised to a most high dignity. Therefore, when the Church preaches Christ she announces salvation to mankind.

3. The mystery of the Church

The whole importance of the Church derives from her connection with Christ. The council has described the Church in diverse ways: as the people of God, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the temple of the

Holy Spirit, the family of God. These descriptions of the Church complete one another and must be understood in the light of the mystery of Christ or of the Church in Christ. We cannot replace a false unilateral vision of the Church as purely hierarchical with a new sociological conception which is also unilateral. Jesus Christ is ever present in His Church and lives in her as risen. From the Church's connection with Christ we clearly understand the eschatological character of the Church herself (cf. "Lumen Gentium," 7). In this way the pilgrim Church on earth is the Messianic people (cf. "LG," 9) that already anticipates in itself its future reality as a new creation. Yet she remains a holy Church that has sinners in her midst, that must ever be purified, and that moves, amidst the persecutions of this world and the consolations of God, toward the future kingdom (cf. "LG" 8). In this sense there are always present within the Church the mystery of the cross and the mystery of the Resurrection.

4. The universal vocation to holiness

Because the Church in Christ is mystery, she must be considered a sign and instrument of holiness. For this reason the council proclaimed the vocation of all the faithful to holiness (cf. "Lumen Gentium" 5). The call to holiness is an invitation to an intimate conversion of heart and to participation in the life of God, one and triune, and this signifies and surpasses the realization of man's every desire. In our day above all, when so many people feel an interior void and spiritual crisis, the Church must preserve and energetically promote the sense of penance, prayer, adoration, sacrifice, self-giving, charity and justice.

Men and women saints have always been founts and organs of renewal in the most difficult circumstances throughout the Church's history. Today we have tremendous need of saints, for whom we must assiduously implore God. The institutes of consecrated life through the profession of the evangelical

Synod delegates go 'on record' on del

By Father Kevin McKenna, Vice-Chancellor, Diocese of Rochester

December 7, 1965, witnessed the conclusion in Rome of an historic "Extraordinary Synod" of Bishops of the Catholic Church, which had been convened by Pope John Paul II to "exchange and deepen experiences and information concerning the application of the council (Second Vatican) at the level of the universal Church and the particular churches." (John Paul II, "Origins," Vol. 14, No. 24, p. 150)

The 163 bishops who gathered for the two-week assembly shared with their fellow delegates their personal observations and testimonies concerning the successes and failures of their particular churches in applying the Council's teachings, and the practical implementation of what is found in the various apostolic exhortations, which are, as it were, the fruit of the ordinary synods held beginning in 1969.

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As Father Avery Dulles recently pointed out in discussing the English language, many theologians and other officials have complained that the council's documents have become "a source of misunderstanding and disagreement." ("Catholic World," July 12, 1965)

As Father Dulles also pointed out from the United States, "The council's documents are being read in a very different way than they were intended to be read. The council's documents are being read in a way that is very different from the way in which they were intended to be read. The council's documents are being read in a way that is very different from the way in which they were intended to be read."