

Synod report

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exercise their pastoral service ("Christus Dominus," 38; Code of Canon Law, 447).

In their manner of proceeding, episcopal conferences must keep in mind the good of the Church, that is, the service of unity and the inalienable responsibility of each bishop in relation to the universal Church and the particular church.

6. Participation and coresponsibility in the Church

Because the Church is communion, there must be participation and coresponsibility at all of her levels. This general principle must be understood in diverse ways in diverse areas.

Between a bishop and his presbyterate there exists a relationship founded on the sacrament of orders. Thus priests in a certain way make the bishop present in the individual local assemblies of the faithful, and assume and exercise in part in their daily work his tasks and his solicitude ("Lumen Gentium," 28). Consequently, friendly relations and full trust must exist between bishops and their priests.

Bishops feel themselves linked in gratitude to their priests, who in the post-conciliar period have played a great part in implementing the council ("Optatum Totius," 1) and they wish to be close with all their strength to their priests and to give them help and support in their often difficult work, especially in parishes.

Finally, the spirit of collaboration with deacons and between the bishop and the Religious who are active in his particular church must be favored. In addition, from Vatican II has positively come a new style of collaboration between the laity and clerics. The spirit of willingness with which many lay persons put themselves at the service of the Church is to be numbered among the best fruits of the council. In this is experienced the fact that we are all the Church.

In recent years there has often been discussion regarding the vocation and the mission of women. May the Church do its utmost so that they might be able to express, in the service of the Church, their own gifts, and to play a greater part in the various fields of the Church's apostolate (cf. "Apostolicam Actuositatem," 9). May pastors gratefully accept and promote the collaboration of women in ecclesial activity.

The council calls the young the hope of the Church (Closing Messages, To Youth 2). This extraordinary synod addressed young people with special love and great confidence and expects great things from their generous dedication. It exhorts them that they might embrace and dynamically continue the heritage of the council, assuming their role in the mission of the Church. Because the Church is communion, the new "basic communities," if they truly live in unity with the Church, are a true expression of communion and a means for the construction of a more profound communion. They are thus cause for great hope for the life of the Church ("Evangelii Nuntiandi," 58).

7. Ecumenical communion
Basing itself on the ecclesiology of communion, the Catholic Church at the time of the Second Vatican Council fully assumed her ecumenical responsibility. After these 20 years we can affirm that ecumenism has inscribed itself deeply and indelibly in the consciousness of the Church. We bishops ardently desire that the incomplete communion already existing with the non-Catholic churches and communities might, with the grace of God, come to the point of full communion.

Ecumenical dialogue must be carried out in diverse ways at the diverse levels of the Church, whether by the universal Church, the particular churches or concrete local organizations. The dialogue must be spiritual and theological. The ecumenical movement is particularly favored by mutual prayer. Dialogue is authentic and fruitful if it presents the truth with love and fidelity toward the Church. In this way ecumenical dialogue causes the Church to be seen more clearly as a sacrament of unity. The communion between Catholics and other Christians, although incomplete, summons everyone to collaboration in the numerous fields and thus makes possible a certain common witness to the salvific love of God for the world, so in need of salvation.

8. Suggestions
a) Because the new Code of Canon Law, happily promulgated, is of great help to the Latin Church in the application of the council, the desire is expressed that the Eastern-rite codification be completed as quickly as possible.

b) Since the episcopal conferences are so useful, indeed necessary in the present-day pastoral work of the Church, it is hoped that the study of their theological "status," and above all the problem of their doctrinal authority, might be made explicit in a deeper and more extensive way, keeping in mind what is written in the conciliar decree "Christus Dominus" No. 38 and in the Code of Canon Law, Can. 447 and 753.

c) It is recommended that a study be made to examine whether the principle of subsidiarity in use in human society can be applied to the Church, and to what degree and in what sense such an application can and should be made (cf. Pius XII, AAS 38, 1946, p.144).

D. The mission of the Church in the world

1. Importance of the constitution "Gaudium et Spes"

The Church as communion is a sacrament for the salvation of the world. Therefore the authorities in the Church have been placed there by Christ for the salvation of the world. In this context we affirm the great importance and timeliness of the pastoral constitution "Gaudium et Spes." At the same time, however, we perceive that the signs of our time are in part different from those of the time of the council, with greater problems and anguish. Today, in fact, everywhere in the world we witness an increase in hunger, oppression, injustice and war, sufferings, terrorism and other forms of violence of every sort. This requires a new and more profound theological reflection in order to interpret these signs in the light of the Gospel.

2. Theology of the cross

It seems to us that in the present-day difficulties God wishes to teach us more deeply the value, the importance and the centrality of the cross of Jesus Christ. Therefore the relationship between human history and salvation history is to be explained in the light of the paschal mystery. Certainly the theology of the cross does not at all exclude the theology of the creation and incarnation, but, as is clear, it presupposes it. When we Christians speak of the cross, we do not deserve to be labeled pessimists, but we rather found ourselves upon the realism of Christian hope.

3. "Aggiornamento"

From this paschal perspective, which affirms the unity of the cross and the Resurrection, the true and false meaning of so-called "aggiornamento" is discovered. An easy accommodation that could lead to the secularization of the Church is to be excluded. Also excluded is an immobile closing in upon itself of the community of the faithful. Affirmed instead is a missionary openness for the integral salvation of the world. Through this, all truly human values not only are accepted but energetically defended: the dignity of the human person, fundamental human rights, peace, freedom from oppression, poverty and injustice. But integral salvation is obtained only if these human realities are purified and further elevated through grace to human familiarity with God, through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

4. Inculturation

From this perspective we also find the theological principle for the problem of inculturation. Because the Church is communion, which joins diversity and unity in being present throughout the world, it takes from every culture all that it encounters of positive value. Yet inculturation is different from a simple external adaptation, because it means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity in the various human cultures.

The separation of Gospel and culture was defined by Paul VI as "the drama of our age, as it was for other ages. It is therefore necessary to make every effort toward a generous evangelization of culture, more precisely of cultures. They must be regenerated through the encounter with the Good News. But this encounter will not be brought about if the Good News is not proclaimed" ("Evangelii Nuntiandi," 20).

5. Dialogue with non-Christian religions and non-believers

The Second Vatican Council affirmed that the Catholic Church refuses nothing of what is true and holy in non-Christian religions. Indeed, it exhorted Catholics to recognize, preserve and promote all the good spiritual and moral — as well as socio-cultural — values that they find in their midst: all of this with prudence and charity, through dialogue and collaboration with the faithful of other religions, giving testimony to the Christian faith and life ("Nostra Aetate," 2). The council also affirmed that God does not deny the possibility of salvation to anyone of good will ("Lumen Gentium," 16). The concrete possibilities of dialogue in the various regions depend on many concrete circumstances. All

of this is also true for dialogue with non-believers. Dialogue must not be opposed to mission. Authentic dialogue tends to bring the human person to open up and communicate his interiority to the one with whom he is speaking. Moreover, all Christians have received from Christ the mission to make all people disciples of Christ (Mt 28:18). In this sense God can use the dialogue between Christians and non-Christians and between Christians and non-believers as a pathway for communicating the fullness of grace.

6. Preferential option for the poor and human promotion

Following the Second Vatican Council the Church became more aware of her mission in the service of the poor, the oppressed and the outcast. In this preferential option, which must not be understood as exclusive, the true spirit of the Gospel shines forth. Jesus Christ declared the poor blessed (Mt 5:3, Lk 6:20) and he himself wished to be poor for us (2 Cor 8:9).

Besides material poverty there is the lack of liberty and of spiritual goods, which in some way may be considered forms of poverty, and it is particularly grave when religious liberty is suppressed by force.

The Church must prophetically denounce every form of poverty and oppression, and everywhere defend and promote the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person. This is above all the case where it is a question of defending human life from the time of its very beginning, of protecting it from aggressors in every circumstance and of effectively promoting it in every respect.

The synod expresses its communion with those brothers and sisters who suffer persecution because of their faith and who suffer for the promotion of justice. The synod lifts up prayers to God for them.

The salvific mission of the Church in relation to the world must be understood as an integral whole. Though it is spiritual, the mission of the Church involves human promotion even in its temporal aspects. For this reason the mission of the Church cannot be reduced to a monism, no matter how the latter is understood. In this mission there is certainly a clear distinction — but not a separation — between the natural and the supernatural aspects. This duality is not a dualism. It is thus necessary to put aside the false and useless

oppositions between, for example, the Church's spiritual mission and "diaconia" for the world.

7. Suggestions

Since the world is in continual evolution, it is necessary to analyze continually the signs of the times, in order that the Gospel proclamation might be more clearly heard and that the activity of the Church for the salvation of the world might become more intense and efficacious. In this context we ought once again to consider what is, and how to put into practice:

a) The theology of the cross and the paschal mystery in the preaching, the sacraments and the life of the church of our day.

b) The theory and practice of inculturation, as well as the dialogue with non-Christian religions and with non-believers.

c) The preferential option for the poor.

d) The social doctrine of the Church as it relates to human promotion in ever-new situations.

At the conclusion of this gathering the synod, from the depths of our hearts, gives thanks to God the Father, through his Son, in the Holy Spirit for the greatest grace of this century, that is, the Second Vatican Council. It likewise gives thanks to God for the spiritual experience of this 20th anniversary celebration, which has filled our hearts with joy and hope, even in the midst of the problems and sufferings of our day. As with the apostles in the Cenacle with Mary, the Holy Spirit has suggested to us what he wishes to say to the Church in her journey towards the third millennium.


We bishops, all of us, together with Peter and under his guidance, have strived to comprehend more deeply the Second Vatican Council and to implement it concretely in the Church. That has been our objective during this synod. We have celebrated and verified the council, and we commit ourselves to its promotion. The message of the Second Vatican Council has already been welcomed with great accord by the whole Church, and it remains the "Magna Carta" for the future.

Finally, may there come in our day that "new Pentecost" of which Pope John XXIII had already spoken and which we, with all of the faithful, await from the Holy Spirit. May the Spirit, through the intercession of Mary, mother of the Church, ensure that, in these last days of our century, "the Church in the world of God might celebrate the mysteries of Christ for the salvation of the world."

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