

Bishops see chances, challenges in Europe

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Evangelizing Europe requires ecumenical cooperation, sharing resources and facing up to the fact that the end of communism did not mark the end of challenges to Christianity on the continent, said members of the special Synod of Bishops on Europe.

Some 120 members of the synod took advantage of the eight minutes allotted for individual speeches Nov. 29-Dec. 6 before breaking into small groups to discuss a proposed statement to be issued Dec. 14, at the end of the synod.

The speeches were summarized for synod members Dec. 7 by Cardinal Camillo Ruini, papal vicar of Rome and recording secretary of the synod.

Cardinal Ruini said many speakers cautioned against an "excessive optimism after the fall of the communist regime in Eastern Europe."

Bishops from former communist countries told the synod of ethnic and ecumenical tensions, a lack of resources for training priests and laity, and psychological and moral wounds left by generations of totalitarian rule.

Ukrainian-rite Bishop Sofron Dmyterko of Stanislaviv said Dec. 6 that the Catholic-Orthodox tensions in Eastern Europe — cited by several bishops, Vatican officials and an Orthodox "fraternal delegate" to the synod — are not surprising.

"Intolerance is a residue Marxist ideology has left in the minds of its subjects," he said. "To deal with this evil we need a lengthy spiritual Christian therapy and a purely human dialogue."

People on both sides of the old Iron Curtain feel an emptiness that can be expressed as "a thirst for religion," but the vacuum leads many to search for fulfillment through materialism, Cardinal Ruini said.

Belgian Cardinal Godfried Danneels told the synod Dec. 4 that European Christians are marked by a "crude religiosity," a superficial church membership that lacks real influence in a Christian's daily life.

In some ways the collapse of communism in the East and the consumer cultures of the West have led to a widespread belief in freedom as an absolute value, the summary said. Such values as respect for life and love of neighbor are not influencing the exercise of that freedom, it said.

In its evangelization efforts, the summary said, the church must teach

people what true freedom means.

Getting to the specifics of "the new evangelization of Europe," the summary said the aim is not to preach a "new Gospel," nor simply a message of justice and peace. "It is necessary to announce the person of Christ."

In his Dec. 2 speech to the synod, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, said evangelization is the biggest task facing the church, but that God is not getting enough emphasis in church programs.

"The church speaks too much about herself, polishing her own structures,

authority, its treatment of divorced and remarried Catholics, and the lack of consultation among the laity when appointing bishops.

Several bishops, most of them from Eastern Europe, said they looked forward to the publication of the universal catechism being written by a Vatican-appointed commission.

As Archbishop Istvan Seregely of Eger, Hungary, put it: Catholics want the catechism so they will have "sound Catholic theology" and "not a collection of opinions."

Cardinal Ruini's summary also said evangelization should reach the cul-

sential in a church which is not "international, but supernatural," the summary said.

Bishops from Eastern Europe asked for Western assistance in building churches, printing books and training priests. Western bishops said their people could learn from the strength of faith that kept Catholicism alive despite communist repression.

Other forms of also sharing were called for.

"This synod must turn to tangible things. It must be a synod of visible communion" with the poorest in Europe, said Portuguese Bishop Antonio Marcelino of Veiro.

Cardinal Cahal Daly of Armagh, Northern Ireland, said one of the greatest obstacles to evangelization in Europe is the widening gap between rich and poor individuals, regions and countries.

The "conspicuously luxurious lifestyle" of some — side by side with the misery of millions — is scandalous and morally intolerable, he said.

The practical benefits and moral requirements of Christian unity were emphasized repeatedly in the synod, by Catholic members and by the 10 Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant leaders participating as fraternal delegates.

The absence of five Orthodox churches invited by the pope to participate in the synod showed serious challenges remain to Christian unity on the continent.

The Orthodox churches of Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Greece declined the invitations, citing Catholic-Orthodox disputes over property and claiming that the Catholic Church is engaged in extensive efforts to convert Orthodox believers in traditionally Orthodox territories.

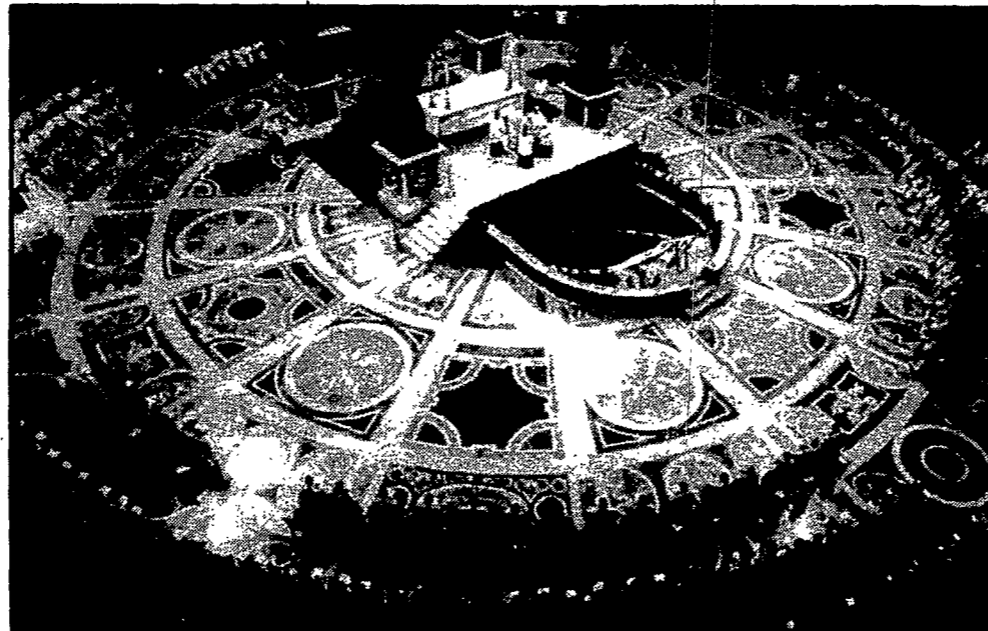
The charges were denied by several Catholic bishops and Vatican officials.

The 10 fraternal delegates who attended the synod spoke frankly of the new ecumenical tensions, but reaffirmed their church's commitments to dialogue.

Cardinal Ruini summed up the speeches as saying, "even if we have not yet reached a true unity, we need to give the world a strong witness of truth and fraternal Christian charity."

The summary also emphasized dialogue with Jews and other non-Christian believers.

The specific mention of the Jews recognizes their contribution to European culture and the "shared roots" of Judaism and Christianity, the summary said.



AP/Wide World Photos

European bishops gathered at St. Peter's Basilica Nov. 28 to open their two-week synod. Pope John Paul II convened the synod of the continent's bishops to chart the church's course in post-communist Europe.

with the consequence that God doesn't shine through enough," he said.

Other synod members speaking the same day said men and women today are "hungry for God," but are not attracted by abstract church statements or by competition between churches.

"We all talk too much like doctors of the law. We need to rediscover the message of evangelical simplicity," said Archbishop Joseph Duval of Rouen, France. "We need to give witness to unity and peace — that's much better than words."

Auxiliary Bishop Norbert Werbs of Schwerin, Germany, said Dec. 3 that effective evangelization requires the church to continually ask itself if it is being faithful to the spirit of the Gospel and the New Testament proscription against burdening believers with unnecessary laws.

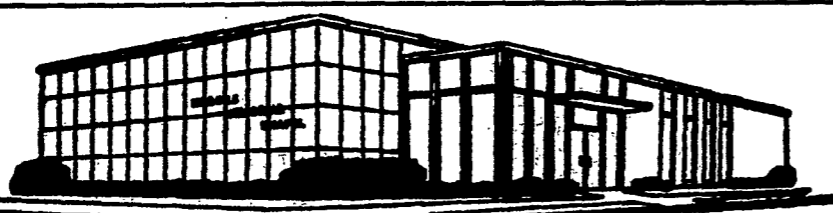
He said the church should review its ban on artificial birth control, its exclusive reliance on men for positions of

structures of Europe. The starting point is individual conversion, but Catholic laity must use their faith and their talents in the media, in politics and other fields to bring Christian values to European cultures.

Byzantine-rite Bishop Jan Hirka of Presov, Czechoslovakia, said the collapse of communism marked an end to the experiment of building a world without God. But now, he warned, "there's the totalitarianism of the dollar," which entrenches poverty. The church needs to bring a more Christian spirit to economic and political spheres, he said.

When Pope John Paul II called for the synod in the spring of 1990, he said it would be an opportunity for bishops from Eastern and Western Europe to explain the experiences of their churches, offer help where possible and ask for assistance where needed.

"Communication and an exchange of gifts" between local churches is es-



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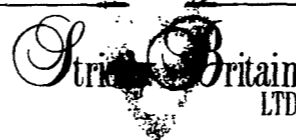
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