

Statements, rhythmic liturgy mark African synod

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The special Synod of Bishops on Africa closed a month of celebration, speech-making and pastoral debate with the presentation of two important documents and a rhythmic liturgy in St. Peter's Basilica.

Pope John Paul II, in the hospital with a broken thigh bone, pronounced the April 10-May 8 synod a success. Comments from many of the 173 participating African bishops indicated that they, too, were happy with the results.

"This synod gave expression to genuine African thoughts. We hope it will be supported and publicized, because the African church has come to stay," said Nigerian Bishop Brian Usanga of Calabar.

The closing Mass was presided over by Nigerian Cardinal Francis Arinze. Like the synod's opening liturgy, it was enlivened by African drums and swaying dance among the basilica's marble halls.

In a sermon read by Cardinal Arinze, the pope said the synod illustrated the maturity of Africa's young and energetic local churches. "Now we await the right moment to transfer its fruits to your continent," he said. The pope planned to travel personally to Africa to lead the sec-

ond, "celebratory" phase of the assembly, probably sometime in 1995.

The pontiff, who was forced to miss the last 10 days of the assembly after he fell in his Vatican apartment, met with synod leaders in his hospital room May 6 and recorded for them a message that was played after the closing Mass.

"The Redeemer is knocking at Africa's door. Welcome him, Africa. Let him walk along all the paths of your culture, in the life of your ancient populations," he said.

The synod's final week focused on a public message and on 64 propositions to be given to the pope as the basis for his post-synodal exhortation. The documents explored church policies while speaking forcefully on African issues of peace and justice.

"On the eve of the 21st century when our identity is being crushed in the mortar of a merciless chain of events, the fundamental need is for prophets to arise and speak in the name of the God of hope for the creation of a new identity," said the 16-page message issued May 6.

The first proposition asked for a "new and urgent evangelization of African men and women," who were described as oppressed by wars, disoriented by religious sects, manipulated by foreign media and victimized by outside ideologies.

What emerged from the message and the propositions were general positions and some specific proposals on key topics of synodal debate:

• **Economic justice.** The synod, citing unjust trade terms and unjust pricing systems, asked for substantial if not total remission of the foreign debt that "humiliates our nations."

• **War and weapons.** Africa was described as "bleeding and burning in many places," with ongoing wars in Sudan, Rwanda, Angola, Liberia, Somalia and elsewhere. Speaking in the name of Africa's millions of refugees, synod fathers urged U.N. intervention to establish peace. It called the large-scale sale of weapons to Africa a "scandal."

• **Women.** The message said the alienation felt by many African women demonstrates a "structure of sin" engulfing African societies. It said women need quality formation not only to prepare for family roles but also to open "all the social careers from which traditional and modern society tend to exclude her."

One of the propositions said it was imperative that women be included in various levels of decision-making in the church and that the church establish ministries for women. Each bishops' conference must champion the rights of women in areas such as widowhood, brideprice, pregnancy and single mothers, it said.

• **Inculturation.** The propositions recommended that local churches change parts of the liturgical celebration — provided essential elements are not altered — in order to increase the understanding and participation by the faithful.

Citing the problem of Catholic cou-

ples excluded from the sacraments because they went through traditional African marriage forms that are not acceptable to the church, the synod recommended creation of a commission on African marriage that would include married couples among its members.

• **Family.** The synod's message denounced the preparatory document of a U.N. population conference scheduled for Cairo this September, saying the text attempts to impose abortion and an immoral lifestyle upon the whole world.

"We all condemn this individualistic and permissive culture which liberalizes abortion and makes the death of the child simply a matter for the decision of the mother," it said.

• **Politics.** The synod's final documents criticized corruption and "lust for power" among African leaders, as well as the "idolatry of ethnicity" that has led to recent bloody wars. It said lay Christians must be better motivated to influence economic and political policies, and to help consolidate democratic reforms on the continent.

The synod, along with the pope, issued repeated calls for an end to ethnic violence in Rwanda, where tens of thousands were killed in April and May. It hailed the first free elections in South Africa as a source of joy.

• **Dialogue with Muslims.** A controversial topic on the synod floor, it became the subject of debate and amendments to the propositions, according to bishops. The synod ended up encouraging dialogue with all Muslims of good will, but warning against forms of militant Islamic fundamentalism.



AP/Wide World Photos

Nelson Mandela raises a toast to his supporters in Johannesburg Monday, May 2, 1994, shortly after giving his victory speech.

Mandela attributes democracy to support of religious leaders

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (CNS) — South African President Nelson Mandela said it was thanks to the support of religious leaders that citizens were able to vote for the government of their choice and were ready for the "great task" of building a new country.

For 46 years, South Africans had lived under apartheid, "one of the most brutal forms of racial oppression," and many were unable to see the country liberated because of that brutality, Mandela told about 5,000 people at a May 8 thanksgiving service for peaceful elections.

The church was "one force which during the height of the repression never forgot that we were behind bars," said Mandela, jailed 27 years for anti-apartheid activities before his release Feb. 11, 1990.

It was "one force which even then was truly nonracial," Mandela told the congregation and church leaders, including

retired Archbishop Denis Hurley of Durban and Archbishop George Daniel of Pretoria. "Every Sunday we (political prisoners) were visited by priests ... they made us realize that however difficult the situation was, one day we would return," Mandela said.

Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu had congregation members waving their arms and saying, "We are the rainbow people of God; we are free, all of us, black and white together."

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference said "the generous conceding of defeat" by outgoing South African President Frederik W. de Klerk and the "equally magnanimous (victory) speech" by Mandela May 2 "have set an example for all South Africans to reach beyond themselves and extend a hand of friendship and cooperation to all others, regardless of their political affiliations..."

Cardinal presents translation of catechism to African synod

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger presented the English translation of the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" to the African synod May 4 and said the long delay in publication was caused by questions of content and style.

In a speech to the synod, Cardinal Ratzinger, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, thanked U.S. and English bishops' conferences for helping prepare a draft translation. That draft was revised in 1993-94 by the Vatican commission for the catechism, which Cardinal Ratzinger also heads. The revisions were based on concern that all translations remain faithful to the content of the original French text approved by Pope John Paul II, the cardinal said.

The Vatican also wanted to make sure the translation used a "style proper to the magisterial nature of the text," said the cardinal.

Catholic News Service obtained a copy of the English catechism distributed to synod participants from English-speaking countries. The 736-page text was published jointly by the Vatican and Paulines Publications in Nairobi, Kenya.

The final English version is basically a word-for-word translation of the French text approved in late 1992.

Unlike the draft submitted by U.S. and English experts, the catechism does not use inclusive, or gender-neutral, language.

The catechism's style of literal translation of the French also differs from the submitted draft, which had sought to better convey meaning through a more varied phraseology.

In translating Scripture, the catechism relies heavily on the Revised Standard Version of the Bible; the draft submitted by U.S. and English bishops had relied primarily on a more modern text, the New Revised Standard Version approved by the Vatican in 1992.

The English text officially will be presented to the pope by English-speaking bishops in a ceremony at the Vatican May 27, Cardinal Ratzinger said. The catechism is due out in the United States and Canada in June.

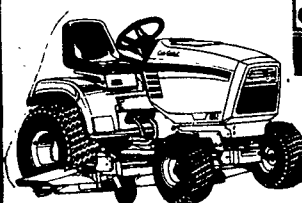


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