

WORLD & NATION

Bishops call for more local powers

By John Norton
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — A week into a meeting of the world's bishops, the issue of shared church governance emerged as the dominant theme, with nearly two dozen bishops advocating more decision-making power at local levels.

A number of bishops at the Sept. 30-Oct. 27 synod also focused on outreach to groups of suffering people around the globe and the need for church leaders to be prophets of social justice. Several bishops cited the U.N. embargo of Iraq, the situation of Palestinians and extreme poverty as injustices at the root of Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the United States.

Archbishop Vincent M. Connessao of Delhi, India, said the attacks drew the world's attention but "there is another kind of subtle, hidden, little-spoken-of terrorism. I mean the terrorism of an unjust economic system which grinds to death thousands of people every day."

Other topics expected to receive more treatment included emphasis on bishops' personal holiness and availability to their flocks, continuing formation for bishops, and practical issues like retirement age.

The synod participants, including Pope John Paul II and nearly 250 selected bishops from more than 110 countries, looked ahead to another week of speech-making before breaking into 12 discussion groups. They were to prepare a list of proposals to give to the pope and a general message to the world.

The Vatican released summaries of the bishops' speeches, and reporters were briefed on their content.

About two dozen synod fathers — roughly 18 percent of the 136 who spoke the first week — directly raised the issue of church governance, with several questioning whether today's model achieves the co-responsibility they said was envisioned by the Second Vatican Council.

"We must realize that all the measures taken (at the council) have not yet found their meaning and their objective," said Bishop Norbert Brunner of Sion, Switzerland.

More than half a dozen prelates, including two leading U.S. churchmen, suggested further study of greater decision-making authority for bishops' conferences.

Most bishops who addressed the issue did not propose specific areas in which local churches might be given more responsibility, but simply called for greater Vatican "trust and confidence."

One exception was Archbishop Henry S. D'Souza of Calcutta, India, who called for liturgical translations and texts that are "free and idiomatic" to better suit local cultures.

"Translations from a dead language Latin ... though seen as a vehicle of orthodoxy, fail to respond satisfactorily to the character and style of living Indian and tribal languages," he said.



Max Rossi/CNS

Bishops from around the world meet in the first session of the monthlong synod Oct. 1 at the Vatican.

Bishop Patrick J. Dunn of Auckland, New Zealand, proposed that heads of bishops' conferences meet "every year or two with brother bishops of the Roman Curia" to discuss pressing pastoral challenges. His examples included use of general absolution, admitting divorced and remarried Catholics to the Eucharist, and the validity of Anglican orders.

German Cardinal Friedrich Wetter of Munich-Freising said regional churches should have a greater role in the selection of new bishops in their territory. But several bishops warned that conferences must not encroach on the work or authority of individual bishops.

Archbishop Hector Miguel Cabrejos Vidarte of Trujillo, vice president of the Peruvian bishops' conference, said such regional bodies should support the pastoral work of their members, "avoiding that the pastors are turned into spokesmen for a group of experts who work in the shadow of the episcopal conference."

Several bishops criticized the synod process, and some advocated modeling it more closely on the synods of Eastern churches. Unlike its Western counterpart, which has a purely advisory role, Eastern synods make concrete decisions for their churches.

Several Vatican cardinals also supported forms of decentralization. Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, prefect of the bishops' congregation, suggested that heads of major archdioceses "play a more incisive role" in coordinating joint ventures — like seminaries and public speaking events — with bishops in neighboring dioceses.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Vatican's doctrinal congregation, among the last speakers of the week, drew the loudest and most sustained applause, according to the synod's English-language press officer.

"If bishops have the courage to judge and

decide with authority in this battle for the Gospel, the so-desired decentralization happens automatically," he said.

The cardinal said the world had a thirst to know "not our church problems but the fire that Jesus brought to earth. Only if we have become Christ's contemporaries and this fire is alight within us will the Gospel announced touch the hearts of our contemporaries."

"The central problem of our time is the emptying of the historical figure of Jesus Christ," he said.

Cardinal Ratzinger cited a synod speech earlier in the week by German Cardinal Joachim Meisner of Cologne, who urged bishops to take a stronger approach toward governance and correcting doctrinal error.

Also drawing applause, Cardinal Meisner said Catholic leaders were partly to blame for a current "crisis of faith" facing the church because they had adopted a laissez-faire approach to governance.

Conference organizers move back registration

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The National Catholic Youth Conference planned for December in Indianapolis will go ahead, despite changed security situations facing travelers and apprehension about the risk of further terrorist attacks.

And though registration for next summer's World Youth Day in Toronto is just beginning, organizers say they don't expect the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks to deter many people from attending events there either.

Pope John Paul II has attended every World Youth Day since he initiated the meetings in the mid-1980s.

The U.S. youth conference, scheduled for Dec. 6-9 with the theme of "Hope at the Crossroads," was expected to draw 26,000 teens and adult chaperones to Indianapolis.

In a letter to participants posted on the Web site of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, the organization's executive director, Bob McCarty, said it's appropriate in the wake of a national tragedy for young people to make a stand for hope, justice and peace.

"Young people need to do something when confronted with overwhelming tragedy," his letter said. "NCYC is an opportunity for our young people to celebrate faith and stand together as a visible sign of hope."

Registration was originally due Sept. 30, but Maureen Gross, associate director of the federation, said the deadline was extended for about 30 dioceses until Oct. 12 because of the impact the terrorist attacks had on decision-making and travel.

Consequently, planners won't know until mid-October whether they'll have the expected number of participants.



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