

## THE SYNOD OF AMERICA: REFLECTIONS OF A NONPARTICIPANT

MICHAEL A. FAHEY, S.J.

*[Editor's note: A special synod of Catholic bishops from the Western hemisphere was held at the Vatican in 1997 to explore ways of effectively fostering the Church's mission. The author describes its preparatory stages, the meeting's format, various points of convergence and contention, and the anticipated long-range impact. What, he asks, can we learn from the synod about the Church's globalization and contextualization in the Americas?]*

LATE LAST YEAR, from November 16 to December 12, 1997, to be exact, nearly 300 representatives of the Catholic Church mostly from this hemisphere—from Alaska to the tip of Patagonia, a region the Vatican prefers to call “America” but map-makers designate as North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean—gathered for a meeting, or a “synod” to use the canonical name, in order to reflect on the theme “Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: The Way to Conversion, Communion, and Solidarity in America.” Though I was not a participant in the synod, I have studied its preparatory stage and agenda and have read the speeches (or summaries of those not published in their entirety) delivered over a total of some 50 hours. I have also culled from international Catholic newspapers, weeklies, and journals, various comments and preliminary assessments of the synod’s achievements. I look forward to John Paul II’s expected apostolic exhortation, his analysis of the bishops’ recommendations that is to be published in December 1998.

In general, the “Synod of America” did not stimulate much media interest. Coverage in the secular press was spotty, and even in the Catholic press it was reported on erratically. In the judgment of Vatican-watcher Thomas Reese, the synod “did not excite the imagination, inspire enthusiasm, or encourage hope.”<sup>1</sup> But as esoteric as this synod may seem to have been, as byzantine its structure, it is highly useful

MICHAEL A. FAHEY, S.J., is the Emmett Doerr Professor of Catholic Systematic Theology at Marquette University, Milwaukee. He completed his Dr. theol. degree at the University of Tübingen. He specializes in ecclesiology and ecumenism, especially with the churches of the Christian East. He is currently preparing a monograph on the Roman papacy as perceived by the Orthodox Church.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas J. Reese, S.J., “The Synod Points Out Needs,” *America* 178 (January 3, 1998) 3–5, at 5.

for Catholic and non-Catholic alike to know something about this event. It reveals Catholicism's growing awareness of global solidarity, the Church's shift away from Eurocentrism, as well as its commitment to what is being called the "new evangelization," and the need to contextualize theology. The synod sheds light on a number of unfinished tasks: communication in our Church, the need to share the burdens of social and cultural challenges related to global economy, national indebtedness, and corruption in government. It also suggests new and expanded roles for the Catholic university in relating religion to the common weal. Catholics face a busy agenda for the 21st century as they plan globally and try to overcome tensions among groups in the Church whose prudential judgments about priorities and policies are remarkably different. Those called to serve as bishops will need to listen to the people of God in their varied countries and to discern the charisms bestowed on individuals by the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of the Church. In all our striking diversity, how can we work more effectively together?

Where did this modern institution called "synod" come from? During the four sessions of the Second Vatican Council, which every Catholic bishop who could travel attended, a group of participants, excited by that learning and teaching opportunity for the Church in the modern world, urged Pope Paul VI to set up a kind of ongoing mini-council that would meet at regular intervals. Those participants had experienced what theologian Karl Rahner concluded in a now-famous address at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that "the Second Vatican Council is in a rudimentary form still groping for identity, the church's first official self-actualization *as a world church*"; it was an event greater than any one single person could grasp.<sup>2</sup>

To keep up the momentum of the council it was decided to restore the venerable institution of synods. The word "synod" is a loan word from Greek meaning "heading down the road together," a kind of ecclesiastical walkathon. Synods have encompassed a variety of "get togethers" since the first formal gathering in council of the apostles in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15). Over the first centuries there developed both city-wide and provincial get-togethers often convened at Eastertide, gatherings of bishops and others in regional, national, general, and eventually ecumenical synods or councils to address doctrinal and pastoral concerns. The Eastern churches continue to place major importance on synods; they feel that synodality should exist at every level of church life, and that the Western church, because it has surrendered most of the work of synods to the pope rather than to a patriarch and

<sup>2</sup> Karl Rahner, S.J., "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 40 (1979) 716-27, at 717.

his permanent synod, has achieved an exaggerated centralism. Reflection on synods has become an important theme for theologians.<sup>3</sup>

The International Bishops' Synod was established as an instrument of administration in the Catholic Church; its birth is recorded in the document called *Apostolica sollicitudo* of Pope Paul VI (September 15, 1965) published during the fourth session of Vatican II.<sup>4</sup> It was instituted to maintain the spirit of Vatican II and to express what had come to be called collegiality (the teaching that all bishops of the Church have to assume a share of responsibility for the Church worldwide). Future synods would be advisory and not deliberative. The pope reserved the right to call a synod, to choose the topic to be discussed, to prepare the agenda. According to its official charter a synod's purpose was "to encourage close union and valued assistance between the Sovereign Pontiff and the bishops of the entire world; to insure that direct and real information is provided on questions and situations touching upon the internal action of the Church and its necessary activity in the world of today; to facilitate agreement on essential points of doctrine and on methods of procedure in the life of the Church." Paul VI said at that time that "this synod, . . . like all human institutions, can be still more perfected with the passage of time. . . . By its very nature it is the task of the Synod of Bishops to inform and give advice." But he also went on to say, "It may also have deliberative [that is to say "decision-making"] power, when such power is conferred on it by the Sovereign Pontiff" (art. 1).

<sup>3</sup> On the theology of synods, see the following studies representative of a variety of viewpoints, listed in chronological order: Vincenzo Fogliolo, "Il Synodus Episcoporum: Origine, natura, struttura, compiti," in *La collegialità episcopale per il futuro della chiesa*, ed. Vincenzo Fagiola and Gino Concetti (Florence: Vallecchi, 1969) 3-43; Vincenzo Ferrara, "Il Sinodo dei Vescovi tra ipotesi e realtà: Natura teologica giuridica del Sinodo dei Vescovi dottrina nel Magistero di Paolo VI e nella dottrina conciliare," *Apolinaris* 42 (1969) 491-556; Pasquale Colella, "Collegialità episcopale e Sinodo dei Vescovi," in *La chiesa dopo il Concilio: Atti del Congresso internazionale di diritto canonico, Roma, 14-19 gennaio 1970*, ed. Juan Arias (Milan: A. Giuffrè, 1972) 2/1.335-50; Hervé Legrand, "Synodes et conseils de l'après-concile: Quelques enjeux ecclésiologiques," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 98 (1976) 193-216; Yves M.-J. Congar, "Synode épiscopal, primauté et collegialité épiscopale," in *Ministères et communion ecclésiale* (Paris: Cerf, 1981) 187-227; Gustave Thils, "Le Synode d'Evêques: Image de l'unité dans l'Eglise' ou de la 'Communione qu'est l'Eglise,'" *Revue théologique de Louvain* 18 (1987) 212-21, also published in *Primauté et infaillibilité du Pontife Romain à Vatican I et autres études d'ecclésiologie* (Leuven: University Press, 1989) 293-304; Alexandre Faivre, "Les premiers Chrétiens interpellent le Synode des Evêques," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 63 (1989) 17-46; John G. Johnson, "Subsidiarity and the Synod of Bishops," *Jurist* 50 (1990) 488-523; Ludwig Kaufmann, "Synods of Bishops: Neither Concilium nor Synodus," in *Collegiality Put to the Test*, ed. J. Provost and K. Wulf, *Concilium* 1990/4 (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990) 67-78; Georges Chantraine, S.J., "Synodalité, expression du sacerdoce commun et du sacerdoce ministériel?" *Nouvelle revue théologique* 113 (1991) 340-62.

<sup>4</sup> AAS 57 (1965) 775-80. The English text is in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbott (New York: America Press, 1966) 720-24. See also the new *Code of Canon Law*, canons 342 to 348.

In the founding document the pope envisaged three kinds of synods: general (later called ordinary), that would meet approximately every three years; extraordinary, that would mark some significant event or address some crisis; and special, meetings of a particular nation or region of the world. Since the close of Vatican II there have been eleven ordinary or extraordinary synods.<sup>5</sup> Each synod has had a theme such as penance, family life, evangelization, catechetics, religious orders of women and men, the training of priests. One tangible fruit of a recent synod has been the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Before each synod the Vatican offices prepare a first draft (*lineamenta*) on the topic circulated several years in advance; then, after discussion and suggested emendations by the national hierarchies, a second draft or "working paper" (*instrumentum laboris*) sets the concrete agenda shortly before the synod meeting.

Unfortunately, despite high hopes for their success, results of synods have been negligible. Each new synod attracts less and less attention; the structure of their sessions has become unwieldy, they have become rituals with little practical impact on the life of the Church. In the last 30 years the institution has not been notable as a wellspring of new ideas or strategies.

<sup>5</sup> See *Catholic Almanac 1998* (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1998) 143–44. The dates and topics of these eleven international synods are as follows: (1) First Ordinary (reform of canon law, dangerous doctrines and atheism, seminaries, mixed marriages, liturgical reforms), 29 September to 29 October 1967; (2) First Extraordinary (collegiality, episcopal conferences, etc.), 11 to 28 October 1969; (3) Second Ordinary (ministerial priesthood, justice in the world), 30 September to 6 November 1971; (4) Third Ordinary (evangelization in the modern world), 27 September to 26 October 1974; (5) Fourth Ordinary (catechesis in our time with special reference to children and youth), 30 September to 29 October 1977; (6) Fifth Ordinary (the Christian family in the modern world), 26 September to 25 October 1980; (7) Sixth Ordinary (reconciliation and penance in the mission of the Church), 29 September to 29 October 1983; (8) Second Extraordinary (anniversary of Vatican II), 24 November to 8 December 1985; (9) Seventh Ordinary (vocation and mission of the laity), 1 to 30 October 1987; (10) Eighth Ordinary (formation of priests in the circumstances of the present day) 30 September to 28 October 1990; (11) Ninth Ordinary (the consecrated life and its role in the Church and in the world), 2 to 29 October 1994. To my knowledge only the Italian publishing house of La Civiltà Cattolica has published complete documentation of the eleven synods under the supervision of the late Giovanni Caprile, S.J.; see, e.g., his 767-page account of the 1990 synod, *Il Sinodo dei vescovi: Ottava assemblea generale ordinaria (30 settembre—27 ottobre 1990)*, ed. Giovanni Caprile, S.J. (Rome: Civiltà Cattolica, 1991). In addition to these worldwide synods there have been several "special" synods for national or regional areas: for Holland (1980), for Europe (1991), for Africa (1994), for Lebanon (1995), and the ones just completed for "America" and Asia. Before the millennium there will be special synods for Oceania (fall 1998) and for Europe (1999). Then on the eve of the millennium, there will be another international synod for the whole church on the theme; "The Bishop: Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World" (fall 1999). A useful account of the 1994 African synod has been published: *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, comp. and ed. Africa Faith & Justice Network under Maura Browne, S.N.D. (Maryknoll N.Y.: Orbis, 1996).

## OTHER EXPRESSIONS OF COLLEGIALITY

However, collegiality is alive and prospering through other forms. Internationally several other expressions of collegiality have had a high success rate and promise to impact church life not only regionally but worldwide. Each nation or group of nations has established episcopal conferences. Three such groupings of bishops close to home are: in the U.S., the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB); to the North, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB); to the South, the Consejo episcopal latinoamericano (CELAM). Occasionally tension emerges between these episcopal conferences and the Vatican administrative offices, especially the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith which has spoken in a way that seems to downplay the magisterial value of the episcopal conferences.

A remarkable collection of published statements from the international community of bishops has recently been gathered by the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. This is an impressive listing and analysis (the "Fribourg catalogue") of the published statements or pastoral letters of episcopal conferences worldwide published from 1891 to 1991.<sup>6</sup> Episcopal conferences' statements on social issues have been produced in all corners of the globe. European conferences produced 37% of them, Latin America 29%, Africa 14%, North America 10%, Asia 7%, and Oceania 3%.

The insights of these episcopal conferences show that local churches are becoming increasingly aware of their prophetic voice for raising consciousness and effecting change. Gradually non-European churches are taking the lead in formulating Catholic social teaching on a wide variety of issues such as poverty, education, unemployment, work, human rights, property, government corruption, migration, and family life. One of the common challenges facing bishops and their advisers is the question about their right to speak out on social matters, especially on complex social-justice issues. Internationally they have come to the common conclusion that their own role is to raise questions and to sensitize people while inviting others with special training and skills to propose concrete solutions. They do not consider their recommendations on economic questions as having the same moral authority as their affirmations about universal moral principles, let alone the official teaching of the Church. Nor are the bishops naïve in presuming that just because they have published texts they have effected intellectual or moral conversion in their readers.

One of the outstanding examples of this kind of collegial activity in

<sup>6</sup> *Economie et développement: Répertoire des documents épiscopaux des cinq continents (1891–1991)*, Etudes d'éthique chrétienne 69, ed. Roger Berthouzot et al. (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires; Paris: Cerf, 1997); on this "Fribourg catalogue" see Terence McGoldrick, "Episcopal Conferences Worldwide on Catholic Social Teaching," *TS* 59 (1998) 22–50.

the U.S. was the production by the NCCB in 1986 under the chairmanship of Milwaukee's Archbishop Rembert Weakland of the much-hailed pastoral statement *Economic Justice for All*.<sup>7</sup> What has been applauded worldwide was the process of preparing its various drafts. That process involved slow and deliberate consultation, hearings involving experts from a spectrum of political backgrounds, and the circulation of early drafts with opportunities for others to respond and to fine-tune the emerging text. As we shall see, this painstaking process achieved better results than the rather hurried and superficial treatment of drafts and speeches for the Synod of America.

The pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All* and other similar texts produced in Africa, Asia, and Latin America continue a tradition initiated especially in papal encyclicals going back to the end of the last century.<sup>8</sup> The Roman Catholic Church, its bishops, and its religious orders have become more active in promoting justice in social structures and in political and economic life. The year 1991 marked the 100th anniversary of the publication of Pope Leo XII's first major encyclical on social questions, *Rerum novarum*, further enhanced by Pius XI's 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*. Often the work of the popes and bishops was further popularized by individual activists, such as John Augustine Ryan (1869–1945), also known as "Msgr. New Dealer" (he gave the benediction at FDR's second and fourth inauguration), who worked for minimum-wage law for women in Wisconsin and Minnesota before becoming a professor at the Catholic University of America.<sup>9</sup>

John Paul II, especially through his encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987), has promoted the notion of "solidarity," the virtue that recognizes the economic, cultural, political, and religious interdependence among individuals and nations, aware that we are all really responsible for all as images of God and one in Christ.

The national episcopal conferences have done more than simply publish documents. The NCCB, for instance, has also performed valuable service through various committees such as the U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Church in Latin America. The Secretariat for Latin America was authorized in 1995 to carry out major research regarding the relationship of the Church in the U.S. with the Church in Latin America in connection with the 35th anniversary of the founding of the conference's Latin American office. The project was ultimately located at the University of Notre Dame, under the general coordination of Robert S. Pelton, C.S.C., and Rodney Ganey of the Laboratory for So-

<sup>7</sup> *Economic Justice for All*, text in *Origins* 16 (Nov. 27, 1986) 409–56. For reflections on the process and the text from the vantage point of its tenth anniversary, see "A Decade after 'Economic Justice for All': Continuing Principles, Changing Context, New Challenges," *Origins* 25 (November 23, 1995) 389–93.

<sup>8</sup> See David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, ed., *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992) 395–436.

<sup>9</sup> See especially John Augustine Ryan, *A Living Wage: Its Ethical and Economic Aspects* (New York: Macmillan, 1906).

cial Research at Notre Dame. Other collaborators, to name just a few: from the University of Notre Dame, Regina Cole and Jay Dolan; from the Woodstock Theological Center, Gaspar LoBiondo S.J.; Marcos McGrath (Archbishop Emeritus of Panama), and Philip Murnion. They chose Mary McGlone, C.S.J., of Avila College, Kansas City, a historian and theologian with missionary experience in Peru, to write up the research in book form.<sup>10</sup> Hence when the American bishops went to the Synod of America they were able to draw upon the work of the Secretariat for Latin America as well as notable missionary activities south of the border such as the work of the Society of St. James of the Boston Archdiocese.

#### CELAM

The Latin American counterpart to the NCCB is the Consejo episcopal latinoamericano (CELAM) which first met in 1955 at Rio de Janeiro under the leadership of Manuel Larraín and Dom Helder Camara, retired archbishop of Recife in Brazil. The second meeting was held after the close of Vatican II in 1968, at Medellín, Colombia; the third in 1979 at Puebla, Mexico; and most recently, the fourth meeting took place in 1992, held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.<sup>11</sup> After a high point at Medellín, at which the Latin American bishops applied the council's teaching on "The Church in the Modern World" to its own context, CELAM became much more cautious, distancing itself from various forms of liberation theologies, appointing more traditionalist leaders, responding to voiced criticisms of CELAM by the Con-

<sup>10</sup> *Sharing Faith across the Hemisphere*, ed. Mary M. McGlone, for the NCCB Committee on the Church in Latin America (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, Washington: NCCB, 1997). For a global overview, see *World Catholicism in Transition*, ed. Thomas M. Gannon, S.J. (New York: Macmillan, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> Four meetings of CELAM have occurred to date. The first CELAM was in 1955, in Rio de Janeiro. The second CELAM meeting in 1968, in Medellín, Colombia. Its acts were published as *Conferencia general del episcopado latinoamericano* (Bogotá, Colombia: Secretariado General del CELAM, 1970), English edition: *Church in the Present Day Transformation in Latin America*, 2 vols. (Bogotá: CELAM, 1970). This meeting popularized the notion of preferential option for the poor, calling for a radically innovating global transformation. Under new presidency a gradual shift in focus for CELAM is noticeable by the third meeting of CELAM in 1979, at Puebla, Mexico. *Documentos de Puebla* (Madrid: PPC, 1979), English texts are available in *Puebla and Beyond*, ed. John Eagleson and Philip Scharper (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979). The shift from Medellín to Puebla resulted in part from the new head of CELAM, Alfonso López Trujillo, who introduced other emphases, see Michael Fleet, "Neo-Conservatism in Latin America," *Neo-Conservatism: Social and Religious Phenomenon*, ed. Gregory Baum, *Concilium* 141 (New York: Seabury, 1981) 56-62. Some have noted a shift now from stress on oppression to secularization (arguably more a European problem than one of Latin America). This is reflected in the fourth and most recent CELAM meeting in 1992, in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, see *New Evangelization, Human Development, Christian Culture*, Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, October 12-28, 1992 (Washington: NCCB Secretariat of the Committee for the Church in Latin America, 1993), see also *Santo Domingo and Beyond, CELAM IV*, ed. Alfred T. Hennelly, S.J. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993).

gregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Pope John Paul II attended the meetings first in Puebla and then in Santo Domingo where he proposed on October 12, 1992 "an even broader exercise of episcopal collegiality," which of course was the nucleus of the idea behind the Synod of America. He repeated his challenge in 1994 in his statement on the forthcoming millennium, *Tertio millennio adveniente* (November 10, 1994). Some Vatican observers feared that this was an attempt from the outside to influence CELAM and indirectly the Caribbean and North America. By convoking the Synod of America, however, the pope wished to encourage the creative voices in the churches of Canada, the U.S., Latin America, and the Caribbean to communicate with one another more effectively. Hence his proposal for a Synod of America that would prepare for the millennium and also revitalize the Church as a dynamic force in the work of a new evangelization.<sup>12</sup>

### THE SYNOD

The theme for the Synod of America was spelled out as "Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: The Way to Conversion, Communion, and Solidarity in America." It was meant to promote a new evangelization throughout the whole hemisphere, to increase solidarity among the diverse churches and illuminate the problems of justice, and to study international economic cooperation between the American nations in order to highlight the massive inequalities between South and North.

Let me comment on the Synod of America in four sections: the preparatory stage, the delegate-selection process, the actual day-to-day structure of the synod, and finally the follow-up stage. If I seem to stress problems rather than successes, it is in the hope that synods may be more successful in the future.

#### *Preparatory Stage*

As with ordinary or extraordinary synods this special synod had a preparatory first draft (*lineamenta*), an outline of topics followed by questions, but it was released only 15 months before the beginning,

<sup>12</sup> Leonardo Boff, *New Evangelization: Good News to the Poor* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991); *The New Catholic Evangelization*, ed. Kenneth Boyack (New York: Paulist, 1992); *1492-1992, the Voice of the Victims*, ed. Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, *Concilium* 1990/6 (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990); *The Church at the Service of the Family*, ed. Anthony J. Mastroeni (Steubenville, Ohio: Franciscan University, 1993 [contains keynote address, "The Family at the Center of the New Evangelization," by Alfonso Cardinal López Trujillo]; *Catholicity and the New Evangelization*, ed. Anthony J. Mastroeni (s.l.: Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, 1994); *John Paul II and the New Evangelization: How You Can Bring the Good News to Others*, ed. Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995); *The Hispanic Presence in the New Evangelization in the United States*, ed. National Conference of Catholic Bishops [bilingual ed.] (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1996).

and prepared by a council of 16 bishops appointed in June 1995.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the *lineamenta* for the African synod had been released four years before its synod met, and after a long consultation with experts and the faithful. Several factors seem to explain the rush this time: the determination to have all this work completed (synods for America, Asia, Oceania, and Europe) before the millennium, and especially before any possible reduction of activity due to deterioration of the pope's health.

The *lineamenta* of the Synod of America contains some 20,000 words. Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino shared the view held by some that its presupposition was not in keeping with the best of Latin American theology. Here historical reality is not seen as a "sign of the times" in the theological sense. The trio "see, judge, act" of the Belgian Young Catholic Workers (JOC) has become "judge, see, act." A prejudged theology seems to reflect on the world, then to reach a judgment on specific actions. Some in the Church of Peru judged that there seemed to be a return to a view in which the path to salvation is individual and ahistorical; injustice becomes a problem of individuals, not of groups or social classes.<sup>14</sup>

In introducing its initial working paper, the General Secretary of the Synod, Cardinal Jan Scotte, wrote that "the whole church in America is invited to participate: diocesan and religious priests, women and men religious, lay men and women, seminaries and faculties of theology, pastoral councils, Catholic movements and groups, parish communities and all church organizations."<sup>15</sup> In fact these groups were never invited to respond to the draft as such, but only to 16 questions appended to the provisional text. There was very little consultation of the faithful at this stage, except in some Canadian dioceses.

The faithful, especially theologians, were invited too late to participate in a meaningful way. Many in the Church had become somewhat skeptical about the usefulness of a formal event orchestrated from a distance. They had concluded that synods, with the possible exception of the 1985 extraordinary synod marking the 20th anniversary of Vatican II's closure, had failed to fulfill high expectations. Some theologians with whom I talked argued that, since the final synod document is now written by the pope as a "postsynodal apostolic exhortation" and not by the synod participants, the effectiveness of synods has now been diminished. Theologians sensitized to issues of inculturation and contextualization may well have felt a sense of powerlessness as they tried to envisage how the Church in the Western hemisphere could pursue

<sup>13</sup> *Origins* 26 (August 15, 1996) 145–64.

<sup>14</sup> On this question, see Gary MacEoin, "American Synod: Roman Agenda," *LADOC* [Lima, Peru] 28, no. 2 (1997) 1–5; see also Raul Rosales, "The Panamerican Synod within the Neoliberal Context," *LADOC* [Lima] 28, no. 2 (1997) 6–8; Victor Codina, "Contribution to the Synod of the Americas," *LADOC* [Lima] 28, no. 3 (Jan./Feb. 1998) 1–6.

<sup>15</sup> *Origins* 26 (August 15, 1996) 147.

a common agenda within such a short time. Given also the level of suspicion in high places for forms of liberation theology, agreement on priorities and strategies was bound to be difficult to achieve.

Speaking at the June 1997 meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America in Minneapolis, Bishop Donald Wuerl of Pittsburgh pressed for participation by theologians in preparing for the synod, especially regarding America's problems of religious illiteracy and aggressive secularism. In particular he challenged Catholic colleges and universities: "A Catholic institution of higher learning should be expected and should be capable of offering witness to the values it espouses and in such a way that the witness impacts on society."<sup>16</sup> He criticized Catholic institutions of higher learning for their "institutional silence." This challenge is particularly notable against the background of ongoing negotiations between the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops and the Vatican on the implementation of the document *Ex corde ecclesiae* which outlines responsibilities of Catholic institutions of higher learning.

It was too late for Catholic universities, colleges, theologians, to provide much input for the Synod of America. But the issue of effective and meaningful collaboration between hierarchies and theologians is one that will not go away easily. When the final *instrumentum laboris* was released in September 1997, there were only two months left before the opening of synod.<sup>17</sup>

### *The Delegate-Selection Process*

In Vatican geography, as we have seen, the Western Hemisphere is one continent. Pope John Paul II in his opening talk said, "It is important not to separate the Christian history of North America from that of Central America and South America"; one must look at "the continent as a whole from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, without introducing a separation between the North, the Center, and the South."<sup>18</sup> This "continent as a whole" includes no less than 51 countries.<sup>19</sup>

It is instructive to note several bits of statistical information, based

<sup>16</sup> *Origins* 27 (June 19, 1997) 71.

<sup>17</sup> *Origins* 27 (September 11, 1997) 201-24; see also the critique of the working document by Gary MacEoin in *National Catholic Reporter*, 31 October 1977, 10-11, who argues that it contains serious flaws.

<sup>18</sup> See [London] *Tablet* 251 (November 22, 1997) 1512.

<sup>19</sup> For the Vatican, North America is made up of five countries (Greenland, Bermuda, St. Pierre et Miquelon, Canada, and the U.S.). As for Central America, it is divided into two parts: (1) the continental sector which includes eight countries (Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama); and (2) insular Central America, the Antilles or the Caribbean, which is made up of 24 countries (Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, Montserrat, Netherlands Antilles, Puerto Rico, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, Virgin Islands [British], Virgin Islands [U.S.]). Finally, there are the 14 countries of South America (Argentina,

on data from 1995. In the whole world there are some 989,366,033 Catholics, or 17.4% of the world's population. Some 484,366,000 Catholics (49%) live in this hemisphere. And of those 484 million Catholics only 69 million live in the U.S. and Canada. Another way of expressing this is to note that 63.3% of the population of "America" is Catholic. The Southern hemisphere is much more heavily Catholic (88.1%) than the Northern hemisphere (23.8%). There are notable differences in the GNP of individual countries within "America." For the U.S., the GNP is about \$23,000 per capita, whereas for Mexico and Brazil it is only one-tenth of that amount. North Americans outlive Mexicans by five years, and outlive Brazilians by ten years.

One of the daunting tasks of the Synod of America was to find a formula for determining the number of delegates from each region. A rather arcane system was used that favored the smaller conferences. Some concluded that the Vatican Curia was nervous about the influence of larger conferences (such as the U.S. and Brazil). The process for selection of delegates became skewed.

First of all, a large number of the 297 attending (of whom 233 were voting members) were present "ex officio." It was determined that "ex officio" all the nonretired cardinals in the Western hemisphere would be present (27), plus the Eastern Church metropolitans from America (3). In addition to them, all 23 presidents of the national bishops' conferences were expected to attend, as well as the president of CELAM; the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops was also there "ex officio" and, more controversially, the 25 heads of the Vatican Curia. The heads of the Union of Superiors General representing orders of men were permitted to elect six voting delegates. Women's orders were not represented, nor were the laity except through several auditors appointed by the pope, since the synod was not intended to be a democratic representation of the people of God.

From the national episcopal conferences according to the formula we have noted a total of 136 were appointed. The formula was skewed in favor of Latin America. It was decided that episcopal conferences with up to 20 bishops were permitted to elect one delegate for every four members (thus if you had 20 bishops you had five delegates); those episcopal conferences with more than 100 bishops, were authorized to have one delegate for every 20 members (consequently, if you had 100 bishops you also had only five delegates). This led to some anomalies. Countries such as the U.S. and Brazil, with close to 300 bishops in each country, were permitted to elect 15 delegates each. But the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, Puerto Rico, and Uruguay, which have 41 bishops all together, had a total of 13 delegates. Peru was allowed to elect 8 delegates and Canada 10 delegates; yet Peru has only 49 bishops and Canada 70. No particular rationale was given for this kind of

---

Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Falkland Islands, French Guiana, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay, Venezuela).

favoring of smaller conferences of bishops.<sup>20</sup> The final breakdown of elected delegates by country was as follows: Argentina (9), Bolivia (5), Brazil (15), Canada (10), Caribbean (5), Chile (6), Colombia (9), Costa Rica (2), Cuba (3), Dominican Republic (3), Ecuador (6), El Salvador (2), Guatemala (4), Haiti (3), Honduras (2), Mexico (10), Nicaragua (2), Panama (3), Paraguay (3), Peru (8), Puerto Rico (2), Uruguay (3), U.S. (15), Venezuela (6).

The pope also named 21 persons (10 of whom were not from the Americas): the three presidents of international episcopal conferences (Europe, Africa, Asia), 14 additional bishops, two diocesan priests, and two religious-order priests.

Confusion abounded about the proper election procedures for national episcopal conferences. Who could vote and who could be voted for? In the U.S., Archbishop John Quinn was elected as a delegate by his fellow bishops in November 1996, but the Vatican later declared him ineligible for a special synod because he is a retired bishop. This was surprising because the Vatican's Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts had earlier ruled that retired bishops could be elected to ordinary synods. Furthermore, the Vatican did accept the election of a retired bishop by Brazil's episcopal conference. Some speculated without any evidence that this decision might have been a way of expressing Vatican pique about Archbishop Quinn's widely-reported speech on papal primacy delivered in Oxford in 1997.<sup>21</sup> To make matters further complicated, the Vatican determined that *de facto* the U.S. bishops had erred when they allowed retired bishops to vote on synod delegates. At the request of the NCCB the pope granted a "sanatio" or validation of the process so that the U.S. bishops would not have to repeat the election process. From the U.S., bishops were elected or appointed from cities that have notable Hispanic populations such as Miami, Oakland, Brownsville, Corpus Christi, Newark, and San Antonio.

To this number were also added 41 experts (*adiutores secretarii specialis*) [24 men and 17 women, some of whom spoke at the synod] and 17 observers (*auditores*); also five so-called "fraternal delegates" (i.e. non-Catholic observers). These ecumenical observers were: Bishop Nicholas, Carpatho-Russian Orthodox diocese of the U.S.; George Vandervelde, Anglican, from Toronto's Institute for Christian Studies; Walter Altmann, a Lutheran from Brazil; William Rusch, Faith and Order of NCCB in the U.S.; and finally, Trevor Edwards, a Jamaican Baptist. These experts, observers, and ecumenical representatives were permitted to attend, address the assembly, and participate in small group discussions, but could not vote.

<sup>20</sup> See interview with Thomas Reese, S.J., in the *National Catholic Reporter*, 7 November 1997, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Archbishop John Quinn, "The Oxford Lecture: Considering the Papacy," *Origins* 26 (July 11, 1997) 113-27.

After the synod, in an interview for a British Catholic weekly, Archbishop Weakland noted, "It was not really a meeting of North and South as such because the number of people from Central and South America so dominated. I think the Caribbean got lost a bit."<sup>22</sup> Others noted that the French Canadians saw themselves as the most overlooked in the course of the synod owing to the strong presence of Spanish- and English-speakers. This was ironic since the Canadians had prepared for the synod in a particularly careful way and, meeting every night during the synod's first stage, they went over their strategy in meticulous detail down to the exact phrasing of their interventions. Commenting after the synod, Archbishop Weakland further noted that "the Canadians were the best prepared and raised the most sensitive issues, like the role of women, priest shortage, economic questions. They did not carry much weight, ultimately, because they were relatively small in number compared to the overwhelming dominance of Central and South American bishops."<sup>23</sup>

### *The Synod's Day-to-Day Structure*

Fortunately for the bishops, many delegates were lodged in the Vatican's new hotel, the Domus Sanctae Marthae (St. Martha's House) built adjacent to St. Peter's, designed also to provide housing for the cardinals during the next election for a pope. Bishop Cummins described the new hotel as just a nine-iron shot from the south transept of St. Peter's. Delegates were provided with a 53-page book of directives: where to go, what to wear, how long to speak, etc. At the opening liturgy, prayers were recited not only in Spanish, English, Portuguese, and French but also in Maya and Quechuan. But the liturgy was classically Roman without indigenous music.

Each working session of the synod was referred to as a "general congregation."<sup>24</sup> Often there were two congregations a day, one in the morning and a second in the afternoon. During the synod's first two weeks there were 18 general congregations at which more than 250 bishops and others aired their views in a series of eight-minute speeches, for a total of 50 hours of talk. The speeches were delivered in the principal languages of the Western hemisphere and simultaneous translation was made available into English, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. The translators were drawn from members of

<sup>22</sup> *Tablet* 251 (December 20/27, 1997) 1661.

<sup>23</sup> *Catholic Herald* (Milwaukee), 18 December 1997, 24.

<sup>24</sup> The official Vatican newspaper, *Osservatore Romano*, in both its daily Italian edition and its weekly editions in other languages including English, described the activities of each general congregation and provided very brief, one-paragraph summaries of the speeches. See the weekly reports in the *Osservatore Romano* (English edition) published in the issues dated November 26, December 3, 10, 17/24, 31 [1997], and January 7, 14, 21, 28 [1998]. The London *Tablet* in its five issues published between November 22 and December 20/27, 1997, has excellent overviews and summaries of the synod interventions.

Opus Dei. The American observer Thomas Reese observed that most of the speeches were mini sermons rather than profound analyses; they were rather "laundry lists" of desiderata. This procedure encouraged neither discernment nor coherent development of ideas. The pope was present for all the talks. Archbishop Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, writing back home, noted: "I've been impressed [with the pope's stamina]. I'm 63 years old and I can tell you I've slept through more speeches than the Pope has!" The archbishop, commenting on the fact that the synod was only consultative and not deliberative, said, "It's not an efficient way of doing business, but you have to realize at every moment, we are not here to do business. We are here to talk, to discuss, to learn from one another and to help each other learn. From this point of view, I think this synod of America has been quite successful."<sup>25</sup>

Only a smattering of the full texts have been published in English, mainly interventions by U.S. and Canadian speakers.<sup>26</sup> Official press coverage during and after the synod was meager even in the Americas.<sup>27</sup> We received very brief, one-or-two-paragraph résumés in the Vatican newspaper, *Osservatore Romano*. But these summaries contain little of the nuances of the original interventions; any potentially controversial remark was omitted. How little the summaries reflect the core of the full talk can be seen by comparing the full text of two speeches and their summaries of two American delegates: Archbishop Rembert Weakland's intervention of November 17, and Archbishop William Levada's speech of November 25.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *National Catholic Register*, 7–13 December 1997, 17.

<sup>26</sup> The weekly *Origins* devoted four issues to speeches given at the Synod of America mostly by North Americans. See *Origins* 27 (December 4, 1997): John Paul II's opening homily, and speeches by Cardinal Bevilacqua (Philadelphia), Archbishop Chaput (Denver), Archbishop George (Chicago), Bishop Cummins (Oakland), Bishop Wiesner (Prince George, British Columbia); *Origins* 27 (December 11, 1997): Bishop Gonzalez (Corpus Christi), Professor Mary Ann Glendon (Harvard), Archbishop Weakland (Milwaukee), Bishop Wuerl (Pittsburgh), Archbishop Samuel Carter, S.J. (Kingston, Jamaica), Cardinal Maida (Detroit), Cardinal Mahony (Los Angeles), Cardinal Keeler (Baltimore), Bishop Ramirez (Las Cruces, New Mexico); *Origins* 27 (December 18, 1997): Bishop Pelotte (Gallup, New Mexico), Archbishop Lipscomb (Mobile), Archbishop Levada (San Francisco), Bishop J. Richard (Pensacola-Tallahassee), Bishop Lahey (St. George's, Newfoundland), Chief Harry Lafond (Saskatchewan); and *Origins* 27 (January 1, 1998): the final "Message to America."

<sup>27</sup> "Ungewohntes Wirgefühel: Die ausserordentliche Bischofssynode für Amerika," *Herder Korrespondenz* 52, no. 2 (Feb. 1998) 68–74; Nikolaus Klein, "Spezielle Bischofssynode für Amerika," *Orientierung* 62 (January 15, 1998) 2–5; (January 31, 1998) 13–16; (February 15, 1998) 35–36. See also *Documentation catholique* 95 (January 4, 1998) 17–18, which contains useful statistics. Several bishops provided valuable descriptions of the synod; see especially Bishop John Cummins of Oakland, in *CRUX* (December 8, 1997) 5–6; *CRUX* (December 22, 1997) 1–4, also published in *The Catholic Voice* [Oakland] vol. 36, no. 1 (January 12, 1998) 16.

<sup>28</sup> See Weakland's full text in *Origins* 27 (December 11, 1997), contrasting it with the single-paragraph summary in *Osservatore Romano*, 26 November 1997; Archbishop Levada's full text in *Origins* 27 (December 18, 1997), briefly summarized in *Osservatore Romano*, 7 January 1998.

The persons assigned to tally on a quasi scorecard the themes discussed in the mini-speeches offered the following list of topics and their frequency (in descending order of importance): the need for solidarity in light of the growing globalization of the hemisphere's economy (37 times), the need for a new evangelization and improved missionary strategy (32), clarification of the role of priests and bishops (14), the need for interchurch ecumenical dialogue (14), the universal call to holiness (14), the need to improve catechetical education (13), care for inculturation of the gospel (13), attention to the role of the laity (11), promotion of social justice (10), improvement of liturgical celebrations (9), improved relations with the media (9), concern for youth culture (7), the need to urge the IMF and the World Bank to cancel the foreign debt of poor nations (7), the family and the needs of women (6), the rights of indigenous peoples (5), pastoral care of migrant people (5), preservation of liturgical rites of the Christian East (4), ethical problems (3), and health care issues (2).<sup>29</sup>

There were several notable speeches. Harry Lafond, chief of the Meskeg Lake Indian band in Saskatchewan, gave a dramatic intervention in which he repeatedly hailed the pope as "grandfather" (a native term of endearment and respect) but at the same time called upon the Church to respect the role of elders in his culture, suggesting the desirability of their ordination. He also called for inclusion of native American ceremonies and rituals within the Church. Pope John Paul II joined in with applause for the speech.<sup>30</sup> Professor Belisario Betancur, president of the Pope John Paul II Institute of Social Studies in Medellín, Colombia, asked why it was that if women represented more than half of the people in the Church, there were so few of them at the synod. Jacqueline Wilson, executive director of the Office of Black Catholics in the archdiocese of Washington, stated that in the U.S. many African Americans still view the Catholic Church as a racist institution, and she noted that blacks feel that Catholics pay much attention to the needs of Hispanics but had little time for African Americans. One bishop noted that of the 300 bishops in the U.S. only 20 are Hispanics, and he asked what the Church in the U.S. would look like if the Hispanic bishops were in proportion to the Hispanic faithful.<sup>31</sup>

From the U.S., Mary Waskowiak, R.S.M., president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, asked that women be brought into decision-making responsibility in the Church, and that their talents for conflict resolution and consensus building be utilized. The Church could thereby "better model the partnership of disciples."

<sup>29</sup> See *CRUX* (December 8, 1997) 3.

<sup>30</sup> His text is found in *Origins* 27 (December 18, 1997) 456-57; see also *Tablet* 251 (December 6, 1997) 1578. The remarks of Betancur and Waskowiak that follow are summarized on this page of the *Tablet*.

<sup>31</sup> *Tablet* 251 (December 13, 1997) 1611.

Bishop Cummins of Oakland, California, along the Pacific Rim, noted the growing importance of the Asian/Pacific population in the U.S. (7.2 million), a population equal to that of Bolivia, and greater than that of Paraguay and Uruguay combined. He stated that by the year 2035, 12% of the U.S. will be Asian/Pacific people.<sup>32</sup>

During the third week there was respite from the many speeches, and the bishops went into 12 *circuli minores* (small groups) of about 20 persons, organized by language. There were six Spanish-language groups (plus a combined Spanish-Portuguese and a combined Spanish-Italian group), three groups in English, and one in French. Someone in each small group was chosen to prepare long summaries of the topics touched upon. The pope did not meet in the small groups, but frequently he invited groups of bishops to join him at his evening meal for discussion.

Opinions voiced in the small groups were formulated into various "propositions" designed to be presented to the pope and his committee to prepare after the synod an "apostolic exhortation." By agreement, the exact wording of these propositions would not be made public, in order to leave the pope the freedom to choose from among them, to adjust the tone of the language, and even to add new ideas. There were 76 propositions. We are told that one of the low points of the synod was a full three-hour public reading of the propositions in Latin to the full assembly. One of the last acts of the synod was to issue a final message to the Catholic population entitled "Message to America."<sup>33</sup>

### *The Follow-up Stage*

Although the exact wording of these recommendations is confidential, the Catholic News Service did publish the major themes. The synod asked for condemnation of exaggerated forms of capitalism that turn profit-seeking and the laws of the market into absolute values; it also backed the pope's call for action to request the IMF and the World Bank to relieve the external debt of poor nations. Separate propositions contain reflections on the role of women in church and society, the fate of indigenous peoples, migration policies, ecology, and urbanization. Several highlight pro-life and pro-family themes. The synod stressed ecumenism's essential role in the new evangelization. While deploring aggressive proselytizing by non-Catholic religious movements, especially in traditionally Catholic regions, the synod distinguished members of evangelical Christian churches, with whom Catholics share the grace of baptism, from religious sects or cults. The bishops urged that, in response to the proselytizing activities of new religious movements, the Catholic Church should renew its own pastoral methods and offer more personal attention to the promotion of

<sup>32</sup> *CRUX* (December 8, 1997) 6.

<sup>33</sup> *Origins* 27 (January 1, 1998) 461-66.

faith and more effective preaching based on solid use of Scripture. One proposal is entitled "The Preferential Option for the Poor" and argues that the entire pastoral program of the Church in the Americas—including the life-styles of bishops and priests—should reflect solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. The synod gives attention to the family and the sacredness of human life, both of which are under attack by infanticide, abortion, and an increase in divorce and contraception. The synod asked that the final document denounce discrimination against women, sexual abuse, and male dominance in society as contrary to God's will. The synod called for improved religious education among the laity as an antidote to doctrinal and moral relativism. Migration was taken up in a proposal that defended the right of all people to move freely inside their own nation and from one country to another; it called for respect of migrants' rights and human dignity. The propositions warned of the great danger of ecological damage, especially in the Amazon area, and urged Christians to work to protect the environment. The synod also asked for greater international action to curb the marketing of illegal drugs and asked the Church to increase its work with poor farmers in Latin America who often are tempted by the easy money of drug-related agriculture.<sup>34</sup>

It is widely expected that the pope will take the suggestion of the synod and incorporate these ideas into an apostolic exhortation that will be formally promulgated in Mexico City, at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of America. December 12, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, would be an appropriate date if the exhortation is completed by then. A postsynodal committee or council of 15 (12 elected by the synod with attention to regional representation and 3 members added by the pope) will assist him in writing the postsynodal apostolic exhortation. Elected from the U.S. are Archbishop McCarrick of Newark and Cardinal George of Chicago; appointed by the pope is Archbishop Levada of San Francisco. Membership on the committee also includes Jesuit Archbishop Luciano Mendes de Almeida of Mariana, Brazil.

#### CONCLUSION

Finally I draw some conclusions and mention some suggestions—of the sort that might occur to any friendly observer—for the Vatican Secretariat for Synods, for the U.S. bishops' conference, and for every Catholic committed to the mission of the Church.

Part of the genius of Catholicism and Catholic theology has been its sensitivity to global concerns. What the First Vatican Council said in 1870 about "care for all churches" (*sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum*) applies not just to the pope, but to bishops, theologians, and indeed to all the faithful. Christianity, a religion rooted in Western Asia, has

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 462; see also *Tablet* 251 (December 20/27, 1997) 1667.

never been identified exclusively with one continent or culture, whatever the dominance of Europe since the Middle Ages. Through imaginative but faithful inculturation, it shows resilience and adaptability to the signs of the times. For that awareness its leaders need not the gift of tongues, but the gift of ears.

The Synod of America concentrated on major challenges. That it was not a complete success is not surprising. It would be unfair not to applaud what it at least began. Still the meager results, considering the investment of 300 persons' valuable time over four weeks, requires us to rethink the synod's presuppositions and structures.

To the Vatican Secretariat for Synods, one might make a plea that *lineamenta* and *instrumenta laboris* be prepared after a broad and serious consultative process that requires asking many other persons their views, not simply always asking the same persons. As it is now, consultation comes too late and is restricted to reactive, not proactive, comments. Persons known to be likely to represent alternative views are not asked in advance, for they have been labeled "dissenters" or, in the language of one U.S. Catholic newspaper, "not orthodox." And yet many of these persons are simply asking that the church not forget some dimension of its reality; they want to exercise the virtue of free expression or boldness (*parresia*) a virtue extolled in Acts 2:29 and 4:13. Because of the current process for selecting bishops, we are already heavily weighted with persons whose prudential judgments are normally characterized by a similar or identical outlook.

The style and language of these presynodal documents, especially in their English version, need to be reader-friendly. Unfortunately, as with encyclicals, these kinds of documents are not easy or interesting reading, largely because of their style.

It is important that the Synod Secretariat not control the discussions in advance by communicating subtly that some topics will be taboo, especially in the Synod's aula. It was clear in advance that certain topics, even if they had earlier been praised by popes or regional conferences of bishops, were to be avoided. Such topics included liberation theology, basic Christian communities, the responsibilities of collegiality for the regional bishops, the restoration of the diaconate for women in the Church,<sup>35</sup> the serious shortage of priests in most countries, and the need for theological research. Even the overview of history for the North and South was a highly selective account of what happened from the 16th century onward—the ugly side of the *conquistadores*, the shame of slavery, the genocide of the first nations or native people, the disruption of creative missions such as the Jesuit Reduc-

<sup>35</sup> To my knowledge only Bishop Gerald Wiesner of Prince George, British Columbia, Canada, raised the topic of women's ordination: "The issue of women and ordination is deeply divisive within the Canadian Church. . . . Efforts at all levels must be made to help the faithful assimilate and deepen this teaching . . ." *Origins* 27 (December 4, 1997) 422–23.

tions in Paraguay, the unwitting biological chaos caused by the spread of diseases from one population to another.

After a synod all of the interventions and propositions should be published, so that at least specialists will have access to its extremely valuable documentation regarding particular churches and leaders.

For the U.S. Bishops' Conference, one might urge that its members build on the personal bonding created at the Synod. This will diffuse suspicions and destroy stereotyping. Increased ties with the churches of the South are needed, and not just at ceremonial occasions such as the Pope's visit to Cuba or the funeral of Jesuits in El Salvador. Bishops could promote twinning of parishes North and South. They could also promote exchange of seminarians and even faculty members along this axis. Bishops collaborating with religious orders in the U.S. who have had historical contacts with Caribbean and Latin American countries could build on this experience. Recently, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus decreed that every Jesuit in the world should learn to communicate in English as the new *lingua franca*; but he went on to state that those whose mother tongue is English should learn to speak and read Spanish because of its importance.

Noting that experts of any kind, theological, economic, were almost completely absent from the synod, Thomas Reese concluded: "The bishops have gone home. Now it is time for economists and politicians, scientists and teachers, entrepreneurs and workers, . . . artists and poets, musicians and ministers, theologians and catechists to form a community more faithful to the First Evangelizer. . . ."<sup>36</sup>

I believe that the Swiss priest and missionary Walbert Buhlmann was correct when he alerted us several decades ago to the fact that Catholicism at the start of the next millennium will have its axis south of the equator.<sup>37</sup> Whether our home is on, near, or distant to the neighborhood church, the headquarters of an episcopal conference, or St. Peter's Square, we will all have something to contribute to the work of the next decades.

<sup>36</sup> *America* 178 (January 3, 1998) 5

<sup>37</sup> Walbert Buhlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976)