

ENCOUNTERING THE AMERICAN SYNOD

PAUL D. MINNIHAN

[Scant attention has been paid to the 1997 Synod of America. The author compares the structure and content of its two framing documents, the working paper for the Synod and the postsynod apostolic exhortation, Ecclesia in America. By juxtaposing these documents one can trace the emergence and development of certain themes as well as the regression of others. Indirectly, the organic interplay between these documents highlights the discourse of the synod itself that has contributed to the ongoing task of the new evangelization.]

WITH THE NEW MILLENNIUM and the jubilee year 2000 fast approaching, the Roman Catholic Church has been engaged in extensive preparations. A clear signal is a series of regional episcopal synods, devoted in part to the new evangelization and issues of justice and solidarity.¹ My article fixes particular attention on the Synod of America that comprised South, Central, and North America, as well as the Caribbean, and was held in Rome during the fall of 1997, on the theme "Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: Way to Conversion, Communion, and Solidarity." That synod drew little attention.² Some of the synod's spectators, not participants,

PAUL D. MINNIHAN was ordained for the diocese of Oakland, California, and served for several years as associate pastor at St. Augustine Church, Pleasanton. He is currently completing his doctorate in theology at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium, where he obtained the S.T.L. degree in 1994. In addition to his research on the Synod of America, he is involved in pastoral ministry to the NATO forces in Brunsum, the Netherlands.

¹ *Tertio millennio adveniente* no. 38 (Washington: USCC, 1995) 51–52. Some of the regional synods of bishops have been convened apart from jubilee preparations (the Netherlands in 1980 and Lebanon in 1995); the remainder of these special synods, even those convoked prior to *Tertio millennio adveniente*, have been oriented toward the jubilee: Europe, 1991; Africa, 1994; America, 1997; Asia, 1998; Oceania, 1998; Europe, 1999. See Synodus Episcoporum, *Bulletin: Synod of Bishops: Special Assembly for America 2* (November 15, 1997) 5–12; hereafter this periodical will be cited as *Bulletin*.

² Apart from articles in weekly newspapers and periodicals such as *National Catholic Reporter* and *America*, there was in the U.S. little coverage of the synod and its interventions apart from the publication of official documents found, e.g., in *Origins* and similar periodicals published by other episcopal conferences. Two

formed negative judgments even before its opening. Such opinions appear to have been based on at least two factors. First, while the bishops involved in drafting synodal documents were known, and while certain sources utilized were also named and released, the underlying criteria used in drafting synodal documents have remained sketchy.³ Second, synodal procedure was viewed as archaic, thereby crippling what could have been a well-fashioned strategic planning process on a host of issues that continue to emerge from the Second Vatican Council. The bishop participants acted as a consultative and nondeliberative body, but it is unclear whether they had concrete and collegial effect on its outcome.

Even while acknowledging these pressing factors, I argue that the Synod of Bishops: Special Assembly for America is worth encountering. To demonstrate this, I assess the theme of the assembly (Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ) and the subthemes (Way to Conversion, Communion, and Solidarity). Two documents that encase the actual assembly in 1997 serve as my primary sources, the *Instrumentum laboris*, or working paper, and the postsynodal apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in America (The Church in America)*.⁴ Through a comparative analysis of their structure and content, what emerges is an ebb and flow, progression and regression, on different

theological journals from North America, *Theological Studies* and *Mission*, offered substantive reflection to the event. See Michael A. Fahey, S.J., "The Synod of Bishops: Reflections of a Non-Participant," *TS* 59 (1998) 486–504; his "From the Editor's Desk," *TS* 60 (1999) 1–2; and Carl F. Starkloff, S.J., "The Synod for America and Aboriginal Peoples of North America: A Review and an Appraisal," *Mission* 5 (1998) 53–68.

³ The names of those on the presynodal council for the Special Assembly for America have been released in different periodicals. Since presidents of episcopal conferences occupy a number of seats on the council, these are *durante munere*. At the expiration of a term of office, the newly elected president replaces the member. For a complete list of the council's participants, see *Bulletin* 4 (November 17, 1997) 7–8. Regarding synodal procedure and the utilization of documents for the American synod, see *Bulletin* 2 (November 15, 1997) 3–4.

⁴ There are a number of public documents utilized in preparation for an assembly, during the assembly, and afterward. I note the most significant in order to clarify terms used in this article. The presynodal council first releases the *Lineamenta*, a general outline of proposed topics for the assembly; see *Lineamenta* in *Origins* 26 (August 15, 1996). Responses from episcopal conferences, the curia, and other persons are collated and the resulting document is the assembly's *Instrumentum laboris*, its working paper; see *Origins* 26 (August 15, 1996). Frequently, there has been a concluding message for the people of God, called the *Nuntius*, issued at the end of a gathering; see "Message to America," in *Origins* 27 (January 1, 1998). Since 1974, in addition to the message, apostolic exhortations have been issued, which while not part of the Synod proper serve as the pope's summation of the event, offering reflections and directives; see *Ecclesia in America (The Church in America)* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999), and the English translation in *Origins* 28 (February 4, 1999) 565–92.

themes and topics.⁵ Such movements are the result of an organic synodal gathering for America, the *raison d'être* for the documents as well as the hinge connecting them. This is not to say that the synodal or editorial procedures are beyond criticism and not in need of development. However, while these concerns must be aired, the effects of synodal gatherings such as the one for America need not be discounted in the meantime.

ENCOUNTER WITH THE LIVING JESUS CHRIST

Taken as the overarching theme, the "Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ" is treated in the working paper and the postsynodal exhortation. Both documents utilize what has been termed the "judge-see-act" principle as the undergirding theological method.⁶

⁵ Beyond a formal analysis, a more exhaustive examination of the entire Synod of America's contribution to the shape of the new evangelization is the subject of my doctoral research.

⁶ There has been a degree of lamentation over a shift in method from "see-judge-act" to "judge-see-act." See Gary MacEoin, "Justice Issues Gone from Synod Agenda," *National Catholic Reporter* 34 (October 31, 1997) 10–11; Jon Sobrino, "The Winds in Santo Domingo and the Evangelization of Culture", Alfred T. Hennelly, S.J., *Santo Domingo and Beyond* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993) 177. "See-judge-act," born of Belgian youth movements, achieved more global appreciation from the earliest advocates of liberation theology prior to the Second Vatican Council and through the council, specifically within the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*. Yet during the Second General Conference of CELAM held in Medellín the method referred to in the pastoral constitution was given highest billing. "See-judge-act" in the Latin American context became synonymous with the rightful valorization of the human sciences through which historical phenomena might be seen more clearly. In particular, the socioeconomic sciences served as points of mediation which clarified the object of theological discourse. There remains, however, an inherent danger that exceeds the rightful valorization of the sciences as mediations, namely scientism "that tries to deny [science's] own hermeneutic character and mask its own historicity so that it might claim ahistorical certainty" (David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, and Hope* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987] 31). In the Latin American context, a certain hegemonic cope was placed over the social and economic sciences. For better and for worse, the inversion of "seeing" and "judging" began to germinate in the early 1970s in an effort to fortify the Church's theological patrimony without jeopardizing the informing role of the sciences. The tensions appeared in the Third General Conference of CELAM in Puebla. Today, that debate has subsided in favor of a more fruitful debate over alternative hermeneutic templates that serve as mediations. Thus other cultural paradigms or criteria are challenging socioeconomic mediations in an effort to shape theological discourse. See Franz J. Hinkelammert, "Liberation Theology in the Economic and Social Context of Latin America: Economy and Theology or the Irrationality of the Rationalized," in *Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity, and the Americas*, ed. D. Batstone et al. (N.Y.: Routledge, 1997) 25–52; Georges De Schrijver, S.J., ed., *Liberation Theologies on*

The Working Paper

Its structure. It is of no great surprise that Part 1, Chapter 1 of the working paper sketches what is essential to a complete proclamation of Christ and a full awareness of the human person. This axiomatic diptych serves as the regulative doctrinal framework in the new evangelization. On the other hand, Chapter 2 sketches the object of consideration, namely America. What is wanting is a basis for the structure in this chapter. It is not at all clear why the document shifts from topic to topic in successive paragraphs. The issues, presented in a flat and disconnected manner, neither build on one another nor are they embedded in broader categorical shifts. In short, it is not clear what mediations are used, if any, to “see.”⁷

Nevertheless, there appear to be three intertwined, unstated categories: general tendencies, ethnic heritage within American cultures, and notable methods to guide the new evangelization within this context.⁸ Chapter 2 begins with a bullet description of tendencies or visible phenomena within American cultures which might have served more appropriately as a conclusion rather than an introduction. The description of the American context might have begun by painting the history and present awareness of the numerous indigenous and immigrant cultures. These paragraphs would then have provided a rich starting point. Tracing the rich colors in the cultural kaleidoscope of America would have made visible the tendencies and phenomena that unite and distinguish these cultures. Consequently these tendencies and phenomena could have been more adequately situated and appreciated with a reference to the criterion. Then an introductory and passing reference to each of the numerous methods in the new evangelization might have hinted in what followed at the structure to be developed.

Shifting Grounds (Leuven: Peeters, 1998). What emerges is not simply whether “seeing” precedes “judging” but that historical experience precedes reflection in the first place. Once in a hermeneutical circle, regardless of the point of entry, the interlocutory elements must be traveled through appropriately and critically. In the end, this must be the point of concern. It is a methodological given that the documents from the Synod of America employ not “see-judge-act” but “judge-see-act.” This is not worth debate, but what might need examination and clarification are the criteria that methodologically craft the interlocutory elements.

⁷ Throughout the working paper, the single referent for both the structural breakdown as well as the content is group responses to the preparatory outline. However, beyond that there are no clear criteria that determine inclusion or exclusion. Is such a decision based upon the merit of a group response? The experts employed by the collators of the group response? Mediations employed? The lack of an understood scientific template tracing group responses clouds the presentation of the working paper.

⁸ *Instrumentum laboris* nos. 12–21.

Its content. Part 1 shapes the fundamental content of the encounter with Jesus Christ which thematically is an overarching component in the new evangelization. Its first chapter names two complementary and foundational principles: the complete proclamation of Jesus Christ, and the organic reception in persons and cultures—principles that echo *Evangelii nuntiandi*.⁹ Thus the true encounter is between the human and divine Redeemer, who is proclaimed as historically immanent in spirit as well as glorified, and the human person, understood as not only unique and irreducible but also as relational and cultural. However, the cultural element recedes in Part 1. The new evangelization is mentioned, directed at a personal, individual encounter, but there is no reference to the cultural fiber or any other communal encounter.¹⁰ As a result, the initial accent on the individual muddies an understanding of the person as essentially affected by culture or relationality. From this oversight, a culturally framed encounter with Jesus Christ is treated at best as secondary. The result is an impoverished anthropology and Christology.

From these general principles comes the peculiarity of the American context treated in Chapter 2. Despite the initial underdevelopment of the topic of culture, here both American indigenous and immigrant cultures are treated. Built upon collated responses to the *Lineamenta*, the general outline, the section mentions inherent values within indigenous cultures as well as certain phenomena within them that are reflected in present manifestations of the Christian faith. Unfortunately, there is no development of appreciable differences among the varying indigenous cultures. In contrast, the treatment of immigrant cultures does reflect some degrees of nuance that recognize different waves of migrants coming from differing origins. The difference between how the document treats indigenous as opposed to immigrant cultures illustrates that its authors had a more acute awareness of migrating cultures than of the various indigenous cultures.¹¹

Following up on this treatment of American cultural identity, the document then acknowledges three methods or tools to be utilized in the new evangelization: popular piety, education, and social communication. While

⁹ Ibid. nos. 6–11; see *Evangelii nuntiandi* nos. 9, 25, 27, 28, 32.

¹⁰ *Instrumentum laboris* no. 2. Even a later mention of a plurality of cultural expressions in America, does not give it solid footing as tandem with individual's search for Christ; see *ibid.* no. 4.

¹¹ Ibid. nos. 13–14 and 15–16. One can note the nuance and development of immigrant culture, whereas there is no real differentiation noted between the varying intraregional indigenous cultures. If the authors of the working paper were relying upon the group responses to the general outline, the *Lineamenta*, then it might have been helpful to cite national or regional conferences' specific concerns. By explicitly comparing and contrasting the concerns, the treatment of indigenous cultures might have risen to the caliber of immigrant cultures.

it is noted that these emerge from group responses to the general outline, it is not clear why these methods were chosen over others, e.g. life witness. Witness is taken up only later in the document.¹² What is wanting is a criterion that can be studied and examined for determining such reasons.

Ecclesia in America

Its structure. Structurally, Chapter 1 of *Ecclesia in America* offers a clear linear development from narrative sources highlighting the theme of encounter to the personal and communal quality of the encounters and ultimately to the foundational sources for ecclesial encounters. Yet there is one noticeable gap. The chapter is limited to narrative encounters in the New Testament and thus devalues the life-giving experiences of encounter with the Lord described in the Hebrew Scriptures that nourished Jesus' self-understanding.¹³ What is missing here is reflection on the Jewishness of Jesus. Its inclusion could have yielded a clear ground for further developing Jewish-Christian relations. The unique role of Mary in the Church emerges—as throughout documents devoted to this synod—as a model of reception and proclamation, evangelized and evangelizer. The last section of Chapter 1 is structurally significant in its clear development from the working paper, devoted to fundamental life sources in the Church: Scripture, sacrament, and praxis. As each builds upon and feeds the others, what emerges is a template for Christian identity. In the end, the basis of the three earmarks is grounded in documents from Vatican II. Their ongoing spiralic interaction deepens the encounter with the living Jesus Christ and is the life-breath for new evangelization.

Chapter 2 of the exhortation contextualizes Christian identity in America. The same structural problems found in the working paper recur. Following the brief paragraph on the uniqueness of American identity, the exhortation's structure breaks apart. While presenting both phenomena and methods in the new evangelization, the two categories are inter-

¹² The three chosen methods are treated in distinct paragraphs in Chapter 2 of Part 1 (ibid. nos. 17–21). Two of the three, namely popular piety and social communication, are methods also noted in Paul VI's postsynodal apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) nos. 45, 48. The third method, education, is not specifically cited in the 1975 document as a method, although catechesis is. Missing in this fundamental treatment of method in the working paper is the value of life witness. It does emerge later and is cited as "the most effective means to carry out the task of the new evangelization" (*Instrumentum laboris* no. 26). If this is the case, one wonders why this most effective means was not incorporated into the methods for evangelization. Again, the question of criteria comes to the forefront.

¹³ *Ecclesia in America* nos. 8–9; see also *Instrumentum laboris* nos. 6–8.

mingled; readers are left to their own devices to sort out one from the other.¹⁴ This hinders a fluid development.

Its content. In Chapters 1 and 2 of the postsynodal apostolic exhortation, the general reflections on encounter demonstrate a refocusing and an evolution from the working paper. Rather than beginning with a doctrinal reflection on a full announcement of Jesus Christ, as *Evangelii nuntiandi* did, *Ecclesia in America* begin with a narrative description of encounters of Jesus of Nazareth with women and men of his day. These encounters include experiences with the risen Christ.¹⁵ Emphasized for the most part are individual encounters with Jesus and communal encounters with the risen Christ followed by corresponding experiences of conversion, communion, and solidarity. From the outset, this fusion points Christians toward a standard of self-awareness. Such a hybrid between individual and communal/cultural encounters gives the exhortation a more digestible and practical flavor. Another development in content from the working paper is a clear understanding of the organic tripod (Scripture, sacrament, and praxis¹⁶) that frames Christian identity. The tripod establishes the locale from which all other methods fostering the encounter are deduced in the new evangelization: "we need to indicate the specific times and places in which, in the Church, it is possible to encounter him."¹⁷

¹⁴ *Ecclesia in America* nos. 15–25. After a brief introduction to American identity now and in the past, the exhortation shifts to the value of popular piety, a method for new evangelization. The document then focuses on one positive aspect of communion, namely Eastern Catholic presence. Following this paragraph, the document weaves back to methods, citing education and social action. These are then followed by a host of phenomena that shape American identity. This structural pseudo-amalgamation diminishes a solid content.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* nos. 8–9; see *Instrumentum laboris* nos. 6–8. Scripture is cited to uphold doctrinal elements. The exhortation reflects the narrativity from the initial paragraphs in Paul VI's postsynodal apostolic exhortation on evangelization (see *Evangelii nuntiandi* nos. 6–12).

¹⁶ *Ecclesia in America* no. 12; see *Instrumentum laboris* nos. 31–32. While there is an extensive citation to the triad made in the working paper's section on communion, such a reference belongs more fundamentally in the general understanding of encounter which brings together conversion, communion, and solidarity. This is also the case in the exhortation; see Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeline Beaumont (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1995) 172. Chauvet, in outlining the symbolic mediation of the Church notes that Scripture, sacrament, and ethics structure the identity of the Christian. He is attempting to move from more static categories of onto-causality toward an organic symbolic web that both positively points to the divine presence while expressing the divine's transcendent absence and the need for symbolic manifestations of narrativity to understand such presence/absence. This is not the usage of the triad within the exhortation. Nevertheless, in citing Chauvet and the exhortation, I note the use of the same identity base, though it is utilized differently.

¹⁷ *Ecclesia in America* no. 12

Out of the general reflection on encounter comes in Chapter 2 a treatment of Christian identity in America. Unlike the somewhat nuanced and extended reflections on indigenous and immigrant peoples in Part 1 of the working paper, the apostolic exhortation's treatment is quite brief. There is no mention of indigenous peoples and their cultures as constitutive of American identity or representative of unique cultural encounters.¹⁸ Furthermore, the history of American migration is reduced to the historically popularized European migrations. Migrations from other regions simultaneous to or later than the European influx, such as Asian migration, are not mentioned.¹⁹ An appreciation of cultural contributors to America is lost. What is included here is something not mentioned in the working document's treatment of American Christian identity, namely, a clear nod at the significance of hoped-for Christian unity in America amid its rich diversity. Early in the exhortation, ecumenism emerges as a clear goal in the new evangelization.²⁰

Other aspects of American identity listed can be briefly classified under the following categories: positive elements viewed as vehicles for new evangelization, phenomena that can be viewed as helpful or harmful in the new evangelization, and expressions that damage Christian identity.²¹ Notable among the positive expressions is the affirmation of the presence in America of Eastern Catholics, a presence overlooked in the working document apart from a passing reference. Evidently a fuller awareness of the role of Eastern Catholic churches in America emerged during the synod.²² In what follows, education and social action are brought together, although there is only brief mention of education. In contrast, the working paper offered an extended and more critical reflection.²³ More spotlight is given

¹⁸ *Instrumentum laboris* nos. 13–16; *Ecclesia in America* no. 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* no. 15. This factor was mentioned during the synod's intervention phase by the Bishop of Oakland, California (John S. Cummins, "Acknowledging the Extent of Asian Immigration to America," *Origins* 27 [December 4, 1997] 420–22); a synopsis of his intervention is available in *Bulletin* 11 (November 21, 1997) 3.

²⁰ *Ecclesia in America* no. 14.

²¹ Under "vehicles for new evangelization" I list holiness in America, popular piety, education, and social action. The list of phenomena affecting identity might include Eastern Catholic presence, human rights, globalization, urbanization, and ecological awareness. Finally, having a negative impact on identity are the external debt, corruption, and drugs.

²² *Ecclesia in America* no. 17; see *Instrumentum laboris* nos. 15, 42. Part of the development is due to certain interventions. See Judson Michael Procyk, "The Life of the Eastern Catholic Church in America: The Importance of the Eastern Tradition for the Universal Church," *Bulletin* 5 (November 17, 1997) 4; Stephen Sulyk, "Relationship of Eastern Catholic Churches with the Latin Catholic Church in the Americas," *Bulletin* 5 (November 17, 1997) 8–9; Pierre Mouallem, "Les Eglises Orientales en Amérique" *Bulletin* 15 (November 24, 1997) 7.

²³ *Ecclesia in America* no. 18; see *Instrumentum laboris* no. 20.

to social action that confirms the preferential option for the poor treated later in the exhortation.

Also worth noting are two paragraphs that concentrate on phenomena with positive and negative consequences. Under globalization, there is a balanced treatment of its economic aspect, viewed as potentially beneficial since it links economic gain and increased production. Yet globalization is criticized insofar as the more controlled and limited multipolar globalization devalues the person and jeopardizes self-actualization. Unfortunately, its economic counterpart, cultural globalization, does not receive a balanced treatment. The more negative characterization of a flowing and globalized culture that suffocates particular culture is not balanced with treatment of the potential benefits. Missing then is an appreciation of cultural globalization as a vehicle for building and transmitting a system of values and positive interactions that nurture a globally expanded and compressed Church.²⁴ The reader is left with the impression that cultural globalization is not appreciated or adequately understood.²⁵ Still, and in contrast to the passing mention in the working paper, the exhortation's treatment is a valuable beginning.²⁶ Also, the urbanization phenomenon, while presented in a limited descriptive framework, is a clear development from the working paper.²⁷ Finally, one can ask again about the criteria used in establishing the content of Chapter 2 in the apostolic exhortation. This is not to deny that the issues treated impact or shape identity in America, for they do, but the choice of these issues over others remains unclear. I have already asked why life witness, so fundamental to the new evangelization, is neglected in this chapter?²⁸

²⁴ Rembert Weakland, "Globalization and the Need for a Cultural Vision," *Origins* 27 (December 11, 1997) 433–34; also *Bulletin* 5 (November 17, 1997) 6. Weakland gave one of the more balanced treatments of globalization, both economic and cultural, along with the emerging challenges and benefits. Other interventions touched on the topic; see Balthazar Porras Cardozo, "La eclesiología de comunión," *Bulletin* 6 (November 18, 1997) 9; Luis Morales Reyes, "Ética y globalización económica," *Bulletin* 6 (November 18, 1997) 8; Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga, "En mundo globalizado," *Bulletin* 6 (November 18, 1997) 9; Jacinto Guerrero Torres, "Hacia una cultura de la solidaridad," *Bulletin* 9 (November 20, 1997) 7; Edmundo Luis Flavio Abastoflor Montero, "Globalización, medios de comunicación, vocaciones al ministerio," *Bulletin* 16 (November 25, 1997) 7.

²⁵ *Ecclesia in America* no. 20.

²⁶ *Instrumentum laboris* no. 12. For a rich treatment of globalization and its effects upon religion and faith, see Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (London: Sage, 1994) and Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997).

²⁷ See *Octogesima adveniens*, in *The Pope Speaks* 16 (1971) 137–64.

²⁸ *Evangelii nuntiandi* no. 41; *Redemptoris missio* nos. 42–43, in *Origins* 20 (January 31, 1991) 553–54.

THE WAY TO CONVERSION

Conversion is the first sub-theme treated in both documents, in Part 2 of the working paper and Chapter 3 of the exhortation.

The Working Paper

Its structure. The working paper establishes a theological and doctrinal framework for conversion and cites the Church's imperative responsibility for it. The general landscape is described in Chapter 1, and a host of issues in the life of the Church and in society are raised in Chapter 2. Products of conversion as well as urgent areas for conversion are acknowledged; balance between the two is sought and achieved. As in Part 1, the working paper acknowledges here that the specific issues mentioned, even in balance, are the result of responses to the *Lineamenta*. We are left with the question about what criteria led to their inclusion.

Its content. The section entitled "Conversion to Jesus Christ" emphasizes the concept *metanoia* as the "inner total transformation of and renewal of [the person] in [the] way of feeling, judging, and deciding."²⁹ However, there is an inadequate elaboration of penance—partially realized in a re-oriented praxis—in the process of conversion. Penance, while not limited to external manifestations alone, must manifest an ethical dimension as part of the overturning or disruption of one's spirit. Whereas the working paper notes that inner transformation is expressed in life and deeds, the passing reference seems inadequate.³⁰ But the subject of conversion is appropriately highlighted, as related to persons and structures. While making clear that the individual is the ultimate subject, the working paper also gives emphasis to the relational dynamics of the person, and therefore by extension to the structural dynamics of sin. This appropriately leads to a last paragraph on ecclesial conversion, echoing *Evangelii nuntiandi* and *Reconciliatio et penitentia*. The Church acknowledges its need for conversion, which segues into both signs of felt and needed conversion.³¹

"Conversion in Church and Society" is the title given to this part's Chapter 2. The paragraphs on conversion in the Church cite the positive effects of conversion, giving emphasis to structural signs and less to the individual's contribution; areas requiring conversion reflect concern for structures of sin but with less emphasis on the individual in the process of conversion.³² Thus, while the working paper qualifies the individual as the pri-

²⁹ *Instrumentum laboris* no. 22.

³⁰ *Reconciliatio et penitentia* no. 4, in *Origins* 14 (December 20, 1984) 435.

³¹ See *Evangelii nuntiandi* no. 15; *Reconciliatio et penitentia* no. 9.

³² Concrete signs of religious reawakening within social dynamics and structures include cooperation between ecclesial bodies, ongoing formation of clergy, a more

mary subject for conversion, the presentation does not stress the individual's responsibility in the social or structural aspects. The sections on conversion in society also balance both the fruits of conversion and areas where conversion is needed. Unlike the treatment on ecclesial conversion, the positive effects of societal conversion are more a reflection of the individual's witness in society than of realized structural conversion.³³ However, the passage that calls for conversion in society, much like the one calling for intraecclesial conversion, stresses the structural, interrelational, and phenomenological areas more than the individual's responsibility.³⁴ The result is noteworthy. While ecclesial and societal conversion is cited as the fruit of a genuine and individual encounter with Jesus Christ, the document lays bare the more structural results of either felt conversion or areas for conversion, except for the paragraph on the product of conversion in society. Thus one can ask whether the document adequately highlights the role of the individual.

Ecclesia in America

Its structure. The first chapter of the exhortation is a scriptural presentation of Jesus Christ as object of faith-encounters. It serves as a lens for assessing Christian identity in the next chapter. But the structure lacks sequential order. In fact, there are leaps in logic which leaves the reader disoriented at times. It might have been more beneficial to start this chapter with something like "The Urgency of the Call to Conversion" that would have served as a brief introduction to the topic. Then, rather than proceeding into discourse on the social and continuing dynamics in conversion, the section "Jesus, the One Way to Holiness" might have offered

active participation in liturgy, and an increased presence by the laity. The one sign that appears to first touch upon the individual, though not exclusively, is "a strong witness in the ministerial life of many priests" (*Instrumentum laboris* no. 25). Structural problems that are areas for conversion include a lack of experienced communion, tensions between theologians and the magisterium, pastoral ineffectiveness from shaky structures, an incomplete application of the Second Vatican Council, a lack of renewal in method of catechesis, and an incorrect application of principles in liturgical renewal. Specific to the individual's need for conversion is the clarity of life witness; see *Instrumentum laboris* no. 26.

³³ Included under positive aspects of conversion in society that reflect upon the individual are a person's awareness of human rights, a sense of justice, respect for nature, spiritual values, concern for the transcendent, a feeling of solidarity, and generosity; see *Instrumentum laboris* no. 27.

³⁴ Areas cited as needing conversion in society include the family, the economic sphere, the social and political level, demagoguery and corruption, and the cultural level. While these areas do not discount the responsibility of the individual, their orientation exceeds the individual; see *Instrumentum laboris* no. 28.

the necessary scriptural reflection, paralleling Chapter 1's treatment of the encounter. Next, further scriptural citations and deductive doctrinal reflection might have bolstered the need for all to experience conversion toward holiness—what the exhortation calls “the universal call to holiness.” From those paragraphs, “Guided by the Holy Spirit to a New Way of Living” might have further outlined the place of prayer and the contemplative life understood as integral to the activity of whole people of God. This might then have served as a lens for the ethical field where social and ongoing dimensions of conversion are realized. Finally, the chapter on conversion might have treated reconciliation and penance as a privileged and particular ecclesial pathway. Concluding with the sacramental experience of penance and reconciliation, the chapter on conversion would have segued into the thematic beneficiary, communion.

Why do I stress structural revision? The answer is simple. While “judge-see-act” is the acknowledged theological method, that structure is not clear here. Greater care might have been taken in the final editing. I propose restructuring the chapter on the basis of the underlying method.

Its content. Like the working document, the presentation of conversion in the postsynodal apostolic exhortation is not a narrative reflection so much as a doctrinal reflection based upon defining *metanoia* and naming its essential interplay with the other pathways in the new evangelization, namely, communion and solidarity.³⁵ Unlike the working document which presented specific points for potential discussion at the synod (the positive aspects of conversion and areas for conversion), the exhortation offers a reflection on elements fundamental in experiencing conversion without indicating firm action items. The lack of application of the doctrinal principles will certainly be criticized. Yet it might be appropriate to postpone such criticism until some implementation can begin on a strategic plan. The lack of suggestions about applications might in fact encourage more contextual reflection benefiting conversion for the individual and social structures within small Christian communities, parishes, dioceses, national and regional churches. Thus the weight of action would rest not on a centripetal but on a centrifugal force, the local community.

One area ripe for such contextual reflection is the believer who manifests ongoing conversion by realizing the value of solidarity as both citizen of a given country or territory and as a member of the Church. At the same time, the exhortation draws a distinction between an individual acting as a responsible citizen with an informed Christian conscience, and the person acting in explicit union with the people of God, both particularly and globally, exhibiting a fraternal and just ethical imperative enabling ecclesial

³⁵ *Ecclesia in America* nos. 26–28; see *Instrumentum laboris* no. 22–23.

communion.³⁶ The overlap and the distinction represent elements touched upon in the two controversial instructions on liberation theology from the 1980s.³⁷ More significant, however, is the underlying issue of the intricate relationship between evangelization and human promotion.³⁸ While a certain guidepost is offered, the realization of this interrelationship is manifest contextually and can only result from an engagement of the contextual interlocutors, not just representative from the synod fathers. What at first glimpse may appear an impoverishment within the exhortation, its failure to articulate an action plan for conversion, may prove to be a contextual and intercontextual goldmine.

Another contrast to the working paper is detectable. Conversion is situated more completely in the call toward holiness, toward a way of life grounded in prayer and worship and extended into social praxis.³⁹ The role of *lectio divina* is emphasized as essential for all in the Church, it is considered a vital component toward a fruitful exercise of faith. Yet the nucleus of the entire chapter is the paragraphs on the universal call to holiness and the fundamental role of Scripture. Citing *Lumen gentium*, the exhortation is at its finest when it situates within the ministry of Jesus a call to conversion, intricately bound to communion and leading to solidarity. Conversion is directed toward holiness, since conversion “is not an end in itself, but a journey toward God who is holy. . . . On the path of holiness, Jesus Christ is the point of reference and the model to be imitated. . . . Therefore, to imitate the holiness of God, as it was made manifest in Jesus Christ his Son, is nothing other than to extend in history his love, especially toward the poor, the sick, and the needy.”⁴⁰ Conversion for all—a first requirement in new evangelization—must build up the character of the individual, and, thereby, impact the character of the Church fostering the full liberation of all persons. In a clear example—and unlike the working document’s exposé—on conversion, the exhortation points specifically to bishops and priests who must model the need for conversion based on a clear identification with the universal call to holiness modeled in Jesus

³⁶ *Ecclesia in America* no. 27.

³⁷ While the exhortation cites both *Gaudium et spes* and *Christifideles laici*, there are clear traces of the statements issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith during the 1980s; see “Instructions on Certain Aspects of the ‘Theology of Liberation,’” *Origins* 14 (September 13, 1984) 193–204; “Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation,” *Origins* 15 (April 17, 1986) 713–27.

³⁸ *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* no. 64.

³⁹ *Ecclesia in America* no. 29; see *Instrumentum laboris* nos. 22–24; *Apostolicam actuositatem* no. 4, in Norman P. Tanner, S.J., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1990) 2.983–85. Further citations from Vatican II are from Tanner.

⁴⁰ *Ecclesia in America* no. 30; *Lumen gentium* nos. 39–42.

Christ. The fruits are a visible identification with the poor and a renouncing of self-serving motives in ministry.⁴¹

THE WAY TO COMMUNION

Communion is the second sub-theme treated in both documents, in Part 3 of the working paper and Chapter 4 of the exhortation.

The Working Paper

Its structure. The working paper develops the pathway of communion through a four-chapter framework. Chapter 1 situates communion within the evangelizing ministry of Jesus connecting the organic nature of the Church with its mission to proclaim what it has received. Of pivotal importance is the history of evangelizers who forged communion in America. From here Chapter 2 briefly sketches the conciliar teaching on communion implicit in the documents of Vatican II. While there is no development apart from a one-sentence summary of each document's contribution, the working paper does bring together a triad of expressions for communion that must stand together: common faith, sacrament (worship), and mission. It then cites phenomena that impact communion, again without offering criteria for inclusion. The chapter concludes with a brief treatment of *Lumen gentium's* "People of God" and the essential relationship between the laity and clergy who fortify communion.⁴²

Chapter 3 is devoted entirely to difficulties in realizing communion within the Christian community. There is no mention of the positive aspects of communion, apart from a general reference to the "People of God" in the previous chapter and a passing reference to felt unity and collaboration here. While Part 2 of the working paper noted areas where conversion was felt, both ecclesially and societally, there is no parallel in the reflection on communion.⁴³ In order to solve the difficulties that impinge upon communion, dialogue is encouraged. But unfortunately there is no description here of the Church's principles of dialogue. The last chapter in Part 3 rightly extends communion toward the unity of the Christian churches, interreligious dialogue, and difficulties with estranged groups unwilling to dialogue. There is an impressive, though limited structural recognition of differing circumstances in the northern and southern parts of America.⁴⁴

Its content. Situated within the new evangelization, the relationship be-

⁴¹ Ibid. no. 28; see *Christus Dominus* no. 15.

⁴² *Lumen gentium* nos. 10–13.

⁴³ *Instrumentum laboris* no 38; see also nos. 25, 27.

⁴⁴ Ibid. nos. 41–44.

tween evangelization and communion is developed by stressing Jesus' proclamation as reconciling and crystallizing communion with God and among the entire human family. The trajectory of the Church's mission is fundamentally rooted in Jesus the evangelizer.⁴⁵ The content of communion is identified in a common profession of faith, worship, and witness.⁴⁶ What is not desired, however, is a uniform expression of communion, and the working document alludes to this by emphasizing the "historical and cultural factors, which condition and qualify this communion."⁴⁷ The single reference to Latin American liberation theology is made in this regard, insofar as it grew from what is simply described as a "very complex social context" that existed in Latin America. The reference is appreciably descriptive, not negative in tone. But, in a more condemnatory brushstroke, the working paper points to the extremes of civil democracy (a clear reference to the North) that diminishes right relations with both the divine and human persons, the two prongs of ecclesial communion.⁴⁸ Whereas proponents of Latin American liberation theology were the object of ecclesial concern the 1980s, it is now the North with its political culture of civil democracy which receives greater attention.

The last paragraph, "The Catholic Church as an Evangelizing Community," substantiates the role of intraregional and interregional evangelization in the cooperation of particular churches.⁴⁹ These statements attest to the essential role of inculturation in the new evangelization as it fosters communion. At best, the statements are an indirect testimony to the essential role of inculturation. That the topic and content of inculturation are overlooked within the reflections on communion is unfortunate, for inculturation remains a favored tenant in the new evangelization. As a result, paragraphs within this part of the working document lack adequate cultural nuance, even if there are generic allusions to specific context. This becomes even clearer through an apology that excuses a hoped-for treatment of communion that might have touched on inculturation. Rather, noting that the aim of the working document is to offer concrete examples of communion, the document fails to offer fuller criteria for building communion.⁵⁰ This is most evident when it examines the positive aspects of communion as well as the present difficulties. The lack of footing yields a presentation of issues and phenomena that seem more imposed than understood and embedded in concrete experiences of particular churches. Examples are clear from both the positive aspects and difficulties influencing the eccle-

⁴⁵ Ibid. no. 29; see *Evangelii nuntiandi* nos. 14–15.

⁴⁶ *Instrumentum laboris* nos. 31–32.

⁴⁷ Ibid. no. 34.

⁴⁹ Ibid. no. 49.

⁴⁸ Ibid. no. 35.

⁵⁰ Ibid. no. 33.

siology of communion and intraecclesial life. In examining the list of positive influences in the postconciliar period, hierarchical officers are cited, as are the laity. But what is lacking are examples of particular influences, cultural variables that serve as signs of faith in dialogue with the multicultural region of America.⁵¹ In short, the list says nothing specific about America. Similarly, the signs of division within communion, not entirely peculiar to America, are still presented in a removed, detached manner. There is not a single allusion to any concrete division that would signal intraecclesial strains with particular cultures in the region.⁵² For example, the last bullet cites "conflicting attitudes concerning certain subjects on which the Magisterium has already made pronouncements."⁵³ It would have been more beneficial to cite not just the issue but how these difficulties manifest themselves in different American contexts.

Setting this concern aside for the moment, dialogue is suggested as the answer to the difficulties. That specific attitudes are suggested for the interlocutors is a clear sign that conversion from present dialogue structures is essential. However, what is outlined reduces dialogue to a healthy exchange of ideas.⁵⁴ Other elements essential to dialogue based upon the application of intercultural hermeneutics are not mentioned. Robert Schreiter has noted three components: the interlocutors, the context, and the message.⁵⁵ The working paper pays little heed to the latter two elements.

When this section of the working paper considers the Roman Catholic Church in relationship to other religious bodies, there is some respect for cultural variety. For example, regarding ecumenism and communion, there is greater awareness of fundamental differences between the North and the South, demonstrating real variances in ecumenical dialogue.⁵⁶ The same holds true for interreligious dialogue. There is contextual recognition of sorts, separating out how cultures in the southern hemisphere embrace interreligious dialogue differently from the northern.⁵⁷ Still this is a marked development from the paragraphs in the working paper on intraecclesial communion, which offered no contextualization.

Finally, considerable space is devoted to relations with "sects" and "new religious movements."⁵⁸ These terms appear to be used interchangeably, a somewhat dangerous assumption. New religious movements appear to be a much more wide-open descriptive category than the narrow definition of

⁵¹ Ibid. no. 37.

⁵² Ibid. no. 38.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid. nos. 39–40.

⁵⁵ Schreiter, *The New Catholicity* 34–35; see Raymond Lahey, "The Risk of Failing to Dialogue," *Origins* 27 (December 18, 1997) 455–56; *Bulletin* 11 (November 21, 1997) 8.

⁵⁶ *Instrumentum laboris* nos. 42–43.

⁵⁷ Ibid. no. 44.

⁵⁸ Ibid. nos. 45–48.

so-called “sects.” Clarification is needed or at least the basis for such labels needs to be presented. The term “sect” is equally complicated, given its nonpejorative sociological applications from Western analysis over and against the contextual application in Latin America, where “sect” is understood not as a nonjudgmental designation but as a pejorative one. And finally, while the beginning of this section argued for a spirit of respect in dialogue, that same courtesy should be extended to those in so-called “sects,” regardless of their willingness to dialogue. Using terms that cast a completely negative veil over these groups neither encourages dialogue nor fosters cooperative, formational efforts. For these reasons, a reconsideration of terms is needed.

Ecclesia in America

Its structure. As in previous chapters in the apostolic exhortation, Chapter 4, on communion, is pieced together in such a way that paragraphs do not logically flow one from another. The chapter first echoes the opening chapter of *Lumen gentium*.⁵⁹ The movement into Christian initiation and Eucharist emphasizes the foundation of vertical and horizontal dimensions within communion. But after this introduction, the remaining development jumps from point to point, thereby sacrificing an integrated outline of ecclesial communion. The text also moves back and forth between ecclesial office-holders and ecclesial structures in a somewhat confusing manner. It would have been helpful to buttress the notion of communion between particular churches and with Eastern Catholic churches, and to include a paragraph on episcopal collegiality as a sign of the global nature of the Church. Following the reflection on communion between churches could have come an analysis on visible communion in the particular church, including the parish, small Christian communities (noticeably absent), and the family as a domestic church. The paragraph on vocation would follow from the particular church, and would serve as a bridge into discussion of those who specifically build communion, namely, church officers and laypersons alike. Specifically treated would be bishop, priest, deacon, consecrated life, and laity. Qualifying the latter, particular paragraphs on lay persons, women, youth, and children would follow. Finally, the paragraphs on Christian communion, relations with Jewish communities and relations with other religions would complete the chapter.

Its content. I consider problematic the omission of reference to the role of small Christian communities for building up communion. While the drafters made an effort to highlight the parish as the concrete experience of Church, only an indirect mention was made of intraparochial structures,

⁵⁹ *Lumen gentium* nos. 1–8.

such as small Christian communities.⁶⁰ In contrast, the working paper had indicated that “these small Christian communities have been considered a decisive pastoral option for the renewal of church life, given the enormous dimensions and demands of the diocesan and parochial structure,” and that the base community is “where many Christians can experience ecclesial communion and solidarity.”⁶¹ Given the pivotal role of these communities in Latin America and their increasing popularity in North America, the drafters passed over a vital ecclesial structure.⁶² Absent also is consideration of organic inculturation as essential to ecclesial communion. What is lacking is discussion of how a community continues to digest the Word within a culture by being evangelized, and in response, builds up ecclesial communion in dialogue with other cultures. While the issue of inculturation is taken up later in the exhortation, it is somewhat understated. Its absence here, as in the working paper’s treatment of communion, is unfortunate. The paragraph on laypersons, while reemphasizing their call to evangelize in society, also mentions their presence in the interecclesial realm. Unfortunately, there is inadequate recognition of the breadth of leadership roles exercised by them. Whereas the exhortation lauds “delegates of the word, catechists, visitors to the sick and the imprisoned, group leaders, etc.,” it makes no mention of those who offer their gifts to ecclesial administration on parochial, diocesan, or conference levels.⁶³ In short, the treatment could have been more comprehensive.

The same is the case with the treatment of ecumenism. While the working paper noted varying hues in ecumenical awareness and dialogue throughout the Americas, the exhortation makes no reference to this.⁶⁴ Equally problematic is the paragraph on non-Christian religions. While the paragraph appropriately expresses the Church’s fundamental teaching on non-Christian religions, it offers no real awareness of the presence of non-

⁶⁰ *Ecclesia in America* no. 41. In his intervention Roger Mahony noted: “Historically, parishes developed as a network of smaller communities (*par oikos*, ‘beyond the house’). A parish is a strong instrument for evangelization to the degree that it is genuine experience of smaller groups. . . . In addition to these small intentional groups becoming communities, the communal life and the reign of God need to also be fostered in the domestic church” (Mahony “Parish Revitalization for Evangelization,” *Origins* 27 [December 11, 1997] 438–44; *Bulletin* 9 [November 20, 1997] 6). See also Rodolfo Wirz Kraemer (no title), *Bulletin* 11 (November 21, 1997) 4–5.

⁶¹ *Instrumentum laboris* no. 64.

⁶² See *Evangelii nuntiandi* no. 58; *Redemptoris missio* no. 51; CELAM, *Puebla: Evangelization at Present and in the Future of Latin America*, (Washington: USCC, 1980) nos. 640–42; hereafter cited as *Puebla*.

⁶³ *Ecclesia in America* no. 44.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* no. 49; see *Instrumentum laboris* nos. 42–43.

Christian religions, save Judaism, within the hemisphere.⁶⁵ Although there is a noteworthy passing reference to the commonalties among Muslims, Christians, and Jews, this is not developed further, and no mention is made of hope for peaceful co-existence, and no call for dialogue is issued. The situation with respect to Buddhism and Hinduism is no better. In the end, what is called for is tolerance.⁶⁶ This cannot be the last word. Tolerance, while appreciably virtuous, neither fosters a genuine, critical dialogue about systems of belief nor forges relations which empower world religions to cooperate in promoting justice and solidarity.

Yet the content and tone of Chapter 4 are commendable. The section devoted to Eastern Catholic churches is a striking development beyond the passing references in the working paper. Explicit reference to their inclusion into ecclesial communion not only fortifies a greater understanding of communion, but also integrates at least implicitly the essential place of inculturation. The paragraphs on the workers for communion, while not ground-breaking, are solid and laudatory. Particular notice must be paid to the reference on women; unlike the working paper, the exhortation formulates a positive appraisal of women's contributions to civil and ecclesial life.⁶⁷ The denunciation of discrimination against women is firm, albeit lacking in concrete examples. No reference is made to the exclusion of women from ordination to the priesthood.⁶⁸ Another welcome addition in the exhortation is the insertion of a paragraph on children, their rights, and the Church's future. Also there is no generalization about tensions between the magisterium and theologians. Since this had been touched upon in both the general outline and the working paper, its absence from the postsynodal exhortation may testify to the synod participants' choice to downplay the tension or to argue for its nonpervasiveness.⁶⁹ All things considered, the chapter on communion, despite its noted shortcomings in structure and content, shows notable progress over the working paper in various places.

THE WAY TO SOLIDARITY

Solidarity, the third and last sub-theme developed in both documents, is taken up in Part 4 of the working paper and Chapter 5 of the exhortation.

The Working Paper

Its structure. Apart from the concluding remarks, the structure of Part 4 is the most underdeveloped in the working paper. Again, the problem of

⁶⁵ See *Nostra aetate* no. 2.

⁶⁶ *Ecclesia in America* no. 51.

⁶⁷ See *Mulieris dignitatem et epistula apostolica ad mulieres* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995); *Christifideles laici* no. 49.

⁶⁸ *Ecclesia in America* no. 45; see *Lineamenta* no. 39.

⁶⁹ *Lineamenta* no. 33; *Instrumentum laboris* nos. 26, 38.

criteria is fundamental. Nevertheless, its structure has certain merits that warrant mentioning. Chapters 1 and 2 try to ground solidarity in a scriptural and doctrinal framework. Chapter 3 discusses areas where solidarity exists in the Americas and where social change is needed by human promotion in light of the broader new evangelization. I have already noted that too much emphasis is placed on the theoretical framework; however Chapter 3 serves as a point of departure for potential exchange on questions of justice and solidarity. Here the text moves from the imperative gospel challenge for justice to alleviating the plight of the poor, and from the value of base communities to promoting human life in all stages. Concerns over foreign debt and a globalized economy are also touched upon. While the text's discussion of areas for action is brief, in some cases merely passing references, the issues remain structurally present and served as the basis for potential development at the synod proper. Part 4 has a clear linear development, from Scripture to Church to areas for action; the text's structure underscores the wide berth for local examination and implementation in the area of praxis and doxa of solidarity.

Its content. In the document's first two chapters in Part 4, it is argued that: "The answers to the *Lineamenta* indicate . . . little account given in some cases to the social implications of the faith, which, in turn, is reflected in an incomplete formation in both the laity and clergy."⁷⁰ These chapters offer a synopsis of the social implications of scriptural narratives. The scriptural basis is a thorough blending of both Old and New Testament. In fact, the biblical texts extend from the Pentateuch through the minor and major prophets, from Mark, Matthew, Luke/Acts, and John, to letters in the Pauline corpus, forming an intricate tapestry for engaging in solidarity.⁷¹

This point is further developed in Chapter 2, where evangelization and human promotion are linked. The proclamation of the Word of God to persons and cultures, while toward an eschatological end, is seen necessarily to involve the concrete and social dimension of persons. Furthermore, the working paper not only states that individuals have the basic right to self-actualization; it also calls upon the state to foster this by encouraging, not removing, incentives toward this end.⁷² This demands uniting with the poor whose rights are infringed and promoting an ethic of justice for restoring and reenforcing dignity. Chapter 3 then lists areas warranting attention since they are problems hindering full expression of solidarity and justice. Systemic problems requiring fraternal charity toward those affected and simultaneously reordering or overturning their very sources are

⁷⁰ *Instrumentum laboris* no. 58.

⁷² *Instrumentum laboris* no. 57.

⁷¹ *Ecclesia in America* nos. 50–52.

touched upon.⁷³ Appreciably, the content of this chapter, just as other parts of the working paper, makes distinctions within the Americas.

One vehicle identified as a channel for promoting solidarity is the small Christian community. The statement views these cells as vital to ecclesial communion and solidarity, although it mentions once the danger of potential political manipulation. However, to argue that these small communities are tied more toward realizing solidarity and less to communion seems to underestimate their positive influence on life within the Church.

Statements stressing the option for the poor in the working paper are not as notable as passages found in the CELAM documents from Medellín or Puebla.⁷⁴ Still there remains a strong tone. Without question, Latin American liberation theology bears much of the merit for this emphasis. That liberation theology is not explicitly mentioned is regrettable.⁷⁵ However, its fruits are evident. Speaking to social issues, standing preferentially with the poor, and working toward justice clearly requires the mediation of the human sciences. Earlier supporters of liberation theology introduced these as part of its legacy. At the same time, socioeconomic mediations critical to illuminating problematics in the 1970s and 1980s have been nuanced and complemented. Between developments in the social and economic spheres and the contribution of emerging sociocultural mediations, no longer is democratic capitalism understood as intrinsically an affront to basic dignity and corresponding human rights. No longer are theologies of liberation, specifically Latin American perspectives, viewed reductionistically as socialist or Marxist.⁷⁶ Such overtly simplified polarities have been outgrown. Cautioning against regression, the document reiterates that the state cannot neutralize or stifle the self-development of the person. Nor can capital or profit ever be viewed as the end for which the person becomes a means. Consequently it seems that strong statements against both extremes equally embody a preferential option for the poor.⁷⁷ In my view, the fact that Latin American liberation theology goes unmentioned in the working paper should not be raised to headline status, for more importantly its effects are evident in the text.

⁷³ Ibid. nos. 60–61.

⁷⁴ CELAM, *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in Light of the Council*, trans. Louis Michael Colonnese (Washington: USCC, 1970) part 2, no. 22, part 14, nos. 5–7; *Puebla* nos. 1134–65.

⁷⁵ See Mary Waskowiak, who laments the lack of reference to Latin American liberation theology in the documents of the special assembly (cited in *Tablet* 251 [December 6, 1997] 1578).

⁷⁶ See Jeffrey Klaiber, S.J., *Iglesia, dictaduras y democracias en America latina* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Perú, 1997).

⁷⁷ Georges De Schrijver, ed., *Liberation Theology on Shifting Grounds: A Clash of Socio-economic and Cultural Paradigms* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998).

Finally, Part 4, on solidarity, concludes with a section on what is often termed “the culture of life.” Like the preceding paragraphs in the previous chapter, the treatment is brief but offers fertile ground for the synod. Family is viewed as offering valuable witness to the promotion of solidarity and justice; family also reaffirms the value of the “domestic church” and reminds all that solidarity begins not just from structural revisioning but equally from family witness on the local level. But issues relating to bioethics are seen as too complex for the synod to devote adequate attention to them. The issue is the domain for experts, who should gather to address them with local, national, regional, and global church agencies.

Ecclesia in America

Its structure. Chapter 5 of the exhortation, like the working paper, briefly tackles issues related to solidarity and justice. By situating solidarity in relation to ecclesial communion, one can see the necessary link between evangelization and human promotion. This is clearer in the next section where conversion toward a more complete awareness of the Church’s social teaching is seen as imperative to a correct pursuit of justice and solidarity. To facilitate this awareness, the Church’s social doctrine is then highlighted. The structure of this section might have been organized somewhat differently. Beginning with scriptural and doctrinal foundations to the Church’s social teaching, attention might have turned to their embodiment in basic human rights and the preferential option for the poor. Because we now live in a globalized society, both economically and culturally, awareness of social sins and their particular solutions could have been placed within this organic context. Thus a reflection on globalization could have preceded indicators that present social sin. Furthermore, specific social sins that merit attention through individual and structural conversion need mentioning. Attention should also have been given to discrimination against indigenous and immigrant cultures in light of the expansive globalization of culture. The question again is what determines the criteria for inclusion or exclusion. Rather than concluding the chapter with a reflection on the culture of death, it would have been more advantageous to highlight the merits of solidarity as fostering the culture of life.

Its content. Given that solidarity is understood as an essential outpouring of communion and not something peripheral, the exhortation clearly states that human solidarity is not just a matter of charity. Rather, the gospel demands a concrete pursuit of justice undertaken by persons, agencies, and nations.⁷⁸ In order to accomplish this, the exhortation concerns itself with

⁷⁸ See *Centesimus annus* no. 5; *Sollicitudo rei socialis* no. 41; *Evangelii nuntiandi* nos. 29–30.

spreading church social teaching. However, unlike the working paper, the exhortation minimizes, almost negating, a treatment of the scriptural basis for solidarity. This appears to me to be problematic. Given the initial accent placed on Scripture as a primary vehicle for encountering the living Jesus Christ, the editors of the exhortation seem to have missed a prime opportunity to demonstrate the riches present in both the Old and New Testaments.⁷⁹

As hinted at in both the general outline and the working paper, the exhortation, echoing the bishops at the synod, indicates that “it would be very useful to have a compendium or approved synthesis of Catholic social doctrine, including a ‘Catechism’, which would show the connection between it and the new evangelization.”⁸⁰ To some, this will raise red flags, as did the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. However, understood correctly, a catechism of social doctrine could serve as a resource text for particular churches, not as a primary teaching tool. As in the paths to conversion and communion, the pathway to solidarity includes a wide berth for local strategies, namely particular compendia and concrete action items. “[As] in the case of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, such a synthesis would only formulate general principles, leaving their application to further treatment of the specific issues bound up with the different local situations.”⁸¹ Here is another important opportunity to engage in evangelization toward inculturation.

In a clear development from the working paper, globalization is treated as a given, a phenomenon that expresses itself in economic indicators as well as cultural ones.⁸² Unlike the working paper, with its more pessimistic treatment of globalization, the exhortation believes that solidarity can utilize and shape a globalized world. Equally significant is the challenge to the negative effects of a “controlled globalization” in order to counter “the domination of the powerful over the weak, especially in the economic sphere, and the loss of the values of local cultures in favor of a misconstrued homogenization.”⁸³ What was previously a most limited treatment has been refined in favor of a more balanced and appreciated tenor. Still, it will be important to study how to utilize the media, such as cyberspace and other communication technologies, that are central to globalization.

Questions on social sins must be inserted into the global phenomenon. Thus, concern over so-called “neo-liberalism” and the appropriate advancement of democracy reflect more, though not exclusively, upon the economic strands of globalization. Racial discrimination and inequality between social groups emerge as a negative effect and manifest themselves

⁷⁹ *Ecclesia in America* no. 52; see *Instrumentum laboris* nos. 50–52.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* no. 54.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.* nos. 20, 55.

⁸³ *Ibid.* no. 55.

as a controlling device on the “culture of globalization.” It is critical to specify how globalized technologies can inform consumers of their responsibility to ensure fundamental rights, thus adopting an ethic toward the liberation of the undignified poor.

Another clear development from the working paper is the insertion of a paragraph on human rights which then leads naturally to a personal, social, and political stance to ensure that those who lack basic rights are the preferred focus of the Church’s attention. Yet the paragraph on human rights is a mirror of an earlier treatment of human rights in chapter 2 of the exhortation. Had the content of these two paragraphs been fused and placed within this chapter, the effects might have been even more crystalizing. Nevertheless, that human rights is linked to a preferential option for the poor indicates that justice and the pursuit of human rights are intrinsically tied to human solidarity.⁸⁴

As in the working paper, a host of issues are listed that demand attention and action. Statements on foreign debt, corruption, drugs, and arms are specifically mentioned. Not only are items noted, but also possible courses of action are proposed.⁸⁵ Oddly enough, these items were outlined first in Chapter 2 of the exhortation, and the treatment here is mainly a restatement. Does the repetition point to questions over final redaction? The only item not repeated from Chapter 2 is ecological stewardship. *Ecclesia in America*’s treatment of life-issues is also noteworthy, including a very strongly worded remark against the death penalty, signaling a clear evolution from the working paper which did not address the topic.⁸⁶ As encouraging as the statements are, might it have been more beneficial to develop other items within the American context, such as the merits and drawbacks of a global economy and ecological awareness and action?

The treatment of indigenous and immigrant cultures regresses from what was presented in the working paper. While sections devoted to indigenous, African and immigrant cultures were elements of American identity there,

⁸⁴ See *Octogesima adveniens*.

⁸⁵ Regarding foreign debt, the exhortation suggests, echoing the Synod participants, that specific ecclesial agencies cooperate with representatives of the banking sector and incorporate the insights of experts in monetary and economic areas. On corruption, the first action cited is pedagogical. How are the Church’s teachings, both global and particular, disseminated and actualized. On drugs, the exhortation takes aim at legislative bodies, hoping that incentives will be negated. Also regarding drug abuse, the exhortation encourages pastors and local ecclesial leaders to speak out against a lifestyle that encourages drug consumption in an effort to reduce drug traffic. On weapons, the exhortation speaks to those who are experts in mediation and arbitration. The use of these skills to broker peace initiatives and reducing the threat of armed conflict is encouraged; see *Ecclesia in America* nos. 59–62.

⁸⁶ *Ecclesia in America* no. 63; see *Instrumentum laboris* no. 66.

the exhortation places them within its chapter on solidarity.⁸⁷ To me, this is clearly problematic. That the issue of discrimination against indigenous and African cultures is raised is commendable. That their presence, given the content of the paragraph, is not acknowledged as part of American identity is unfortunate. The content of the paragraph indicates the essential priority of these cultures and their right to preserve their identity. Oddly the final words on the paragraph on indigenous and African cultures note that “it will be easier to provide a sufficient number of pastors to work with the native peoples if efforts are made to promote priestly and religious vocations within the midst of these very people.”⁸⁸ The need for indigenous vocations was already mentioned in the paragraph on priestly vocations.⁸⁹ It is not clear why this overlapping was judged to be necessary?

The discussion of present-day migration is significant and reflects a clear development from the working paper. The exhortation notes that “[a]ttention must be called to the rights of migrants and their families and to respect for their human dignity, even in cases of non-legal immigration.”⁹⁰ At the same time, the introductory remark on migrants highlights what has already been mentioned as an impoverishment in the exhortation. Understanding that the paragraph is devoted to the present issues facing human and cultural migration, the fleeting reference to past waves of migration to the American region is, at best, insufficient. Even tied together with the passing reference in Chapter 2 on European migration, the acknowledgement is incomplete.⁹¹ Overall, however, despite the concerns that have been raised, the chapter on solidarity encourages a strong ethic of justice and proposes action to curb violations on basic rights.

ECCLESIA IN AMERICA AND NEW EVANGELIZATION

Chapter 6 of the exhortation has no structural parallel in the working paper, but its content can be found throughout the working paper.

Its structure. This chapter needs to be read along with Chapter 2. Together they trace components and methods in the new evangelization, thematically understood as “Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ.” This chapter follows much of the structure of Paul VI’s exhortation on evangelization. First, new evangelization and mission find their rationale in the Christ, the primary and complete evangelizer. Methods for evangelization then emerge, restating those in *Evangelii nuntiandi* and located in Part 1 of

⁸⁷ See *Instrumentum laboris* nos. 13–16; *Ecclesia in America* nos. 64–65.

⁸⁸ *Ecclesia in America* no. 64; see also no. 40.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* no. 40.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* no. 65.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* no. 14.

the working paper.⁹² The presentation of the evangelization of culture within the structure of the exhortation is problematic. It cannot be viewed simply as another method for evangelization; rather inculturation is elementary in the content of evangelization. Gerald Arbuckle, for one, takes this to mean that evangelization and inculturation are synonyms.⁹³ Methods are more appropriately unearthed from an awareness of the interplay between evangelization and culture. It is paramount not just to adapt methods but to locate new methods proper to a culture between cultures. Thus the methods that are structurally cited in Chapter 6 need to be left open ended, though this is not stated or implied.

The placement of “sects” and “new religious movements” has structurally shifted from its place in the working paper.⁹⁴ Its placement in Chapter 6 is awkward and breaks up the development of methods. It would have been better to incorporate this into Chapter 2, where other presenting phenomena such as globalization and urbanization are treated.

Its content. As this chapter is devoted specifically to mission and new evangelization, its content might appropriately be gauged by the definition that has been attached to it. What is outlined is an evangelization that is “new in ardor, new in method, and new in expression.”⁹⁵ Without question, the zeal undergirding the vast and extensive project of new evangelization is encouraging. Most critical is the need to announce confidently and creatively the complete news of Jesus Christ in both the immanent and transcendent dimensions. The first paragraphs of Chapter 6, somewhat an echo of *Evangelii nuntiandi*, serve as both focal points and instigators of zealous proclamation.⁹⁶ While there is certainly a new ardor that is taking shape, this final chapter of the exhortation falls short in methods. More accurately, the methods named are repetitious of those found in *Evangelii nuntiandi*. Catechesis, education, and the media are not new. Similarly,

⁹² *Instrumentum laboris* nos. 12–21.

⁹³ Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990) 18; see also Aylward Shorter, *Toward A Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997) 10–15. Shorter believes that there are in fact two stages in evangelization, acculturation and inculturation. As he notes, remaining in the phase of acculturation runs the danger of imposing a symbolic order in a syncretistic manner. Moving toward ongoing inculturation allows a culture to express itself, having digested the narrative life of other cultures (ibid. 12–13). Richard G. Cote outlines what he believes to be the pope’s view on the relationship between evangelization and inculturation. He notes that mission is directed toward the evangelization of the secular realm, while inculturation is turned more inward, toward the ongoing maturation of a faith that is already organically present (Cote, *Re-visioning Mission* [New York: Paulist, 1996] 40).

⁹⁴ See *Instrumentum laboris* nos. 45–48.

⁹⁵ *Ecclesia in America* nos. 9, 65. ⁹⁶ *Ibid.* no. 67.

methods listed in Chapter 2, namely popular piety and a repetition of education and social action, are also anchored in Paul VI's postsynodal exhortation on evangelization. While the new evangelization speaks of new methods, there is not one new method given adequate development or treatment. At the same time however, the exhortation does cite "new" phenomena that evangelization must face, like globalization. New phenomena should encourage new methods. Also, in this chapter, an extended presentation is made of so-called "sects" and/or new religious movements. While the exhortation calls for national studies on attrition from the Church toward such groups as well as pastoral plans to address this migration, will that be sufficient? In other words, without new methods will a new ardor be sufficient to treat the new and presenting phenomena? New expressions are present in Chapter 6, but minimally. The growing awareness of contextuality and interculturalism in dialogue with long-standing faith narratives could give birth to new expressions of faith, but the inadequate attention given to inculturation throughout the exhortation does not help this. This chapter offers nothing more than an acknowledgement of the value of contextuality in new evangelization and an appreciable mention of the *mestiza* face of Our Lady of Guadalupe as a hallmark of inculturation.

The final paragraph on mission contains a remark that is both confusing and clarifying. *Ecclesia in America* shapes the relationship between new evangelization and mission *ad gentes* as such: "The program of a new evangelization on the American continent, to which many pastoral projects are directed, cannot be restricted to revitalizing the faith of regular believers, but must strive as well to proclaim Christ where he is not known."⁹⁷ Thus, it becomes clear that the mission *ad gentes* is a component of the new evangelization. Yet, in John Paul's encyclical on mission, he refers to three general situations in evangelization. For the purposes of this article two of the three warrant mention: "First, there is a situation which the church's missionary activity addresses . . . in which Christ and his Gospel are not known. . . . This is mission *ad gentes* in the proper sense of the term . . . [Then, t]here is an intermediate situation . . . where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith or even no longer consider themselves members of the church. . . . In this case what is needed is a 'new evangelization.'"⁹⁸ Clearly *Redemptoris missio* and *Ecclesia in America* are two different readings of the relationship between the new evangelization and mission *ad gentes*. Does the exhortation develop mission *ad gentes* from its "proper sense" toward evangelizing gaps in Christianized cultures? The paragraph on mission *ad gentes* also exhibits the merits of true interculturalism. The Americas, marked by a kaleidoscope of cultures, must

⁹⁷ Ibid. no. 74.

⁹⁸ *Redemptoris missio* no. 33.

speak to cultures beyond their borders to pass on the developing plurinarrative patrimony of faith. This indirect reference to interculturalization, region to region, is significant, since it is constitutive of Church.

CONCLUSION

That *Ecclesia in America* offered no detailed plan of action for the new evangelization is not unfortunate. The exhortation avoided such concrete reflection, thereby exhorting the regional church to engage in localized, contextual, and intercontextual reflection. Various bishops signaled this idea when a representative number of them gathered in Cuba following the pope's visit to Mexico and the U.S. in January 1999. Various other ecclesial units, the family, small base communities, parishes, dioceses and communities of consecrated life, will need to do the same. Ultimately, if no activity wells up from this synodal process, it is not the bishop who will be to blame, but the local church.

The working paper was at pains to appreciate the history of indigenous and migrant cultures in the Americas, showing similarities and dissimilarities between these cultures and the need to foster more integrated relationships. The drafters of the exhortation, although alluding to the complexity of this history, did not repeat this and hence inculturation was neglected. This is both a lacuna and an opportunity. As local churches have been charged with implementing contextual action plans and engaging in cooperative ventures, so the greatest witness to inculturation might emerge from reflections and strategies for the new evangelization out of the Americas.

Finally, two issues that seemingly curbed interest in the Synod of America need to be addressed. The first concerns the criteria utilized in shaping the structure and content of the synod documents. Second, the authoritative character of synodal assemblies needs clarification. The pope addressed the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops in 1983, noting that a synodal assembly's "vote—if morally unanimous—has a qualitative ecclesial weight, which surpasses the merely formal aspect of the consultative vote."⁹⁹ That almost all the recommended 76 synodal propositions are contained in the exhortation indicates that this consultative body had a weighty impact over a range of issues, including those not treated in the exhortation, now left to local reflection. The synod's participants did their job. Will the local churches now do theirs?

⁹⁹ "Allocutio ad sodales secretariae generalis synodi episcoporum," AAS 75/1 (1983) 650–51.