

SELECT GROUPS

Topic: The Synod for America: Theological and Anthropological Implications

Moderator: Mary M. McGlone, St. Louis, Missouri

Presenters: Bishop Ricardo Ramirez, Las Cruces, New Mexico

Archbishop Marcel Gervais, Ottawa

The two presenters were elected members of the 1997 Synod for America. Building their presentations on one another, they outlined the recent history of bishops' synods and speculated about the potential results of this synod.

Bishop Ramirez suggested that of the seventeen synods held since Vatican II, the four which have given the most significant direction to the Church have been the 1971 synod on justice and the ministerial priesthood, the 1974 synod on evangelization, the 1987 synod on the laity, and the 1994 synod on religious life. According to Ramirez, the Synod for America should be regarded as a process that began in 1997, with unknown potential in regard to its effects on the future.

The bishops cited certain weaknesses of the synod in raising the question of whether "America" is a reality or a European idealization of the land across the water. They also drew attention to the strong Vatican component of the synod membership, and the synod format which emphasized speech making over dialogue. On the positive side, the final synod message favored a more biblical Christology than did preparatory documents and, if it did not significantly develop themes of justice, solidarity and commitment to the poor, neither did it abandon them.

Given that the synod needs to be viewed as a process rather than an already accomplished fact, the bishops suggested several priorities for a follow-up agenda on the part of theologians. In the area of ecclesiology, the Church needs a better historical understanding of synodality, collegiality and conciliarity to ground regional synods as supranational bodies. In this regard, they referred to a suggestion made at the Asian synod that the establishment of new Patriarchates might open the way for a more genuine inculturation of Christianity. In regard to the Church throughout America, they highlighted the need for greater collaboration among theologians of North and South America and the need of the Church Universal to reap the benefits of genuine cooperation among theologians, and between theologians and bishops.

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