

BACKGROUND AND REFLECTIONS ON THE 2015 SYNOD
(ABOUT POPE FRANCIS FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW)
PART 7 APPENDIX – THE PRESENT (2015) SYNOD (Continued)

In PART 6 APPENDIX – THE PRESENT (2015) SYNOD (Continued), the second half of that material, we began our look at the dynamics and processes being used in the present Synod. We ended those comments/reflections with the segments of the Instrumentum Laboris being closely perused in three weeks. Here we continue our study/reflection with what comes next.

The Commission for the elaboration of the Final Report now takes over. The appointees here were made by the Pope and it includes world-wide representation: 4 archbishops, 2 archbishops who are also cardinals, 2 bishops, and one priest (a religious community priest). Again there could have been included here in the light of content a woman and/or married couple but this opportunity was missed also. The responsibility of this commission is the drafting of a final document to be presented to the full Assembly. There are opportunities here for interventions from the Assembly. The final text will now be decided for the last time and presented to the plenary session on the morning of Saturday, October 24, 2015, and presented for approval in the afternoon. Why, again, are no women and/or married laity given a chance to help with this final decision?

The final or finished text is handed over to the Pope who is responsible for any decisions to be made. At this point, it does not look as if a mid-term report will be issued nor a post-synodal exhortation; a short final report will probably be issued for further discussion. All we can do now is wait and see. And in the meantime, pray for the success of the Synod's work.

At the Synod the large number of the Synod Fathers and of those allowed to speak is well over 300 – it actually is 350. So interventions and speaking times have been carefully worked out: each Father or other speaker will be allowed to speak for three minutes. Of course, they also will be participating in small groups for discussion. One hour is allowed for each General Congregation of the Curia, e.g., the Congregation For the Doctrine of the Faith. In these Curial presentations, the Synod Fathers are allowed to intervene.

There are a few other procedures in addition to all those we have described so far (above) but what has been said so far is enough to help us understand how the Synod is operating. An example of these “few other procedures” is the submitting of other written documents to the Synod's General Secretariat. Parenthetically, please allow me to express my public thanks to two men in my Congregation who have helped me tremendously as I did my research by providing me with excellent material sources: these two men are Deacon Phil Tremblay, C.R., and Father Ernie Varosi, C.R. My thanks to them and may God continue to bless them both for helping me and the Consortium of partners do this necessary work of helping our Holy Father to make the Church more responsive and more clearly evident that it is the Body of Christ for today's world.

There is ongoing contact with the media during the time the Synod is meeting and there will be on-going briefings. A special Synod Commission in conjunction with the Holy See Press Office are responsible for providing information to the media. However, “the various stages in the development of the basic document remain confidential, since during the synodal process, the texts are subject to continuous developments right up to the final draft” (Baldisseri). The results of the small group discussions will be made public and the Synod Fathers are also free to communicate with the media as they see fit.

The basic criteria in all that is said in these appendix-parts come from Pope Francis himself. He has made it clear that the Synod must be a safe place for the Fathers to speak freely so that the Holy Spirit can act through this Synod. “Francis [certainly] wants the [Synod] participants to speak

their minds but he also sees the need for serious discernment: that means less grandstanding and more listening” (Christopher Lamb, reporter and writer for The Tablet).

Francis truly believes in the collegiality proposed by Vatican II and so he has wisely left matters open-ended; “leaving matters open-ended is both a clever strategy by Francis and an indication of his desire to veer away from a top-down, Roman centralism when it comes to making decisions” (Lamb). Of all the post-Vatican II pontiffs, Pope Francis is the most collegial by far.

On the morning of October 17, 2015, Synod members gathered in Paul VI Hall to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the use of Bishops’ Synods. Again here we have a very strong and clear manifestation of Francis’ use of collegiality. This event was open to the public. Blessed Pope Paul VI set up the Bishops’ Synods in 1965 in order to perpetuate the Spirit of Vatican II “so that even after [Vatican II’s] conclusion it would continue to receive that ‘great abundance of benefits that we have been so happy to see flow to the Christian people during the time of the Council as a result of Our close collaboration with the bishops;’” (Blessed Paul VI). At this gathering, a few bishops representing all parts of the world spoke followed by the Pope.

On October 18, 2015, at 10:30 a.m., in the Vatican Basilica, Mass was celebrated for the canonization of some holy persons including the parents of St. Therese of the Child Jesus (the spouses Louise Martin and Marie-Azelie Guérin). Note the emphasis here on family.

Every day of the Synod Mass is celebrated and the rosary said at the Basilica of Saint Mary Major; in the Synod’s first week these prayers are for the world’s children, in the second week for the parents, and in the third week for grandparents. We can certainly see the hand of Francis in this! Please pray for the same intentions personally in your parishes. Thank you.

Aboard the papal plane going back to Rome from the United States, Francis held a press conference. For our purposes, we need to note that “the pontiff [among other things] also said it’s ‘simplistic’ to believe that the second round of the Synod of Bishops [the present Synod] for the family [which began on October 4, 2015] would solve the question of whether divorced and civilly remarried Catholics should be able to receive Communion. He noted that it must also face other issues, such as the inadequacy of marriage preparation efforts.” (John L. Allen Junior, associate editor of Cruxnow [at www.cruxnow.com] and a specialist in Vatican matters, US Papal Visit: Pope Francis calls sex abuse cover-up by some bishops ‘very ugly’)

We end these comments with a summation of the essential aspects of a synod.

The synod’s proper name is the Synod of Bishops. A synod is “an international body of bishops representing the bishops of the world” (A-Z of the Catholic Church: Its Doctrines, its Teachings, its Personalities and its Idiosyncrasies compiled by Luke Connaughton, theologian). It is meant to maintain close communion and collaboration with the Pope, and it presumes every bishop shares in the responsibility of the whole Church.

Synods were established by Blessed Pope Paul VI with the first one being held in 1967. They continue to meet under its President, the Pope, who decides when it shall meet and why: so the Pope convokes it and gives it its agenda. Synods now seem to be perpetual meetings and over a dozen of them have been held so far; they will continue into the future. At least 85% of those who are participants in a synod are to be elected by the world’s bishops.

So that we do not get the wrong impression, we need to realize that “synods and councils of various kinds are as old as the Church” (Footnote 69 to Paragraph 36 of the Decree on the Bishops’ Pastoral Office in the Church found in The Documents of Vatican II edited by Father Walter M. Abbot, S.J.). Vatican II wanted/wants synods to flourish in the Church.

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE SYNOD’S FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO BE MADE REAL IN THE CHURCH! Thank you! THE END.

Father Fred Scinto, C.R., Resurrection Ministries, Waterloo, Ontario. (fscinto@rogers.com)