

## Relatio Finalis: 'The sons of God have inalienable rights'

*There follow excerpts from the final document of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church which concluded Dec. 8 in Rome, in a translation from the Italian (the original being in Latin). The abbreviation LG stands for Lumen gentium, official documents from Vatican II. All emphases are added, and all expressions in brackets are editorial additions. Expressions in parentheses are in the original.*

### Relatio Finalis

**"The Church; in the Word of God, Celebrates the Mysteries of Christ for the Salvation of the World"**

#### I

2. . . . The end towards which this synod was convened was the celebration, verification, and promotion of the Vatican II Council. With a thankful spirit, we feel we have truly reached this fruit, with the aid of God. . . .

3. Lights and shadows in the acceptance of the Council

. . . . Nonetheless, although great fruits have been obtained from the Council, we have recognized at the same time and with great sincerity the wants and difficulties in the acceptance of the Council. *In truth, there have also been shadows in the post-conciliar period due in part to a non-full understanding and application of the Council, and in part due to other causes. Yet in no way can it be affirmed that everything which has occurred after the Council has been caused by the Council.*

4. External and internal causes of the difficulty

. . . . In the rich nations an ideology is constantly growing characterized by pride for its technical progress and a certain immanentism which leads to the idolatry of material goods (so-called consumerism). . . . *Further, we cannot deny the existence in society of forces capable of great influence which*

*act with a certain hostile spirit towards the Church. All these things manifest the work of "the prince of this world" and the "mystery of iniquity" also in our times.*

Among the internal causes, we must note a partial and selective reading of the Council, as well as a superficial interpretation of its doctrine in one sense or another. On the one side, there have been disappointments because we have been too hesitant in the application of the true doctrine of the Council. On the other, due to a partial reading of the Council, there has been a unilateral presentation of the Church as a strictly institutional structure, deprived of its Mystery. Probably we are not free of all responsibility for the fact that the young especially view the Church critically as a pure institution. Have we not perhaps favored in them this opinion, by speaking too much of renewal of the external structures of the Church, and speaking little of God and of Christ? *From time to time there has also been lacking a spiritual discernment, not distinguishing strictly between a legitimate opening of the Council to the world and the acceptance of the mentality and ordering of the values of a secularized world.*

5. A more profound acceptance of the Council

. . . . The theological interpretation of the conciliar doctrine must bear in mind, too, the documents. . . . It is not licit to separate the pastoral dimension from the doctrinal vigor of the documents. *Thus it is also not licit to separate the spirit and letter of the Council.* Furthermore, the Council must always be understood in continuity with the great tradition of the Church. . . . The Church is the same in all the Councils.

#### II

Particular arguments of the Synod

A) The Mystery of the Church

1. Secularism and the signs of the return to the sacred

The brief period of 20 years which separates us from the end of the Council has led to accelerated changes in history.

In that sense, the signs of our times do not coincide exactly, in some points, with those of the period of the Council. Among these, special attention must be placed on the phenomenon of secularism. Without any doubt, the Council affirmed the legitimate autonomy of temporal things (cfr. GS 36 and elsewhere). In this sense one can speak of a correctly understood secularization. But it is something totally different from the secularism which consists of an autonomistic vision of man and of the world, which leaves aside the dimension of mystery, which disregards and even denies it. This immanentism is a reduction of the integral vision of man, which leads not to his true liberation, but to a new idolatry, to the enslavement of ideology, to a life in this world of reductive and often oppressive structures.

Notwithstanding secularism, there exist also signs of a return to the sacred. Today, in fact, there are signs of a new hunger and thirst for transcendence and the divine. . . .

## 2. The Mystery of God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit

. . . The message of the Church, as it was described in the Vatican II Council, is trinitarian and Christocentric.

Because Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the new Adam, he manifests at the same time the mystery of God and the mystery of man, and his [man's] high vocation (cfr. GS 22). The Son of God was made man in order to make men the sons of God. *Through this familiarity with God, man is raised to the highest dignity.* For this reason, when the Church preaches Christ, it announces to men their salvation.

### 3. Mystery of the Church

All the importance of the Church derives from its connection to Christ. . . . *We cannot substitute a false unilateral vision of the Church as purely hierarchical, with a new sociological conception which is also unilateral.* . . .

Relation of the magisterium of Bishops and of theologians

Theology, according to the noted description of St. Anselm, is the "faith which seeks the intellect". . . . [T]heology is specifically necessary today for the life of the Church. . . . But, on the other hand, *we are sorry to see that sometimes theological discussions in our day have been the occasion of confusions among the faithful.* Hence there is required a reciprocal communication and dialogue among Bishops and theologians. . . .

### 4. Suggestions

Many have expressed the desire that there be compiled a catechism or compendium of all Catholic doctrine respecting both the faith and morality, such that it be almost a point of reference for the catechisms or compendia which are being prepared in different regions. This ought to be a healthy doctrine adapted to actual life of Christians. . . .

#### B) Sacred liturgy

##### 1. Internal renewal of liturgy

Liturgical renewal is the most visible fruit of the entire conciliar work. Despite some difficulties which have arisen, generally it has been received with joy and benefit by the

faithful. Liturgical renewal cannot be limited to ceremonies, rites, texts, etc. Active participation, so happily increased in the Post-Concilium, does not consist solely in exterior activity, but above all in interior and spiritual participation, in the living and fruitful participation in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ (cfr. SC 11). *It is evident that liturgy ought to favor and make resplendent the sense of the sacred. It must be permeated with the spirit of reverence, of the adoration and the glory of God.* . . .

##### 2. Suggestions

Bishops must not only correct abuses, but also explain clearly to all, the theological foundations of sacramental discipline and of the liturgy.

##### 2. Unity and pluriformity in the Church

As we believe in one sole God and in one sole mediator Jesus Christ, and in one sole Spirit, so also we have one sole baptism and one sole Eucharist, with which are symbolized and built the unity and uniqueness of the Church. This is of great importance especially in our times because the Church, in that it is one, as a sacrament, is thus a sign and instrument of unity and of reconciliation, of peace among men, nations, classes, and peoples. . . . In this way, ecclesial communion with Peter and his successors is not an obstacle but an anticipation and prophetic sign of a fuller unity. On the other hand, the one and same Spirit operates with many and varied spiritual and charismatic gifts. . . . Because of this, the one and universal Church is present truly in all the particular churches (cfr. CD 11), and these are formed in the image of the universal Church in such a way that the one and only Catholic Church exists in and through the particular Churches (cfr. LG 23). Here we have the true theological principle of variety and pluriformity in unity. *But pluriformity must be distinguished from pluralism. When pluriformity is a true richness and bears plenitude, this is true catholicity. Instead, the pluralism of fundamentally opposed positions leads to the dissolution, destruction, and loss of identity.*

##### 4. Collegiality

The ecclesiology of communion offers the sacramental foundation of collegiality. For this reason, the theology of collegiality is much fuller than its simple juridical aspect. . . .

Collegial action in the strict sense implies the activity of the entire college [of Bishops], together with its head, over all the Church. Its highest expression is the Ecumenical Council. *In all the theological questions on the relationship between the papacy and the college of Bishops no distinction can be made between the Roman Pontiff and the Bishops, considered collectively, but between the Roman Pontiff alone and the Roman Pontiff together with the Bishops.* . . . because the college exists with its "head" and never without. . . .

##### 5. The Episcopal Conferences

The collegial spirit has a concrete application in the episcopal conferences (cfr. LG 23). No one can doubt their pastoral usefulness, even their necessity in the present situation. . . .

In their manner of operation, the Episcopal Conferences ought to bear in mind the good of the Church, or rather the service of unity and the inalienable responsibility of each Bishop respecting the universal Church and his particular Church. . . .

#### 7. Ecumenical communion

Basing itself on the ecclesiology of communion, the Catholic Church, at the time of the Vatican II Council, fully assumed its ecumenical responsibility. After these 20 years, we can affirm that ecumenism is inscribed profoundly and indelibly in the conscience of the Church. . . .

. . . The ecumenical dialogue . . . ought to be spiritual and theological. . . . The dialogue is authentic and fruitful if it presents truth with love and faithfulness towards the Church. . . .

#### 8. Suggestions

a) Because the new Code of Canon Law, happily promulgated, is of great joy to the Latin Church in the application of the Council, there is expressed the desire that the Eastern codification be carried to term as rapidly as possible.

b) Because the Episcopal Conferences are so useful, even necessary, in the present pastoral work of the Church, we wish that the study of their theological "status" be more broadly and profoundly clarified, and above all the problem of their doctrinal authority, bearing in mind what is written in the Conciliar Decree *Christus Dominus* n. 38 and in the *Code of Canon Law*, can. 447 and 753.

#### D) The mission of the Church in the world

1. . . . [W]e . . . perceive that the signs of our time are in part different from those of the time of the Council, with greater problems and anguishes. In fact, everywhere throughout the world there is a growth of hunger, oppression, injustice, and war, of suffering, terrorism, and other forms of violence of all types. This obliges us to a new and more profound theological reflection. . . .

#### 3. Bringing up to date

In this paschal perspective, which affirms the unity of the cross and the resurrection, is to be found the true and false meaning of the so-called "aggiornamento" [bringing the Church up to date with the modern world]. *We exclude a facile adaptation which could lead to the secularization of the Church. We exclude also an immobile closing within itself of the community of the faithful.* We affirm instead the missionary opening for the integral salvation of the world. . . . But integral salvation is obtained only if these human realities are purified and further elevated through the grace of familiarity with God, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

#### 4. Inculturation

In this perspective we have also the theological principle for the problem of inculturation. Because the Church is communion, which combines diversity and unity, it being present throughout the world, it assumes from every culture all that which it finds to be positive. *Inculturation is nonetheless different from a simple exterior adaptation*, because it sig-

nifies the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values, through their integration into Christianity, and the rooting of Christianity into various human cultures. . . .

#### 5. Dialogue with non-Christian religions and with non-believers

The Vatican II Council affirmed that the Catholic Church refuses nothing of what is true and holy in non-Christian religions. . . .

#### 6. Preferential option for the poor and human improvement

After the Vatican II Council the Church became more aware of its mission to serve the poor, the oppressed, the emarginated. In this preferential option, which is not understood as exclusive, shines the true spirit of the Gospels. . . .

Apart from material poverty, there is the lack of liberty and spiritual goods, which in some way can be viewed as a form of poverty, and is particularly grave when religious liberty is suppressed by force.

The Church ought to denounce prophetically every form of poverty and of oppression and defend and promote everywhere the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person. This is especially true when it is a matter of defending human life from its beginning, of protecting it in all circumstances from aggressors, and promoting it effectively under every aspect.

. . . The mission of the Church, although it is spiritual, implies its promotion also under the temporal aspect. . . . Certainly in this mission there is a clear distinction, but not a separation, between the natural and supernatural aspects. This duality is not a dualism. The false and useless oppositions must therefore be put aside, as for example between the spiritual mission and *diaconia* towards the world.

#### 7. Suggestions

Because the world is in continual evolution, it is necessary to analyze continually the signs of the times, such that the message of the Gospels be heard in a clearer way and the activity of the Church for the salvation of the world become more intense and effective. In this context, there should again be an examination of what the following are, and of how they are to be put into practice:

. . . b) the theory and praxis of inculturation, as well as the dialogue with non-Christian religions and with unbelievers;

c) what is the preferential option for the poor;

d) the social doctrine of the Church in relation to human improvement in ever new situations.

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All we Bishops, together with Peter and under his guidance, worked to understand more profoundly the Vatican II Council and realize it concretely in the Church. This has been our objective in this Synod. . . . The message of the Vatican II Council has already been heard with great consensus by all the Church and remains the Magna Carta for the future.