

PREPARATION FOR THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS

Evangelization in the contemporary world will be the theme of the next Synod of Bishops, which will be aimed at reaching concrete pastoral recommendations.

The Secretariat for non-believers, at the request of the Secretariat of the Synod, is planning to make a specific contribution to the preparatory work, especially in the area that concerns the knowledge of contemporary man to whom the Gospel message is addressed and who is conditioned by the world in which he lives, with its ideologies, its culture, and its science. This concrete knowledge of man is indispensable if the incarnation of the Gospel message is to be realized in the present moment of history. On the other hand, it is a well known fact that incomprehension, prejudices, and suspicions have created a large gap between the people of today and the Gospel message and the Church....

One of the tasks of our Secretariat is to promote the study of the phenomena of atheism and secularization that to such a great extent characterize the contemporary world. Accordingly, the Secretariat intends to make a study of those aspects in the document prepared by the Secretariat of the Synod (first part: Panorama of evangelization in the present world situation), which refer to the above mentioned phenomena. These are:

- the new cultural currents - philosophical and scientific - that expound concepts of man and interpretations of human existence which are closed to God and the Gospel;
- the fact and the various forms of atheism and of non-belief (including religious indifference);
- secularization of institutions (a premiss for secularism ?);
- transformation of social conditions: urbanization, migration, etc.) and the relativizing of moral norms.

Added also, without being specifically mentioned in the document, are:

- industrialization;
- consumerism;
- the function of the mass media as dispenser of ideas and information;
- youth protests (and protests by non-youths) against structures that are oppressive or considered as such;
- the claims to a liberty without moral constraints;

- the growing esteem - also in Christian circles - for marxist analysis;
- science as "the explanation for everything", etc.

It is obvious that these phenomena - frequently in contrast to each other - are conditioning man, and that therefore they should be taken into consideration when there is question of evangelization, on different levels and in different ways, according to the particular situation of each country, social context, and the like. For this reason the Vatican Secretariat submits the whole complex problematic to the attention of its Consultors and National Secretariats, inviting them to study the implications in their own country, and then to answer the questions that are puzzling the consciences of believers.

One could think of two types of contributions, which are obviously connected:

1) to undertake an analysis (sociological, philosophical, theological) of the phenomena we have mentioned, of their origins, and of the way in which they condition - both positively and negatively - the task of evangelization in the various countries (this type of contribution is asked particularly of the National Secretaries who can organize the study in the way they think best, possibly involving a team of collaborators);

2) presupposing the results of such an analysis, to concentrate especially on the manner in which pastoral work and evangelization should take those phenomena into account (this type of contribution, which is more personal, is asked particularly from the Consultors).

On the occasion of the next plenary meeting of the Secretariat (postponed, because of the unforeseen delay in the appointment of new Members and Consultors, to March 1974) all are also called upon to treat of the specific contribution which the Secretariat can make to the work of the coming Synod. In order to make it possible, at least a month in advance, to formulate a synthesis of the replies received, we should like to have these replies at the Secretariat before December 15th, 1973.

To facilitate the work, we enclose, but only by way of a sample, a series of questions prepared by some experts.

1 encl.