

SYNOD OF BISHOPS

THE EVANGELIZATION
OF THE
MODERN WORLD

(FOR THE USE OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES)

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INDEX

INTRODUCTION	5
Part One: SURVEY OF EVANGELIZATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD SITUATION	7
I. Elements that can favour evangelization	7
II. Possible hindrances to evangelization	8
A) <i>Obstacles outside the Church</i>	8
B) <i>Obstacles within the Church</i>	9
Part Two: THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF THE CHURCH'S PRESENT SITUATION WITH REGARD TO EVANGELIZATION	11
I. Some principles of the theology of evangelization	11
II. Detailed study of certain apostolic insights of the Second Vatican Council	13
III. Apparent contradictions in evangelization which have to be reconciled	15
Part Three: HOW EVANGELIZATION IS TO BE PROMOTED TODAY	18
I. Some guidelines	18
II. Suggested practical applications	20

INTRODUCTION

I. The world of today is in full evolution. Individuals and communities by their own activity are constructing their individual and social lives; a new way of life is coming into being, as a consequence of industrialization, urbanization, the independence of new nations, etc.; indeed the very judgment and scale of values in men's consciences are undergoing change.

II. In this new form which the world is taking on, Christ who suffered and rose again must be present: he must be present as the principle of eternal life, to which we are all called, as the meaning of history, and as the model of the new man. In other words, he must be present as the foundation of man's entire hope.

III. This salvific presence of Christ is realized through the medium of the Church: God wills all men to be saved in the unity of the People of God and through the ministry of this People. The Church's mediation is accomplished through evangelization.

IV. The word " evangelization " is commonly understood in several different senses today. In the first place, the term can mean every activity whereby the world is in any way transformed in accordance with the will of God the Creator and Redeemer. Secondly, the word is used to mean the priestly, prophetic and royal activity whereby the Church is built up according to Christ's intention. A third and more common meaning is the activity whereby the Gospel is proclaimed and explained, and whereby living faith is awakened in non-Christians and fostered in Christians (missionary preaching, catechetics, homiletics, etc.).

Finally, the word "evangelization" is restricted to meaning the first proclamation of the Gospel to non-Christians, whereby faith is awakened (missionary preaching: kerygma). The various meanings are so closely interconnected that the activities they signify cannot be properly separated. Since the word "evangelization" is understood in different ways by different people, many ambiguities arise in the course of discussions. For the sake of clarity, in these pages, which constitute a "working tool", "evangelization" is understood in the third sense, namely as the activity whereby the Church proclaims the Gospel so that faith may be aroused, may unfold and may grow.

V. In view of the diversity of situations experienced by the universal Church and in view of the fact that the individual Churches encounter different successes, lacks and needs, it is very advantageous that the individual Churches should share their experiences, both positive and negative, with one another and with the Apostolic See, in order that as a result the coordinated action of the People of God may be directed more effectively towards evangelization.

PART ONE

SURVEY OF EVANGELIZATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD SITUATION

With a view to carrying out a theological and pastoral reflection and to establishing practical guidelines, it is necessary to describe the situations in which the Church carries out the task of evangelization. Thus it will be possible to indicate those aspects which are common to all and apply to the Church as a whole and those which apply to individual Churches.

I

ELEMENTS THAT CAN FAVOUR EVANGELIZATION

It is useful in the first place to point out the elements which in the contemporary situation can open the way to evangelization and dispose men to accepting it. Among these elements we indicate some concerning which it may be asked whether they or others are present in the individual Churches and whether they really favour evangelization.

A) People are seeking a new life style, freedom from all types of servitude, and the development and promotion of the whole man.

B) In human society individuals as well are seeking the meaning of life and are daily becoming more involved in the discussion of this matter.

C) Dissatisfaction springs not only from lack of progress; it also increases with the advent of progress itself.

D) The Church is becoming progressively less identified with society's political structures, and is able to manifest her religious nature more clearly.

E) There is an evident reaction against conformism and immutable traditions. This reaction manifests itself in the questioning of structures imposed from without.

F) New community forms of every kind arising everywhere demonstrate people's urge to foster mutual solidarity.

G) There is an increase in the sense of personal responsibility.

H) The less elevated forms of religious practice are coming to be recognized as lacking in substance and are being either rejected or corrected. A more genuine religious experience is prized and sought after.

I) The various religions and world ideologies are coming together in the quest for peace and justice.

II

POSSIBLE HINDRANCES TO EVANGELIZATION

Other elements appear rather to be harmful to evangelization. It will be useful to indicate what these elements are and to determine their true function. The following are a few examples.

A) *Obstacles outside the Church*

1. Modern culture, as expressed in the human sciences (psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc.) and in philosophical, economic and other currents of thought, and as disseminated among the masses, manifests concepts of man and interpretations of human life which are not open to God and the Gospel. In what forms, in what milieux and with what effectiveness are such influences in evidence in your own particular Church?

2. It is often said that atheism is increasing in the modern world. Is this true? What forms does atheism perhaps take in your Church?

3. In many countries the secularization of institutions (schools, hospitals, etc.) is increasing. Do you think this secularization is a hindrance to evangelization, and if so in what way?

4. The social conditions of life are changing (urbanization, mi-

gration, etc.). Are such changes hindering evangelization, and if so to what extent?

5. International relations are exercising a daily increasing influence on the life of peoples, and events taking place are quickly known all over the world. Are all these facts having a negative effect on evangelization?

6. Traditional values (family, homeland, honour) are changing. Ethical principles which flourished in days gone by are being called into doubt. How profoundly is this change affecting your part of the world? Is this change also affecting evangelization?

B) *Obstacles within the Church*

1. In the case of many Christians faith is being put to the test and indeed is shaky. How can this frailty of faith be described and explained, and how is it influencing evangelization?

2. Certain currents of thought, which find expression in the "death of God" and "religionless Christianity" theories, are being disseminated, partly deliberately and partly unconsciously and implicitly. Is the influence of such ideas evident in your area, and is it hindering evangelization?

3. One notes a degree of uncertainty in faith, also evident in the interpretation of Scripture and sometimes affecting the central teachings of the Gospel (Christ's identity, his true divinity, the Resurrection, the eschatological nature of the Gospel, the universal significance of the messianic gift brought by Christ, the nature of Christian salvation, etc.). How can evangelization be carried out, when all these things are being questioned?

4. Among the members of the Church herself there is sometimes disagreement concerning the interpretation of the moral demands made by the Gospel (ethics of the individual, the family, politics, etc.). Is this disagreement to be observed in your particular Church? Is it lessening the Church's moral authority and the firmness of conscience of the faithful?

5. Christians find difficulty in expressing their faith in a language understood by our contemporaries. Is the mode of expression of the

Bible and of traditional Christian experience perhaps an obstacle to communicating these experiences to others today?

6. The Church is often accused of being an institution that conceals rather than reveals the Gospel. What is the cause or occasion of this accusation? Do there in fact exist in your area certain forms of ecclesiastical life that seem to obscure the Gospel?

7. The Church cannot maintain her institutions without material means. But in the eyes of many the use of such means makes her suspect of cooperation with certain organs of economic and political power which are perhaps unjust. Is such cooperation in evidence in your area and is it a hindrance to evangelization?

8. The emphasis on pluralism in the Church is leading to diversity in customs, discipline, liturgy and sometimes even in the way the faith is formulated. Is this variety causing a lessening of that unity which is one of the "notes" of the Church (cf. *Jn* 17:23)?

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF THE CHURCH'S PRESENT SITUATION WITH REGARD TO EVANGELIZATION

The description of this situation demonstrates that the crisis of evangelization in today's world can in no way be overcome simply by adapting the Church's activity to sociological, psychological and other postulates. It shows the necessity of giving deeper consideration to the basic concepts involved in the ministry of evangelization, namely salvation, faith, conversion, the person of Christ, the Church, etc., and the further necessity of rethinking the theological principles of evangelization in the light of these concepts.

In present circumstances this can be opportunely done, both because certain missionary insights already indicated by the Second Vatican Council are set forth in their genuine meaning (cf. II), and because certain apparent contradictions which offer solutions that are too one-sided and mutually opposed are brought into a certain synthesis (cf. III). But in order to do this, we must first of all recall certain theological principles concerning the ministry of the Word, its aim and its effectiveness. These principles would seem to be essential if we are to understand clearly the above-mentioned insights and solve the apparent contradictions (cf. I).

I

SOME PRINCIPLES OF THE THEOLOGY OF EVANGELIZATION

A) The Second Vatican Council expresses the basic principles of the theology of evangelization as follows: "In his goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will (cf. *Eph* 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man has access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and comes

to share in the divine nature (cf. *Eph* 2:18; *2 Peter* 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (cf. *Col* 1:15; *1 Tim* 1:17) out of the abundance of his love speaks to men as friends (cf. *Ex* 33:11; *Jn* 15:14-15) and lives among them (cf. *Bar* 3:38), so that he may invite and take them into fellowship with himself" (*Dei Verbum*, 2). The reality, value, necessity and effectiveness of evangelization takes its ultimate intelligibility not from an empirical consideration of created reality but from the revelation of the mystery of salvation absolutely freely decreed by God from eternity.

B) At the centre of this mystery is Christ. Christ, by his Incarnation, words, deeds, signs and miracles, death and Resurrection especially, and by his enduring presence in the world, accomplishes the work of salvation committed to him by the Father, reconciles everything to God and communicates divine gifts to all men (cf. *D.V.*, 4). He is the true light which enlightens every man (cf. *Jn* 1:9), and is the only name under heaven given to men whereby they must be saved (cf. *Acts* 4:12). Men therefore come to salvation to the extent that they are led by the Spirit of Christ and share in Christ's fullness. And this can the more easily be achieved the more perfectly they know him, and follow him as disciples.

C) Continuing to be present in the world, the glorified Christ brings together *the Church* through the proclamation of the Word; he gives her life through the Holy Spirit and sends her out into the whole world to actuate the work of redemption.

The Church carries out this mission in spite of the mystery of iniquity at work in the world. The Church proclaims the Gospel, always seeks to witness to it by her life, incorporates men in Christ through the sacrament of Baptism, and through the other sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, brings this incorporation to full maturity. Through evangelization the Church exercises her specific and sacred right, which no one can justly deny her. In her proclamation of the Gospel the Church wishes not to extend her dominion over men and subjugate them to her power, but rather to serve them, open to them the road to salvation and provide each and every one with the good things he needs.

D) The proclamation of the Word of God is answered by faith, whereby man freely commits himself wholly to God, giving to God

the revealer the full deference of his intellect and will, and voluntarily consents to the revelation which God gives (cf. *D.V.*, 5) and which, when it reaches its perfection, produces the ordering of man's whole life in accordance with God's will.

By faith man's personality is not only not diminished, but is brought to full development. For by faith the unity and perfection of existence in this life are achieved, the human person is harmoniously incorporated into human society and into the universe created by God, he is reconciled with God, without whom the human heart cannot be at peace, and, in particular, the pledge and first-fruits of eternal life are obtained.

All the above points are to be considered as the effects and benefit of evangelization. For even if God, in ways known to himself, can bring men, who through no fault of their own are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him (*Heb* 11:6; cf. *A.G.*, 7), nevertheless it is much more difficult to obtain this result without evangelization.

E) The Gospel is meant for all men, since Christ died and rose again for all, and merited the grace of salvation for all. The Church therefore must constantly evangelize, so that those who do not believe may come to faith and those who do believe may grow in faith.

II

DETAILED STUDY OF CERTAIN APOSTOLIC INSIGHTS OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

The Second Vatican Council put forward a number of guidelines concerning evangelization. It is time that the Synod examined what fruit has resulted from these seeds, what may have been put into practice insufficiently or less correctly, and what may perhaps have given rise to deviations or indeed errors. A number of examples are put forward for examination by the individual Churches.

A) The Second Vatican Council taught that Christ offers salvation to all men, and that his salvific influence is not limited to the visible unity of the Church (*L.G.*, 16; *A.G.*, 7; *G.S.*, 22). Has this affirmation perhaps lessened the fervour of evangelization? How is it to be

explained in such a way that it not only does not harm evangelization but rather assists it? What should one think of the theories of "anonymous Christians", of "implicit faith sufficient for salvation", of "salvation without the Gospel", etc.?

B) The Second Vatican Council has thrown light on the value of freedom of conscience (*D.H.*, 2) and taught that the Gospel is directed towards human freedom (*D.V.*, 5). How can one take freedom into account, without failing to invite and urge others to embrace the Gospel? (Cf. the question of infant baptism, of religious education and instruction, of the distinction between proselytism and the apostolate, etc.).

C) The Second Vatican Council emphasizes that the Gospel must penetrate men's minds more deeply and be more deeply appreciated (e. g. *L.G.*, 14). Does this insistence on "qualitative" Catholicism diminish the desire to bring the greatest possible number of men into the unity of the Church? How can the two aspects (qualitative and quantitative) of Catholicism be reconciled? (Cf. the ecclesiology of the little flock, the exodus, the desert, etc.).

D) The Second Vatican Council taught that non-Christian religions contain genuine religious values (*N.A.*, 2) and that they are paths towards the Gospel. Some people affirm that this can be interpreted in the sense that these religions have a salvific value in themselves (not only as forms of preparation for the Gospel) and that the Gospel is only one way of salvation, though a privileged one. Do you think that this interpretation can be reconciled with the absolute and unique newness of the Gospel?

E) In the Second Vatican Council Christ the Lord is put forward as he in whom the mystery of man fully shines forth (*A.G.*, 8; *G.S.*, 22) and in whom men come to full maturity and human liberty (*G.S.*, 41). The question arises of how it is possible to explain this without putting at risk the transcendence of the Incarnate Word and the unrepeatable uniqueness of the event of Christ.

F) The Second Vatican Council teaches that the Creating Spirit is always at work in the world, and therefore considers that human phenomena are in themselves a sign of the times. This is often

understood in the sense that human tendencies and aspirations are considered to constitute a *locus theologicus*. And since the mystery of iniquity is also at the same time at work in the world, signs of the true presence of God—it is affirmed—are to be interpreted in the light of the Gospel (*G.S.*, 4; 11; 37). Hence the question of how the signs of the times are to be interpreted in order that may serve evangelization.

G) The Second Vatican Council insists that the Gospel can and must adapt itself to all cultures, and enlighten them in such a way that the true values contained in these cultures may be referred to Christ as their source (*A.G.*, 22; *G.S.*, 62). Here the question arises of determining the relationship between evangelization insofar as it must enlighten and unify cultures and evangelization insofar as it must also lead to the conversion of cultures to Christ (the problem of syncretism).

III

APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS IN EVANGELIZATION WHICH HAVE TO BE RECONCILED

The practice of evangelization shows a tendency to stress certain truths so forcefully that other complementary truths seem virtually to be denied. The theological understanding of evangelization requires that one should not just limit oneself to making contrasting statements but that partial and apparently mutually exclusive truths should be brought into harmony through an understanding of their deeper unity. The following apparent contradictions are put forward in order that the various individual Churches may see whether a synthesis, perhaps from a theoretical point of view, might eliminate cases of onesideness and exaggerations that are detrimental to evangelization.

A) The aim of evangelization is sometimes taken to be the transmission of some objective teaching. On other occasions it is held that the whole of evangelization is directed towards making the mystery of Christ present through the Christian experience. Does one exclude the other? How can it be shown that the one is required by the other in order to attain full perfection?

B) Some people think that evangelization consists wholly in bearing witness through Christian living to the power and beauty of the Gospel.

Others consider that evangelization consists merely in the proclamation of the Gospel. How can one show that the credibility of words lies in witness and the intelligibility of witness in words?

C) The goal of evangelization is conversion, which is a "break" in a person's life and a rebuilding of that life around a new centre (Christ). This can be described both as "death" and as the beginning of a fuller "life". The question arises as to how, in evangelization, these two aspects may be brought into harmony (the problem of "Christian humanism").

D) There are those who describe evangelization as though it were something only on the spiritual and religious level, meant only to free man from the bonds of sin. Others however describe Christ as the new Moses and consider that the Gospel is ordered only towards human development, at least at the present moment of history. One asks whether one should speak of two finalities (albeit closely connected ones), or whether both these aspects of evangelization blend into one. Where should the emphasis be placed? What is to be said of the statements: "The Church promotes the human by evangelizing" and "The Church evangelizes by promoting the human"? (Cf. the problems of the theology of politics and of the theology of liberation and revolution).

E) Evangelization is the Church's mission in the world. Some people however regard the institutional Church as a hindrance and consider that evangelization should be carried out with disregard for the institutional Church. One asks what is the relationship between the ecclesiastical institution and the Christian promotion of individuals or even communities. One likewise asks to what goal should evangelization be primarily aimed: the building up of the Church or the salvation of men?

F) Normally speaking, evangelization without the witness of ecclesial life can hardly be successful. Hence the fact that some hold that evangelization should be avoided until such time as the Church is interiorly reformed and clearly appears as the sign of God in the world. The question arises whether the Church ought to abandon the evangelization of non-Christians in order to devote herself first to

interior reform, or whether reforming activity within and missionary activity without should co-exist, and whether they are so closely connected that one cannot exist without the other.

G) In view of the Gospel's insistence on promoting unity and in view of the phenomenon of alienation or separation from others (which many consider a very serious evil), it would seem that evangelization should be considered as the uniting of all men into one. On the other hand the Gospel teaches that the disciples are separated from the world and subjected to hatred and persecution. One asks whether one is dealing here with two alternatives or rather with two aspects of the same reality. (The question of the identity or singularity of Christian living).

H) Ecumenism works for the unity of all Christians. In dialogue it stresses what we have in common and at the same time avoids the things that separate us. One asks how this tendency to unity can be reconciled with the Church's mission to proclaim the whole truth of the Gospel. What judgment is one to make on the lessening of conversions from other Christian confessions? Is it due to badly understood ecumenism (among other things)?

PART THREE

HOW EVANGELIZATION IS TO BE PROMOTED TODAY

Following the description of the situation of evangelization and the theological judgment thereof, the following question spontaneously arises: how is the Church's evangelizing activity to be renewed, in order that she may more effectively exercise her mission in the modern world? In order to answer this question we shall put forward some general guidelines and then suggest practical applications.

I

SOME GUIDELINES

From the description given above, certain fundamental options emerge as necessary with regard to the renewal of evangelization. We shall recall some of these options, so that the individual Churches may be able to reflect on the following questions: by what principles is their missionary programme governed? Are their preferred ways of working proceeding in the right order?

A) Since faith is the basis of the whole Christian life, it is necessary that everything done in the Church (preaching, theological research, organization, worship, institutions, etc.) should be directed towards ensuring that individuals and communities become converted to God, who communicates himself to us in Christ, and that they should ever progress and live in this conversion.

B) The life of faith is only nourished and only grows in the community, especially in today's secularized society. This shows that it is necessary that there should arise and develop communities of every

kind in which the individual members may communicate their faith to one another and test and increase that faith. At the same time these communities should spread the faith outside themselves and communicate and confirm it.

C) The Church cannot renounce the right and duty of proclaiming the Gospel in order to raise up new disciples of Christ. Christians therefore must not be ashamed of the Gospel, even when they are aware that they are proclaiming a message which is repugnant to human weakness.

D) In order that the faith may be effectively proclaimed the Church should be actively present in the circles in which ideas about the world, man and man's history are formed (in the spheres of the natural, human and philosophical sciences and of the various arts), so that Christians may cooperate in working for cultural progress. In this way the attitudes of mind which have most effect on human life will be open to religious problems and transcendent values.

E) Since public opinion is largely formed and guided today through the media of social communication (press, cinema, radio, television, etc.), the Church should be present in these media. The use thereof usually includes the following:

1. pre-evangelization, i. e. accurate information (preceding faith) about Christian teaching, Christian ethics, the relationship between the Church and the world, etc.;

2. aid for evangelization, by means of which catechetics and preaching may be illustrated by the audiovisual media, and through the use of images may reach people's minds in a way suited to modern culture;

3. the direct medium of evangelization, in order that evangelization may penetrate also those milieux which are not normally reachable by preaching, and this with greater frequency than direct preaching can attain.

F) While the Church urges individual members of the faithful to cooperate in working for human development (as she has done in the Second Vatican Council, in numerous papal documents and at the last

Synod), she in no way forgets that her specific task in this development lies in showing man his final destiny, in the light of which progress itself becomes part of his true good.

G) Through her existence and life the Church is a sign in the world of the truth of the Gospel, and she must appear as such. But in our day she sometimes seems to arouse a certain distrust, because of human frailty and because of a certain connection with temporal structures. Hence the Church must effect a profound self-renewal in those things in which she is lacking, so that she may manifest Christ who dwells within her.

II

SUGGESTED PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

As for practical applications, we shall indicate as examples a number of aspects of how evangelization may be renewed. The purpose of this is to stimulate the creative imagination and assist the individual Churches to seek out the more urgent needs and discover suitable remedies. We shall proceed according to the order of the "guidelines" indicated above.

A) Guideline A:

1. Are our communities (dioceses, parishes, etc.) aware that they are responsible for the evangelization both of their own members and of those who either do not believe or who have lost the faith?

2. Do organizing, administration, etc. in communities absorb so much energy that evangelization properly so-called (preaching, catechetics, etc.) suffers?

3. In the reform of the liturgy, is the instructional and pastoral nature of worship taken into account (cf. adaptation of language, the translation of Scripture, preparation for the sacraments of Christian initiation, etc.)?

B) Guideline B:

1. What is being done in your diocese to ensure that Christian families give their children their first basic education?

2. Are our parishes real communities? How do they work together to foster community life?

3. Are there in your diocese ecclesiastical bodies for participation and shared responsibility, e. g. Priests' Council, Pastoral Council? Do they function effectively?

4. Are religious communities (including contemplative ones) organically incorporated into the life of the individual Churches? How do they work together to promote that life?

5. What is to be said of the small groups springing up today everywhere (*communautés de base*, spontaneous groups, etc.)?

6. How is the bishop's presence in his diocese to be viewed, to ensure that he is the centre of the life of the community?

C) Guideline C:

1. Are the bishops taking steps to ensure that in evangelization the Gospel is kept intact in the matter of dogmatic and moral truths, even though these truths sometimes seem to be opposed to the modern way of thinking?

2. In preaching and catechetics are fundamental matters such as the divinity of Christ, the necessity of faith, the life of grace and the last things passed over in silence, watered down or falsely interpreted?

3. What is being done for the continuing training of the clergy for evangelization (pastoral institutes, courses, libraries, etc.)?

4. Is the training of candidates for the priesthood oriented to future evangelization?

5. Are lay people being trained for the apostolate by suitable means (apostolic spirituality, theological doctrine, the art of communicating, means of maintaining fervour)?

D) Guideline D:

1. What is to be said of Catholic Universities?

2. What is to be said of Catholic primary and secondary schools?

3. What is being done for Catholic pupils attending non-Catholic schools?

4. Are fervent and intelligent young people helped to become experts in the sciences and arts?

E) Guideline E:

1. Is care being taken to ensure that as far as possible the Church has an influence on the means of social communication?

2. Is accurate and attractive information provided on the Church's life, and are errors occurring in general programmes corrected?

3. Are religious programmes provided which are adapted to people of different ages and situations?

4. Are people of capability and who are well instructed in the faith being trained to use the mass media?

5. Is the Christian people's critical sense being formed regarding the content of the output of the mass media?

F) Guideline F:

1. In your part of the world, does the Church play a prophetic role by constructively criticizing social institutions?

2. Are motives of faith provided, to ensure that participation in human development may be carried out in the Gospel spirit?

3. Is the temptation to deduce technical solutions from Gospel principles avoided?

4. Is particular attention given to ensuring that the Church is present in the "world of work"?

5. Is so much emphasis placed on human development that the Church's specific mission of leading men to Christ is neglected?

G) Guideline G:

1. Does your Church give a real example of Christ's poverty?

2. Is care taken lest in the class struggle the Church should seem closely bound up with one side only and thus lose her apostolic freedom?

3. Is due attention paid to the prejudices according to which those outside the Church judge her, and is care taken lest the life of the Church should give occasion of scandal, even though unfounded?

4. In the life of the Church is special attention given to the virtues which are held in high esteem today (justice, charity, solidarity, the equal distribution of wealth, etc.), to ensure that they are signs of the Church's authenticity, and the absence of which would obscure the Church's true nature?

5. Does the Church show that she shares Christ's special love for the poor?

The above are a number of questions that can be discussed in the individual Churches, so that in the Synod the bishops will be able to share their experiences, theories and programmes with one another and with the Apostolic See, thus giving a fresh impulse to evangelization in the whole Church.