

## Vatican by Maria Cristina Fiocchi

### World synod meets in Rome

*For the first time since the changes in Eastern Europe, the bishops from the "captive nations" could participate.*

The eighth General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops is meeting on the theme, "The Formation of Priests in Today's Circumstances." Cardinal Lucas Moreira Neves of Brazil, the Relator of the Synod, presented the summary report on the 217 speeches, to be discussed by 13 language groups. Of his 35-page report only a brief resumé was given to the press.

Yet criticisms have already begun. Journalists complain of secrecy and even speak of "blackout," viewing the Vatican's usual reserve as an insult—as if the search for truth had suddenly become the mass media's big concern. But the surfeit of media attention on the Synod has served only to project the image of a priest as a man in crisis for having chosen celibacy—unsure, unready, and vulnerable to our society's violent contradictions.

Perhaps it's the usual slipshod journalism seeking "hot" news. But behind so much banality poured out on the Synod is the fact that holiness upsets people. The basis of a priest's identity is Christ himself, and Jesus created scandal. The priest, whatever his limits and flaws, witnesses the living Christ in the world. To give one's own life so much meaning upsets many, and in the effort to destroy this, all the frailties and weaknesses are exposed.

In our pleasure-seeking society, it is harder and harder to find God's place in earthly life; and it will be even more so if the Church cannot rid itself of worldly desires and self-pity, to offer a living witness of the Gospel. This was underlined by Cardinal Joseph

Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Cardinal Ratzinger reiterated the basis of the priesthood: "If the Church calls the ordination to the presbyterial ministry 'sacrament,' this means: This man does not fulfill actions for which he is fit by his own capacity, or because he likes them or they bring him advantage. Rather, by receiving the sacrament, he is sent to give that which he cannot give by his own forces, to act 'in person' of Another and be His living instrument." Ratzinger stressed the post-Vatican II problems of Catholic theology: "In the new cultural situation which has been created, the old arguments of the 16th-century Reformation have come into evidence, together with new ones found by modern Biblical exegesis—which itself came out of the Reformation's assumptions—to which Catholic theology has been unable to give adequate replies."

In the typical arguments of Protestant theology, the early Church's "ministers" were not explicitly tied to the eucharist, and hence had no sacramental dimension, but only a social function, he said.

The newest element in the Synod is the participation of bishops from Eastern Europe, for the first time since the recent changes there. They spoke in the name of a Church which was brutally persecuted by Communist regimes, and which today, because of those sufferings, is enjoying a great flowering of priestly vocations.

Cardinal Myroslav Lubachivsky, Archbishop of Lvov in Ukraine, gave a few figures: Leopoli Seminary has more than 300 seminarians, at Ivano-

Frankivsk there are 320, and in Mukachevo 74. But he deplored the lack of buildings, books, and even pen and paper to take notes. Msgr. Sophon Dmyterko, eparch of Ivano-Frankivsk, representing the Ukrainian Catholic Church of Byzantine rite for the first time at a Synod, told of the Ukrainian Catholics' sufferings: "After 1946 not just bishops, about 2,000 priests, monks, and nuns, but also thousands of laymen who refused to go over to the Russian Orthodox Church, were arrested and deported. But the Church survived and developed in the catacombs. Today it emerges victorious with 10 bishops, more than 1,000 priests, many monks and nuns, and some 5 million believers."

There was great emotion at the report of Romanian Msgr. Alexandru Todea, the Metropolitan of Fagaras and Alba Julia: "I speak in the name of a martyr church which has lived for 16 years in prison. In this period, of the 12 bishops it had, five died in prison, two were held in Orthodox monasteries like prisoners, and two of those liberated have had their health ruined.

"I speak in the name of a Church which has lost all its churches, but which transformed jail cells into so many chapels and opened seminaries in the Romanian catacombs of the 20th century." The prelate was overcome by emotion and could not go on, but he was applauded at length by the Synodal fathers. Another Romanian, Msgr. Petru Gherghel, Bishop of Jass, reported, "With freedom obtained, the Catholic Church today knows troubles of an economic order, so many youths are not admitted into seminaries for lack of space." He added that the Greco-Catholic Church in Romania, though declared free, "has not yet gotten back the churches and seminaries that belonged to it in 1948. There is no place to hold mass or train future priests."