

# “Will Many Be Saved? A Look Back at the Vatican Synod on the New Evangelization”

by Ralph Martin

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I’m just back from spending three and a half weeks in Rome serving as an “expert” at the World

That statement seems straightforward enough, but for some of you, at least, it may raise more questions than it answers. First of all, you may ask, what *is* a Synod?

A Synod, in this context, is a meeting of representatives of the world’s Catholic bishops along with the Pope to deliberate on matters of importance. This particular Synod – they generally happen about every 3 years and have been instituted as a way of giving specific shape to the reality of the Pope not governing in isolation but in communion with the world’s bishops – focused on the need for a New Evangelization.

But what, exactly, is new, you might wonder, about the New Evangelization? Hasn’t evangelization been a function of the Church since ancient times?

First of all, the New Evangelization is new in whom it is directed towards— not just to the unreached mission territories that have been the primary focus of traditional evangelism efforts, but now also to Catholics who have some relationship to the Church but who are not living as disciples of Jesus. It is new in who does it – not just priests, nuns, and full-time lay people, but every baptized Catholic. It is also new in respect to the cultural situation in which it is conducted – a situation that is no longer supportive of Christianity but that is increasingly characterized by an aggressive secularization often hostile to Christ and the Church.

The Synod participants who gathered in Rome last month to discuss this vital subject included 262 bishops and Cardinals, elected in proportion to the size of the Catholic Church in their countries, with a maximum of 4 representatives from the largest countries, such as Brazil and the United States, or participating *ex officio* because they are in charge of important Vatican departments, or appointed directly by the Pope. For example, there were four bishops elected by the American Conference of Catholic Bishops – including Cardinal Dolan from New York and Archbishop Kurtz from Louisville, who were the two top elected officers of the Bishops, as well

as the Archbishop of San Antonio, and the Bishop of Tucson, AZ. The Pope appointed a fifth American Bishop, Archbishop Gomez of Los Angeles.

In addition, there were 44 “experts” appointed directly by the Pope (I was one of these) and 49 “observers” who generally represented various movements of evangelization in the Church and who were given brief opportunities to share about them.

At the end of the three weeks of the Synod certain “propositions” were voted on which represented the consensus opinion of the Synod Fathers (only bishops, Cardinals and 10 heads of religious orders of men got to vote) and were given to the Pope to be used as the basis of a Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on New Evangelization.

As an “expert” I was asked to help with the formulation of various propositions and also to assist in their translation from French, Spanish, and Italian into English. Since Cardinal Wuerl of Washington, DC was appointed as the General Relator of the Synod, he chose English as the language in which the propositions would be formulated, out of which they would be translated into Latin for the official record.

Besides the creation of what will surely be an inspiring document, the great good of this Synod, in my opinion, is that it has focused the entire Catholic Church on the need for and urgency of a New Evangelization. The Catholic Church is in the process of rediscovering the missionary responsibility of every Christian, and I believe that this rediscovery will bear much fruit in the future.

I am so pleased to have been a part of this Synod. Some of the concerns I expressed in my recent book – [Will Many Be Saved? What Vatican II Actually Teaches and Its Implications for the New Evangelization](#) (which, out only two months, is already in its fourth printing!) – about a practical “culture of universalism” that undermines the urgency of evangelization even made it into the final propositions.

Proposition #6 in particular highlights the key text from Vatican II that my book explicates – a text which indicates that even though it is possible under certain circumstances for those who through no fault of their own haven’t heard the gospel to be possibly saved, “very often” these conditions aren’t realized. Thus, it remains urgent that we invite those who are on the “broad way” leading to destruction onto the “narrow way” that leads to life.

For those interested, the final propositions can be found [here](#).

A short (less than 5 minutes) video interview that Catholic News Service did with me while I was in Rome that succinctly captures the argument of my book is available [here](#).

A very stirring article by Cardinal Dolan published after the Synod echoes some of the themes of my book. Click [here](#) to read it.