

Saints and sinners: We are praying for a good death

Until we approach our biblically allotted threescore years and 10, most of us don't think much about our mortality. Terrorism has changed all that.

Nowadays the Baby Boomers, who are usually so sure of themselves, wake up in the middle of the night when they hear the sound of a low-flying plane.

Teen-agers and younger children want to keep the hall light on when they go to bed. Small children ask if they can crawl in with mommy and daddy.

Many people, however, don't have any worries about dying, no matter how scary the headlines. They don't flinch every time the words "Late Breaking News" flash on the television screen.

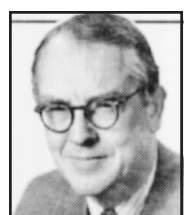
These are people who believe that God has ordained the time of their death, and that there

is nothing anybody can do to alter this. They believe that when your number is up, you go—that the time of our death is already written in indelible ink in the big Book of Life.

Some soldiers in battle take this fatalistic view. If the enemy's bullet has your name on it, you'll be killed. If it doesn't, you won't. So why worry?

Some of the ancient Greek philosophers believed in fate, that the gods predetermined all events.

Fatalism—the name given to this philosophy—can be scary or comforting. To know that you have no control over your destiny, that whether or not you take care of your health or look both ways before you cross the street, life can end for you tomorrow simply because that is what the gods have ordained. It is a frightening notion.



george plagenz

● saints & sinners

On the other hand, knowing that you don't have to worry about what is going to happen to you because it is already determined can get you to adopt a certain carefree attitude about living, which in turn brings a welcome freedom from anxiety.

Most religious people probably are not fatalists in the absolute sense. We believe our lives are in God's hands, but we also believe we have some say in the matter. We try, for example, to

put off death as long as we can, no matter what our theological beliefs.

Most of us, I imagine, would say that we would like to go the way Bing Crosby went: in our 70s (that's long enough to live, most would say); quickly and without suffering; and while doing something we enjoy. (Bing died on a golf course.)

It is the gradual failure of one's powers of mind and body, the prospect of a vista of medicine bottles next to the sick bed that terrifies us, not death itself.

It would be nice to know whether we could avoid the agony of death even if we cannot avoid death itself. Can we do that? Do we have anything to say about the manner of our own death?

Most of us would be inclined to say no. But the late Bible translator Monsignor Ronald Knox of England tells of a friend of his, Arch-

bishop Goodier, who said that people ought to pray for the kind of death that appeals to them. It was surprising, the archbishop told Knox, how often people found that particular prayer granted.

Did it work in Archbishop Goodier's case? Apparently it did, if the archbishop prayed for a sudden death.

A priest, says Knox, went to call on Goodier one afternoon. The archbishop, in fine fettle, saw him to the door when the visit was over. A few minutes later, he was found dead in his quarters.

Goodier would have said his life (and death) was in God's hands, but that we can appeal to God to grant us a happy end to our earthly existence.

If that is true, it could eliminate much of the terror of dying.

Catholic bishops, meet for a month with the Pope, seek local control

By Frances D'emilio

Associated Press Writer

VATICAN CITY — The bishops who assembled from around the world for a monthlong meeting with Pope John Paul II tackled issues ranging from terrorism to their mandatory retirement age.

Yet they frequently returned to one concern: They want more power for themselves and a little less for Rome.

Bishops have grumbled before about the church's lack of local control in previous gatherings, called synods. But at this meeting, which ran from Sept. 30 through last Saturday, some bishops expressed impatience with the lack of change.

Archbishop Vernon Weisgerber of Winnipeg, Canada, asked for a new sensitivity from the Curia, the Vatican

administrative body that helps the pontiff govern.

"The bishop's role in his diocese is strengthened when the offices of the Roman Curia show in their communications and in their actions that they understand the varying local conditions. Otherwise, they risk becoming obstacles to communion," Weisgerber said.

A Swiss bishop, Norbert Brunner of Sion, pleaded for Rome to have more faith in the work of local churches and to exercise its central authority mainly when issues of Catholic unity arise.

Cardinals have made similar statements on local decision-making. At a gathering earlier this year, some cardinals said the Vatican should let local dioceses participate in the selection of bishops, which now is decided by

Rome.

At this latest synod, Bishop Alois Kohgasser of Innsbruck, Austria, repeated the suggestion, arguing bishops "must be more intensely involved in the nominations of new bishops."

Rome's power base had its defenders. German Cardinal Joachim Meisner argued bishops do not work independently but in unity with the "universal jurisdictional power of the supreme pontiff."

Some observers expected no administrative reorganization by the Vatican, despite the complaints.

"I think it unlikely in this pontificate, now in its final innings, that there will be many changes, either in synod procedures or in distribution of ecclesial power," said the Rev. Richard John Neuhaus, a conservative and editor of

the religion magazine First Things.

Tom Roberts, an editor for the National Catholic Reporter, a liberal U.S. publication, disagrees.

"There must be some underlying discussion of what does it mean to have central authority," Roberts said in a phone interview from the United States. "It's constantly being challenged and talked about."

The bishops also raised other concerns in the synod.

Some pressed the pontiff to raise the mandatory retirement age for bishops from 75. Other synod participants pushed for the opposite—a lower limit—especially for clergy in places with harsh living conditions, like Africa.

Victor Corral Mantilla from Ecuador, thought it time to do away with titles like "your excellency" and "your

eminence."

"Thank you, your excellency," quipped Cardinal Bernard Agre, the assembly president, at the end of Mantilla's speech.

In the bishops' closing message, they condemned terrorism and expressed sympathy for the victims of the Sept. 11 attacks in New York and Washington. But they also urged global leaders to address the inequalities between nations they said could produce despair among the disadvantaged and threaten world peace.

The pope will respond to the bishops' ideas in a formal document on the synod that will be released sometime in the coming year.

The 81-year-old pontiff's health was on the minds of many.

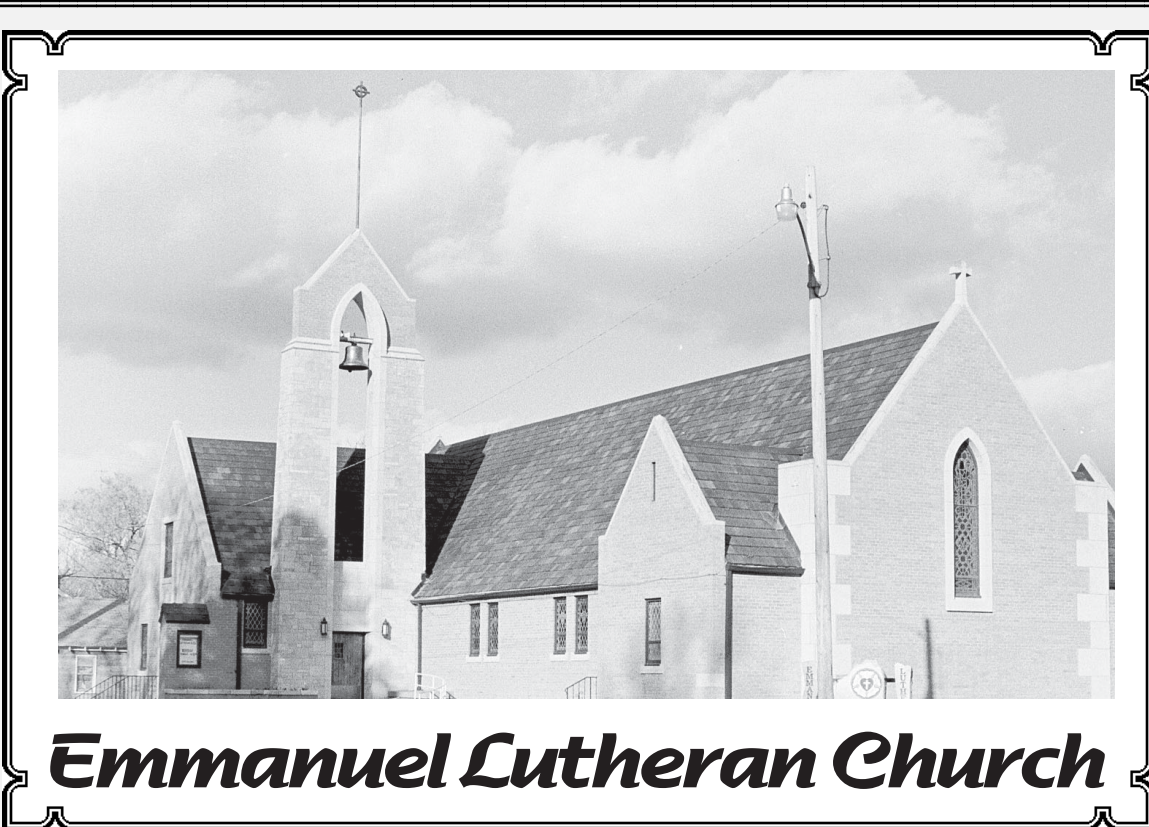
The synod began only three days af-

ter the pope returned from a strenuous trip to Kazakhstan and Armenia. Trembling hands and slurred speech—symptoms of Parkinson's disease—have plagued the pope in public appearances to some degree for several years now.

Still, he sat for two weeks of morning and afternoon sessions in which each bishop was given eight minutes to address him. He sometimes nodded at a point and even made a few quips.

Bishops in one morning synod session called out in Latin: "many more years" to mark the start of John Paul's 24th year in the papacy.

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Morning Worship: 10:30 am
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Thursday: Night Bible Study: 7:00 pm

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Pastor: Arlin Cochran • 785-332-2888
Saturday: Sabbath School: 9:30 am
Worship Service: 11 am

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Kanorado United Methodist Church
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399-2468
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Goodland Bible Church
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Pastor: John Coumerilh
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Pastor:
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Sunday School: 9:45 am CST
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Minister: Rev. Bob Winters
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