

2ND SPECIAL SYNOD OF BISHOPS ON AFRICA (October5 - October25)

The Church In Africa In Service To Reconciliation, Justice And Peace

Introduction

Since the holding of the 1st Synod of African Bishops in 1994, the Church in Africa had made tremendous progress in the evangelization work of the Church in the continent. The Assembly focused on five broad themes, namely: proclamation of the Good News, Inculturation, Justice and Peace, Dialogue and Social Communications.

After that successful Assembly of the bishops, the Servant of God, Pope John Paul II issued an Apostolic Exhortation on the Synod on how to move the Church in Africa forward. Titled *Ecclesia in Africa*, the Apostolic Exhortation, premised on the findings and recommendations of the Synod, was released by the Holy Father at an impressive ceremony in Younde, Cameroun, on September, 14, 1995. The Apostolic Exhortations gave tasks, assignments, action points and challenges to the various stakeholders of the Church in Africa in collaboration with partners outside the continent.

The Synod and the release of the Apostolic Exhortation - *Ecclesia in Africa* generated such interest and enthusiasm that several Workshops, Seminars, and Conferences, aimed at reflecting upon and planning implementation processes on the recommendations of the Synod, took place at all levels of Church Administration and institutions.

The challenges posed by the Synod as contained in the Apostolic Exhortation – *Ecclesia in Africa* was premised on five pillars to enhance the evangelization work of the Church in Africa. These are: proclamation, Dialogue, Justice and Peace, Inculturation and Social Communication. In the last fourteen years, since the end of that synod and the release of *Ecclesia in Africa*, the Church has made tremendous progress in the realization of the objectives of these pillars.

The gains of the Synod continue to manifest as the fathers of the Church in Africa, despite all political, economic and social problems plaguing the continent, still proclaimed the Church in Africa as A Family of God.

Among the gains of this Synod as pointed out by Rev Fr. George Ehusani in his paper: *An Outline of the Major Impacts, Huddles and Challenges of the First “African Synod” – As the Church prepares for the Second* were: the opening of frontiers for National Congresses and Synods across the continent; regular issuance of Pastoral letters and Communiques by the various Provincial, National and Regional Episcopal Conferences on socio-political matters, advocating for justice and peace in all ramifications and at all levels of the society. Other areas include: improved social communications services with the intent of making it the core of evangelization in the continent; strengthening of JDPC/CST Structures; enhanced ecumenism and Inter Religious dialogue.

However, some areas of importance still needed to be addressed to make the Church in Africa more vibrant and actually be the voice of the voiceless. These challenges (as articulated by Fr George) include: proper structuring of the Church's social involvement in the various countries; more attention to leadership training and formation of all stakeholders of the Church; adequate funding for JDPC and health structures, particularly at national level; a more realistic collaboration among all the stakeholders of the Church; a more visible commitment on the part of the Church to the issue of reconciliation, justice and peace and the influence of the decline of the faith in the West and its negative impact on the continent.

An Intimate bond with Christ

Without doubt, this First Synod has been a watershed in the life of the Church in Africa as Catholicism has leapt to greater heights in terms of membership and religiosity. It is therefore not surprising that, fourteen years after, Rome nurtured the burning desire to take the Church in Africa to the next level, with the Second Synod of African Bishops. The idea of this Synod was mooted in November, 2004, by Pope John Paul II and it is now being finally convoked by his successor, Benedict XVI and scheduled to hold at the Vatican from October 5 to 24, this year. This interest of the Church in Africa further confirms the intimate bond between Africa and Christ as indicated by the Christian history of the continent.

This special position of the Church in Africa was confirmed by Pope Benedict XVI during his recent visit to Cameroun to present to the public the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Second Synod on African. In his address to the Special Council of the Synod for Africa titled: *Africa Has Received A particular Vocation To Know Christ*, the Holy Father described Africa as "the continent of hope".

The Holy Father continued: "I consider it important to stress that your continent has been blessed by our Lord Jesus himself. At the dawn of his earthly life, sad circumstances led him to set foot on African soil. God chose your continent to become the dwelling-place of his Son. In Jesus, God drew near to all men and women, of course, but also, in a particular way, to the men and women of Africa. Africa is where the Son of God was weaned, where he was offered effective sanctuary. In Jesus, some two thousand years ago, God himself brought salt and light to Africa. From that time on, the seed of his presence was buried deep within the hearts of this dear continent, and it has blossomed gradually, beyond and within the vicissitudes of its human history. As a result of the coming of Christ who blessed it with his physical presence, Africa has received a particular vocation to know Christ. Let Africans be proud of this!"

Moving to the Next level

If the first Synod was a watershed in the life of the Church in Africa and has yielded good dividends in both spiritual and temporal contexts, despite all odds, there is therefore the need for the Second Synod which is expected to take the Church to the next level with respect to the spirituality and social justice in both the spiritual and social lives of the Church and the State in the continent. Furthermore, as the growth of the Church continues to decline in Europe and other parts of the Western world, there is the absolute need for the Church to hold tenaciously to Africa and consolidate on the gains made in the continent.

Like the First, Synod, the Second Synod has attracted the enthusiasm of the Catholic Faithful in Africa – Bishops, Priests, Religious and Lay Faithful. Several conferences and programmes were held to formulate the guidelines for the Synod and this culminated in the *Lineamenta* which eventually metamorphosed into the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the working document for the Synod Fathers at the October Assembly.

Presenting the *Instrumentum Laboris* to the Special Council of the Synod at the Apostolic Nunciature in Yaounde, Cameroun, the Holy Father declared: “I sincerely thank the Cardinals, the Archbishops and Bishops who are members of the Special Council for Africa for their expert collaboration in the drawing up of the Lineamenta and the Instrumentum Laboris. I am grateful to you, dear Brothers in the Episcopate, for having also presented in your contributions several important aspects of the present ecclesial and social situation in your countries of origin and in the region. In this way you have emphasized the great dynamism of the Church in Africa, but you have also evoked the challenges which the Synod needs to examine, so that the growth of the Church in Africa will be not only quantitative but qualitative as well” .

The Holy Father commenting on the First Special Assembly of the Synod Africa declared: “The First Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops helped to point out the directions to be taken, and it brought out, among other things, the need to appreciate more deeply and to incarnate the mystery of the Church-as-Family”.

He continued: “I would now like to suggest some reflections about the specific theme of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, namely: reconciliation, justice and peace.

Making reference to the position of the Second Vatican Council on the subject matter of the synod the Holy Father declared: “Truly, what is more dramatic, in the present socio-political and economic context of the African continent, than the often savage conflicts between ethnic groups or peoples bound by brotherhood? And if the Synod of 1994 insisted on the Church as Family of God, what can this year’s Synod contribute to the building up of Africa, thirsting for reconciliation and in pursuit of justice and peace? The local or regional wars, massacres and genocides perpetrated on the continent must challenge us in a special way: if it is true that in Jesus Christ we belong to the same family and share the same life – since in our veins there flows the Blood of Christ himself, who has made us children of God, members of God’s Family – there must no longer be hatred, injustice and internecine war”.

The address of the Holy Father in Cameroun and the *Instrumentum Laboris* have continued to stimulate further discussions in search of other areas that need to be considered by the Synod Fathers when they gather in Rome in October. In this perspective, SECAM had saddled JDP/C Commissions in the continent to further study the *Instrumentum Laboris* and find out what has been inadvertently left out and recommend other things that need to be included in the agenda for the October Assembly.

Workshop on Synod

In Nigeria, the National JDP/C National Committee organized a 2-day workshop for a study group in response to the clarion call of SECAM. At the end of its deliberations, the Nigerian Study Group not only came up with a message for the Synod Fathers but for all Catholic faithful in the country with regard to their involvement in the preparation for the assembly and after its deliberation. According to the group, the involvement of Catholic faithful in the preparation and implementation of the outcome of the synod is as important as the gathering of the Synod Fathers.

The workshop was addressed by the Rev. Fr. Michael Ekpenyong, Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) who spoke on the Importance of Africa to the universal Church and Rev Fr. George Ehusani, immediate past Secretary General of CSN, who was the lead speaker made a presentation titled: *AN Outline of the Major Impacts, Huddles and Challenges of the First African Synod – As the Church Prepares for the Second.*

The papers of the two speakers and the *Instrumentum Laboris* formed the basis of discussion for the Nigerian Study Group which, at the end of its deliberations emphasized the absolute need for the practical involvement of all Catholic faithful in the apostolate of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Africa; both within and outside the Church.

In his opening remarks titled Africa Is Very Important To The Church, the Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, Rev Fr. Michael Ekpenyong spoke on the importance of the First Synod of Africa held in Rome, from April 10 to May 8, 1994 in the life of the Church in African. Comparing the two synods, Fr Ekpenyong described the First Synod as an elitist one as only the Bishops and the Church's Theologians facilitated the holding of the assembly. The Second Synod, according to him is a departure from the other in terms of preparation as was an all comers involvement of all the faithful of the Church from the grassroots to the highest hierarchy of the Church.

The Secretary General noted that the Second Synod is an opportunity for the reappraisal of the First Synod. While outlining the challenges facing the Church in Africa subsequent to the tremendous progress made by the Church in the continent since the First Assembly and the release of the Apostolic Exhortation - *Ecclesia in Africa* by Pope John Paul II in 1995, Fr Ekpenyong noted:

“The opportunity of ownership, by the African Church, of the forthcoming Second Special Assembly of the synod of Bishops for Africa also imposes higher responsibility on the Church in Africa. I expect higher enthusiasm to greet the post-synodal exhortations of the Second Special assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa in relation to the level of enthusiasm that greeted the post-synodal exhortations of the First Special Assembly. The proceeding from this Special Assembly should engage every member of the Catholic Church in Africa, in the dioceses, parishes and Church movements. We should expect the proceeding of this Special Assembly to challenge other Churches and Christian Communities, as well as representatives of non-Christian religions as well as people of good will from every continent”.

As the lead presenter, Rev Fr George’s two papers which dwelt extensively on the First Synod of African Bishops were titled: *An Outline of the Major Impacts, Huddles and Challenges of the First “African Synod” – As the Church Prepares for the Second; and The 2nd African Synod on “The Church in Africa In Service to Reconciliation, Justice and peace”. An Outline of Critical Areas of the Instrumentum Laboris for JDP/C*

In the first paper, Fr. George who actively participated in the 1994 Synod as a speaker and “*peritus*” gave an insight of the first Assembly pointing out the successes and failures in the implementation of the Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*. The paper was a good summary of the Apostolic Exhortation and an impressive analysis of the areas of implementation. He noted that this first Assembly was seen by many as the dawn of African Christianity.

The speaker made a build up of the outcome of the synod as implemented by the Church in Nigeria through conferences, workshops, seminars and other practical actions at all levels from the parish to the national level. Also, concrete action plans were put in place for the effective functioning of the JDP/C, congresses, synods and issuance of communiqués and effective communication evangelization became practically obvious in the Church in the country.

While articulating the success of the Church in the post first synodal era, Fr. George also gave an insight into those important aspects that could be described as the failures of the implementation efforts. These failures as noted by him are primarily related to the work of the JDP/C in the areas of conflict resolution, Reconciliation, Justice and Peace. This was the kernel of Fr George’s second paper for the Study Group and the paper is reproduced below for the benefit of our readers.

In this special cover story, we bring you excerpts from the Instrumentum Laboris, the working document for the Synod Fathers that was released by the Holy Father in Cameroun, recently, the presentation of Rev. Fr. Ekpenyong on the Importance of Africa to the Church; An Outline of Critical Areas of the Instrumentum Laboris for JDPCs as enumerated by Rev. Fr. George Ehusani in his presentation, recommendations of the Study Group, submission of the JDP/C Commission to SECAM and other statements related to synods on Africa .

This is part of our efforts to keep you abreast of the Special Assembly and stimulate your interest and participation.

EXCERPTS FROM THE *INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS*

Preamble

The *Instrumental Labors* is a vital and detailed document which summarises the outcome of the First Synod in relation with the forthcoming Second Synod which is expected to look into the successes achieved so far, what remains to be done and how to go about it to take the Church in Africa to the next level in both spiritual and temporal realms. We have excerpted for this publication Chapter Two of the *Instrumentum Laboris* as it contains the core subject for the forthcoming Second Synod – *The Church in Africa in Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*.

Introduction (*Instrumentum laboris*)

In the wake of the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*, preparations for the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops are now entering their final phase. The *Instrumentum laboris* summarizes the responses to the *Lineamenta* received from the episcopal conferences, the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*, the dicasteries of the Roman Curia and the Union of Superiors General. The document is greatly enriched by the fact that these reflections come at a time when the Church is celebrating the Jubilee Year of St. Paul, the Apostle to the Nations.

In keeping with its purpose, this working document aims at generating thought, prompting discussion and guiding and sustaining the collegial discernment of the Pastors, who will be gathered in synodal assembly in communion with the Bishop of Rome, Pope Benedict XVI. In doing so, they will follow the age-old ecclesial tradition in Africa, defended in ancient times by Saint Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage[1], of listening to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

To achieve this objective, the *Instrumentum laboris* presents the material in four chapters. The first begins with a brief overview of contemporary African society in the period since the First Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops (1994). It then considers the implementation of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* and concludes by examining the theological aspects of the topic of the Second Assembly. Treating the three aspects of socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural life and recounting experiences within the Church, the second chapter describes the "openings" and, above all, the "obstacles" encountered by the Church and society on the road to reconciliation, justice and peace. The third chapter sets forth the characteristics of the Church as Family of God in her desire to serve as a force opening paths to reconciliation, justice and peace. Finally, the fourth chapter is an account of what the Church's members

and institutions have already undertaken to promote reconciliation, justice and peace in Africa.

In studying the *Lineamenta*, the Church in Africa had the opportunity to reflect on the contemporary state of African societies and to make an examination of conscience. It seems now, therefore, that she ought not to retire into herself. Instead, she is to venture forth cordially receiving others and carrying out her mission *ad gentes*!

(Chapter II of the *Instrumentum Laboris*)

RECONCILIATION, JUSTICE AND PEACE: AN URGENT NEED

The aforementioned areas of attention and involvement and the reflections on the synod topic from the Particular Churches give some indication of the "openings" and "obstacles" on the road to reconciliation, justice and peace.[29] The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI reminded the Pastors of the African continent that "the commitment of the faithful to the service of reconciliation, justice and peace is urgently needed." [30]

ON THE ROAD TO RECONCILIATION

Some responses have said that, to create a new path towards harmony, certain States have employed traditional models of reconciliation and the Christian practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (sovereign national conferences, the "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" in South Africa, etc.). Though results are varied and imperfect, they seem to be an invitation to the synodal assembly to address experiences which are obstacles to reconciliation.

Reconciliation: Experiences in Society

The socio-political aspect of reconciliation. Some African societies have been ruined by their political leaders. Others have witnessed tragic scenes of xenophobia, where foreigners were looked upon as symbolizing the misfortunes of society and became scape-goats. As a result, persons were burnt alive and hacked; families scattered and villages destroyed. In still other countries, some Particular Churches mention that political parties have used ethnic, tribal or regional sentiments to rally populations to their cause in a conquest for power, instead of fostering living together in peace.

The socio-economic aspect of reconciliation. Some have noted that bad management and its consequent misery has caused trafficking in human beings, the prostitution trade and minors' being forced to work. This has largely contributed to the destruction of family ties, the destabilization of entire communities and the displacement of thousands of refugees. On the national level, areas rich in oil and mining are very quickly becoming the kindling points of conflict, indeed of wars between neighbouring peoples and nations.

The socio-cultural aspect of reconciliation. Some parts of the media (radio, press, television) have disseminated information and images which have incited populations to

violence and hate and brought serious harm to the values which hold the family and society together: respect for elders and the dignity of women as mothers and protectors of life, etc. People are concerned about a growing loss in a cultural identity, primarily among the young and a consequent disregard for African Traditional Religion, which further shows the lack of appreciation for values viewed to be properly African. In certain parts of the continent, some mention that relations between one religion and another are degenerating into a true Christian and Muslim rivalry.

Reconciliation: Experiences within the Church

Particular Churches are asking the synod fathers to help the Church in Africa better communicate her prophetic message, allowing her to speak authoritatively to political leaders. Her message will not be effective, unless she fosters unity among her own members and resolves any conflicting signs in her life of witness. In this regard, divisions based on ethnic, tribal, regional or national lines and a xenophobic mentality have been observed in some ecclesial communities and in the words and attitudes of some Pastors. Moreover, responses to the *Lineamenta* indicate a certain strife between bishops and their presbyterate and a tendency of some bishops in national episcopal conferences to take positions favouring a specific political party. As a result, these episcopal conferences are no longer able to speak with one voice in an appeal for unity.

Achieving Reconciliation: What Questions Need to be Asked?

The responses note that experiences in Church and society are calling upon the Church to devise ways and means to rebuild communion, unity and episcopal or priestly fellowship; to regain courage in her prophetic mission; and to commit herself to forming lay leaders who are committed to their faith, so that they can work in politics to bring the many different people in society to live together in peace. Such is the case also in the formation of priests and women and men religious who are eager to be signs of and witnesses to the Kingdom. The synodal assembly will provide the opportunity to discuss the underlying causes of the conflicts which are so much a part of the African continent.

ON THE ROAD TO JUSTICE

Some responses mention that the African concept of justice is the same as reconciliation and peace, because it is grounded in the idea of restoring harmony-individually or in society as a whole-between those who give offense and the offended parties. So many obstacles exist on the road to justice, the faithful are awaiting some proposals from the synod fathers which will assist them in their work.

Justice: Experiences in Society

The socio-political aspect of justice. In demanding justice, some "ethnic minorities" or regions, where rights have been infringed, take up arms and wage wars. Rioting and the expulsion of different groups of people living in the same country are grave acts of injustice, which in many cases are allowed to go unpunished. Oftentimes, judicial

institutions and those who fight corruption are sieged by political forces. Those who lose power use security forces to subdue citizens who hold contrary opinions. The responses mention other forms of injustice: the death penalty; the inhumane treatment of prisoners which is oftentimes seen in the overcrowding of prisons; excessive delays in the justice system; the torture of prisoners; and the expulsion of refugees with no regard for their dignity.

The socio-economic aspect of justice. The African Mechanism of Evaluation by Peers (MAEP) seeks to identify the forms and causes of the corruption which rages on the continent and goes unpunished. In some places, natural resources are confiscated and depleted by special-interest groups. Bad management, the diverting of public funds and the exodus of capital to foreign banks-already denounced by the Church in Africa at the last synod[31]-are forms of injustice which are done with impunity. The Church must speak out against these unjust practices, raising her voice for the voiceless.

Farm workers, on whom a great part of the African economy depends, are victims of injustice in marketing their products. They are often paid a very low price for their goods. Paradoxically, in some parts of Africa, the cost is even set by the buyers themselves. Populations already suffering from a disadvantage are thereby further impoverished. The seeding campaign of proponents of Genetically Modified Food, which purports to give assurances for food safety, should not overlook the true problems of agriculture in Africa: the lack of cultivatable land, water, energy, access to credit, agricultural training, local markets, road infrastructures, etc. This campaign runs the risk of ruining small landholders, abolishing traditional methods of seeding and making farmers dependent on the production companies of OGM. Furthermore, the problem of climate change, whose effects are being felt in arid areas, is compromising the modest gains of African economies. Will the synod fathers be able to remain unresponsive to these questions weighing so heavily on the shoulders of their countrymen?

The socio-cultural aspect of justice. Culture also suffers from injustices that need to be examined and eradicated, notably nepotism and tribalism which are oftentimes practiced under the pretext of claiming duty and assistance to one's "brother". Everywhere on the continent, women continue to be subjected to many forms of injustice: domestic violence; acts of domination by their husbands; polygamy which deforms the sacred character of marriage and the family and creates a rivalry between spouses and the children they bear; lack of respect for the dignity and rights of widows; prostitution; and the genital mutilation of women. Relations among nations need to consider the legal, administrative and practical aspects of the phenomenon of globalization. As a result of an invasion of models based on military and economic forces, Africa is particularly vulnerable.

The educational system, including higher education, is insufficient, due to overcrowding in classes and an inadequate teacher/student ratio. Education programmes are geared to the formation of those seeking employment and not to those who will create employment. Likewise, the unemployment rate soars, because employment cannot be found for everyone. Considering the Church's commitment to education, the Particular Churches

want the synod fathers to appeal to and motivate those responsible for education to seek a solution in these matters.

Justice: Experiences in the Church

While reflecting on the situation of society, Particular Churches also pointed out injustices within their own communities. In the matter of collaboration, women are oftentimes given an inferior role. In Church structures, just salaries are not always guaranteed. Pastors sometimes lack transparency in their management of Church goods.

Fostering Justice: What Questions Need to be Asked?

The synodal assembly should heed the cry of the poor, minorities, women deprived of their dignity, those on the periphery of society, poorly paid workers, refugees, migrants and prisoners who are awaiting the establishment of a structured chaplaincy and not just designated chaplains. "It is the duty of all-especially Christians-to work energetically to establish universal brotherhood, the indispensable foundation of authentic justice and the condition for a durable peace." [32]

ON THE ROAD TO PEACE

Some roads to peace have been opened by Pastors, by those in the consecrated life, by Small Christian Communities and by the lay faithful, as individuals or members of associations. However, some obstacles still remain.

Peace: Experiences in Society

The socio-political aspect of peace. Political instability, so seriously compromising peace on the African continent, has deep historical roots: slavery, colonization and neo-colonization. Despite the fact that the migration of peoples internally and externally is a normal social phenomenon, it has become, in the final analysis, a source of unrest and conflict. Surely, peace is more than the silence of arms, yet conflicts are a symptom of its absence (The Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Sudan [Darfour], etc.). Transitions in the politics of the democratic exercise of power has propelled on the world stage scenes of fratricide, orchestrated by rival parties.

The socio-economic aspects of peace. Responses mention that violence is often the response to unemployment, massive and clandestine migration and, primarily, the excessive investment in armaments, while thousands of the poor are increasingly victimized through unfair economic practices and social injustices. In this matter, the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI observed that "the countries of the industrially developed world profit immensely from the sale of arms, while the ruling oligarchies in many poor countries wish to reinforce their stronghold by acquiring even more sophisticated weaponry." [33] For the most part, the wars in many regions of Africa are tied to the economy as such.

The socio-cultural aspect of peace. The victims most affected by the absence of peace are families. The tearing apart of the family and the influence of the media have progressively lead to juvenile delinquency, bad moral behaviour, abandonment to drugs, etc. Some think, however, that a more basic reason for the instability of societies on the continent is linked to cultural alienation and racial discrimination, which have engendered along the course of African history an inferiority complex, fatalism and fear. A disdain for African languages and oral African literature has lead to the rejection of values which are properly African. The absence of these points of reference has created instability among young people.

Peace: Experiences in the Church

On various levels, the Church has participated in national peace efforts in some countries as a result of the teaching and activity of her Pastors. In the Great Lakes Region, episcopal conferences have worked to build peace by fostering reconciliation among the young people of the countries in conflict.

Cultivating Peace: What Questions Need to be Asked?

Particular Churches want the synodal assembly to discuss ways to build peace in society through mutual assistance, a willingness to welcome others, fraternal service of the most vulnerable (children, the sick, elderly people), justice and love between sisters and brothers and the reestablishment of parental authority in families. The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI in his *Message of Peace*, stated: "The family is the first and indispensable teacher of peace...because it enables its members in decisive ways to experience peace." [34]

The responses confirm, as stated Pope John Paul II, that "God can create openings for peace where only obstacles and closures are apparent" .[35] The Pope further emphasized: "No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness," [36] for "true peace is 'the work of justice' (Is 12:17)." [37] This is the justice of the Kingdom which incorporates and transcends all laws and limits. This is the justice which the Church-Family of God wants to serve. Indeed, this justice manifests the originality of the Gospel's message of reconciliation, justice and peace.

CONCLUSION (excerpts from the conclusion of the *Instrumentum Laboris*)

The Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops is an important moment for the Church-Family of God in Africa. It is a *kairos* (cf. Mk 1:15). St. Paul the Apostle writes in his Letter to the Corinthians: "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2). This is the acceptable time for reconciling each person to God and one another. This reconciliation will bring about justice and peace. Just as Jesus accomplished his mission through bearing his cross, all Christ's disciples in Africa, who have received "the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess 1:6), must likewise in their flesh break down "the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14). In effect, "suffering produces endurance, and

endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ... because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom 5:3-5). Christ is the one who guides "our feet into the way of peace." (Lk 1:79) and entrusts to the Church the "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18).

The need for reconciliation on the continent is today more urgent than ever. The reconciliation which will regenerate the human family, sought so much by Africa, is obtained in a justice which is more than human and a peace which is more profound than the absence of war or the silence of arms. The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI has invited the faithful to implore the Holy Spirit, who is the source of reconciliation in the Son and who works in people's hearts. "The Spirit is also the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son."[65] Convinced that "in the midst of conflict and division, we know it is (God) who turns our minds to thoughts of peace," people make an offering of their suffering and activity so that "those who were estranged join hands in friendship, and nations seek the way of peace together"[66](cf. 2 Cor 5:18). Building the civilization of love is everyone's responsibility.

AFRICA IS VERY IMPORTANT TO THE CHURCH

*(Statement by the Secretary-General, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, **Rev. Fr. Michael Otto Ekpenyong** to Members of the JDP/Caritas Nigeria working on the **instrumentum Laboris** for the II Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa on the theme, **The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace**)*

**“You are the salt of the earth...”
You are the light of the world” (Mt 5: 13-14)**

Introduction: In 1994, from 10 April to 8 May, the First Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops took place on the theme: “The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000: ‘You shall be my witnesses (Acts 1:8)’” The Servant of God, Pope John Paul II, had, since January 6, 1989, expressed his intention to convene that important meeting for the Church.

An important feature of the First Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa was that it was significantly elitist both in its preparation in its content. That feature constitutes the defining distinction between the First Special Assembly and the Second Special Assembly, to which we look forward in October of this year. In effect, the fact that the African Church is participating from the grassroots level in the build-up to the Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa is an important expression of the value and significance of Africa to the Church today as well as a vital challenge to the African Church.

The opportunity of ownership, by the African Church, of the forthcoming Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa also imposes higher responsibility on the Church in Africa. I expect higher enthusiasm to greet the post-synodal exhortations of the

Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa in relation to the level of enthusiasm that greeted the post-synodal exhortations of the First Special Assembly. The proceeding from this Special Assembly should engage every member of the Catholic Church in Africa, in the dioceses, parishes and Church movements. We should expect the proceeding of this Special Assembly to challenge other Churches and Christian Communities, as well as representatives of non-Christian religions as well as people of good will from every continent.

We know that this Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa is the Consequence of the positive results recorded and the response of the bishops, priests and laity to the post-Synod Apostolic Exhortations of the First Special Assembly. As a result, Pope John Paul II in November 2004 announced his intention to organise the second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa. In June 2005, the Holy Father Benedict XVI confirmed the project of his predecessor by declaring his intention to convene in Rome, the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops.

The focus of this Second Special Assembly is on the Church in Africa at the service of reconciliation, justice and peace. The watch phrase that was decided by the Holy Father is: “You are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world” (Mathew 5, 13 and 14). This makes it the logical consequence of the First Special Assembly.

The Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops should provide opportunity for the evaluation of the results of the First Special Assembly, obtained at all levels. This evaluation was adequately anticipated in the Lineamenta of the Second Special Assembly.

1. The Challenges of the African Church: Since the First Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa, the African Church has witnessed several changes and significant growth in the numbers of both clergy and lay faithful. The life of the Church in Africa includes considerable challenges. This is why the working document of the Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops calls for a united effort among Catholics to help end the rampant injustices that fuel conflicts on the continent and to usher in an era of peace. According to the *instrumentum Laboris*, the synod would have to find ways to better prepare the faithful in Africa for a more visible and active role in promoting unity in the church and in society and in working for the common good.

The working document is highly critical of the impact of globalization on the continent. We are witnesses to the fact that globalization infringes on Africa’s rights and tends to be the vehicle for the domination of a single, cultural model and a culture of death.

In the same respect, we must accept responsibility for many of the ills in the continent. The evils in the hearts of people, especially among our political leaders, make them thirsty for riches, power and revenge.

I have no doubt that the Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa will challenge the Church Hierarchy in Africa to address the continent’s changing

religious, demographic, social and political scenes and discuss new ways to proclaim the Gospel by being “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.”

In a similar respect, the Synod will provide the opportunity to assess what has been accomplished since the post-synodal papal document “*Ecclesia in Africa*” (“The Church in Africa”) and to look at what remains to be done in response to the changing situations in Africa.

We know that since the promulgation of *Ecclesia in Africa* in 1995, the document has been put into action and continues to be a timely and useful guide for the church in Africa. However, it has not been adequately distributed and implemented in many places. This is an added challenge to the Second Special Assembly.

2 The Expectations of the Special assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa: The *instrumentum Laboris* lists a number of shared expectations for the synod. These — include:

> Finding ways through which the Gospel can be inculturated or better grounded in African cultures.

> Helping Catholics get firmer grasp of their faith so as to make Christ more a part of their lives and inspire them to bring his transforming message to the world.

> Paying greater attention to and developing a more creative pastoral response to the spiritual and moral needs of couples and families.

> Underlining the need for greater investment in education, especially in establishing higher education programs to train not just workers but also future entrepreneurs and business people.

> Better integrating women and the laity into the Church’s leadership and pastoral planning.

> Getting the Church more involved in using traditional and news media.

> Helping the bishops to be more effective agents for overcoming ethnic and tribal divisions by being united in denouncing injustices and being a voice for the voiceless.

3. What Should be our Contribution: The *instrumentum Laboris* notes that being a Christian and belonging to the universal Church helps each Catholic put aside his or her differences of origin or ethnicity and brings people closer together as brothers and sisters. This is a very important task that we must seek means and ways of accomplishing in our local context in Nigeria.

The church’s sacraments, especially the sacrament of reconciliation, should help form individuals’ consciences, inspire them to share God’s love with others, and guide them to replace fear with hope and the logic of revenge with reconciliation and forgiveness.

We know that even in the face of so many signs of renewal and reform, Africa and Nigeria in particular still faces many problems. Political instability and selfish leaders continue to compromise peace in parts of Africa. Some politicians foster divisions among their people, violate human rights or use religion to pursue their own agendas. This was our experience in Jos

In addition, the loss of respect for common traditional African values has led, in some parts of the continent to relations between people of one religion and another “degenerating into a true Christian and Muslim rivalry.” Political and social disputes are sometimes resolved with violence and fledging democratic processes can sometimes disintegrate into “scenes of fratricide orchestrated by rival parties.”. Decades of armed conflict in Africa have led to “a culture of violence, division and warrior heroes,” and the

We must not pretend ignorance of the fact that in our country, a true slavery still exists. This is because salaries are insufficient or sporadic and international aid comes frequently with difficult unacceptable conditions.

Our attention should also focus on the fact that international financial programs aimed at restructuring the African economy are having a dire effect. This is because the forced restructuring has led to an extremely fragile economy and the breakdown of society as can be seen by increased crime, the widening gap between rich and poor and massive migration to already overcrowded cities.

There is no doubt that we must take responsibility for our common destiny as a Church in Africa. This is particularly in the face of the economic and social effects of globalization. In effect, multinational corporations continue to “systematically invade the continent in search of natural resources”. This means that Africa’s rights are routinely infringed upon by nations seeking control of our enormous extractive reserves. The external interests together with “the abundance of natural resources on the African continent continue to pose a threat to peace, justice and reconciliation”.

Globalization risks seriously harming societies with its “logic of the world economy which disregards what is truly a part of the human person,” such as the spiritual, moral and cultural values and gifts of local African traditions and religious faith. In effect, “a process organized to destroy the African identity seems to be taking place under the pretext of modernity”.

Because of rampant illiteracy and a lack of investment in education, people — especially the young — are more vulnerable to “the false values propagated by the mass media” and political propaganda. In our country this has led to the upsurge in political thuggery. We cannot overlook the real agricultural problems on the continent, which include a lack of cultivatable land, water, energy, credit, local markets and infrastructure for transporting products. This situation is compounded by endemic diseases and HIV and AIDS.

4. The Way Forward: As we look forward to the Second Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa, the Church in Africa must become more conscious of the importance of its role as a model for peace, justice and reconciliation. This means that the Church must become more just and united in itself. The church should ‘become a sign and instrument for justice and peace in the wider society.

We must know and acknowledge that peace is something that is “born from within”: when: there has been a conversion of heart because a new spirit transforms people’s outlook, mentality and behaviour.

The Church must also assume the symbol of a beacon of hope for those suffering from war, poverty and injustice, because in Christ they can “find hope and a taste for living.”

THE 2ND AFRICAN SYNOD ON “THE CHURCH IN AFRICA IN SERVICE TO RECONCILIATION, JUSTICE AND PEACE”

An Outline of Critical Areas of the *Instrumentum Laboris* for JDPCs

(By Rev. Fr. George Ehusani)

We have in our hands the Working Document - *Instrumentum Laboris* - of the forthcoming 2nd African Synod specifically devoted to reflecting upon and finding solutions (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) to what many recognise as the most challenging issues and the most pressing concerns of Christians in Africa — the issues of reconciliation, justice and peace in a continent that is torn apart by violent conflicts, widespread social injustice, bad governance, poverty and disease.

In the light of the Gospel of Christ, and using the perspective adopted at the 1st African Synod of the “Church as Family,” and from the vantage point of the Christian imperative to be Salt of the Earth and Light of the World (Matthew 5:13 - 16), the *instrumentum Laboris* highlights the gains or positive developments in the politics and economy of the continent since the 1994 Synod as well as positive outcomes within the Church in Africa of the 1994 Synod deliberations and the post-synodal exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*. But it asks the critical question: What remains to be done?

I would attempt to put the posers more clearly: After all the hopes raised on the occasion of the first synod, where and where did we perform below expectation as Church - Family of God and agents of reconciliation, justice and peace? What remains to be done in these areas? What responsibilities should the various agents and institutions of the Church take in meeting these challenges? Perhaps more critical is the challenge of justice within our Church structures and our commitment as individual Christians and groups in Africa to being truly Family of God, Salt of the Earth and Light of the World.

From point of view of the challenges ad extra, the *Instrumentum Laboris* lists the following among other problems that persist in many of our societies:

- Poor leadership orientation - leadership as an exercise in power rather than service

- Disdain for the Common Good Insensitivity to the needs and aspirations of the people
- Lack of a truly democratic Culture
- Celebration of warrior-heroes - many societies have been ruined by their leaders
- Lack of the Rule of Law - some persons are often above the law
- Violation of human Rights — including especially the victimization of women on many fronts
- Use of Religion and Ethnicity for the selfish political gains of certain leaders
- Broken down institutions of State and public infrastructures
- Collapsed economy of many nations and widespread unemployment/underemployment
- Exploitation of local resources by international agents with connivance of local leaders.
- Widespread corruption among African leaders.

The challenges that face the Church *ad intra* in the area of reconciliation, justice and peace are enormous, and they raise serious questions of our credibility as agents of Christ the Just One. Until we tackle these challenges, we would not be able to give credible witness to Jesus Christ, and our identity is thereby compromised. The document says. “[the message of the Church “will not be effective, unless she fosters unity among her own members and resolves any conflicting signs in her life of witness. In this regard, divisions based on ethnic, tribal, regional or national lines and a xenophobic mentality have been observed in some ecclesial communities and in the words and attitudes of some of her Pastors...”

We must admit that unhealthy ethnic sentiments or even outright ethnic bigotry still reign in many parts of our church. And these sentiments are sometimes a major consideration in the creation of dioceses, the creation of parishes and the appointment of bishops, and appointment into other positions on the national, provincial and diocesan levels. With regard to unity as family of God. we indeed have many challenges. Think of the problem of maintaining national and provincial structures and institutions. While we have no problem raising funds for huge Cathedrals and parish Churches, and while individual dioceses can source for Funds for, and engage in various projects worth hundreds of millions of Naira, we have great difficulty Funding the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria and starting as important a project as the Catholic University of Nigeria.

There is the vexing question of Gender Justice within the Church. We remain an unrepentantly male—dominated Church in our structures and practices. As an institution we are hardly qualified to speak to the world and our society about justice to women. We must take on the challenge of gender justice within our structures and stop paying lip-service to the issue.

There is the question of extreme clericalism that tends to victimize the laity, often denying them the opportunity to exercise their legitimate charisms and talents within the Church. This is an injustice that we must address squarely if we wish to take seriously the Synod theme of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace.

There is the issue of poor commitment on the part of Church leaders — Parish Priest, Bishops and Superiors to the adequate funding JDIC structures at all levels from our local resources.

As things stand today most of our activities in Justice Advocacy and Social Development as well as the fight against HIV/AIDS are hinged on donor funds from overseas agencies. This is a clear evidence of a lack of understanding of the integral nature of these issues to the project of Evangelization, or is it a demonstration of what our true level of commitment to reconciliation, justice and peace is?

With regard to functionaries of JDPCs themselves, there is the challenge of accountability with whatever funds are entrusted to them. Our past experiences with the management of funds (by a number of JDPC functionaries) have often not been altogether a good example in transparency! This is especially true of the management of funds in many parishes

Options for the poor; paying lip service – slum; ministry alliance with the rich, schools for the rich etc

Finally there is the challenge of good governance at all administrative levels in the Church. Many of us still run our affairs like dictators and bosses, not like servant leaders, mentors and inspirers, after the fashion of Christ. Participation in Church governance by the generality of members is still a major challenge.

As the Second African Synod convenes in October this year, we must courageously face these issues, if we are to remain credible as agents of the Church of Christ.