

## **SECAM Pastoral Departments Input on Synod Pt. II**

**SECOND SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AFRICA OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS,  
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### **INPUT OF THE PASTORAL DEPARTMENTS OF SECAM: EVANGELIZATION AND JUSTICE AND PEACE**

#### **3.2 Conflicts, Wars and Racism**

It is reported in the *Instrumentum Laboris* that:

“Some political leaders show an insensibility to the needs of their people. They follow their own pursuits and hold in disdain any idea of the common good. Lacking a sense of the State and democratic principles, they work out political deals which are unilateral, partisan, favour-driven and ethnocentric. At the same time, they foster division to secure their rule” (no. 23).

“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” (no. 53).

“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” (no. 54).

As a result of all this (and other factors), many countries in Africa continue to look more and more like a battlefield, where only selfish interests count and the law of force prevails, the law which fatally distances humanity from the hoped-for civilization of love” (EIA no. 79).

#### **3.2.1 Proposal on Reconciliation**

To achieve reconciliation, unity and peaceful co-existence on the continent, every Christian should embrace the message of reconciliation as depicted in 2 Cor 2.17-20. In his death on the Cross, Christ reconciled all of us to God and to each other and established peace and unity among us. As expressed in Ephesians:

“Those who used to be far off, have been brought close, by the blood of Christ. For he is the peace between us, and has made the two into one entity and broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart by destroying in his own person the hostility, that is the law of commandments with its decrees. His purpose in this was, by restoring

peace, to create a single New Man out of the two of them, and through the cross, to reconcile them both to God in one body; in his own person he killed the hostility” (2.13-16).

This calls on all the people of the African continent and indeed the world both as individuals and communities to:

Resolve conflicts and forgive without conditions. For the Good News of reconciliation in 2 Cor 2.17-20 challenges us to make every effort to urgently resolve the tensions, the conflicts and the disputes in human and labour relationships, in the struggle for social justice and equality, for peace and unity, for democracy and development etc everywhere in Africa and in the world. It also calls on each of us to break with the hateful feelings, the hostility, the anger, the bias or the prejudice we sustain against each other and hasten to reconcile with, and forgive one another, un-conditionally as God has forgiven us in Christ.

- Un-conditional forgiveness implies that the victim should not wait for the confession of the perpetrator before he/she is forgiven, neither does it mean that the victim may not recall the harm or the injury caused but that in spite of it, one continues to relate with the other with an open mind, deep mutual trust, cheerful mood and spirit. Similarly, this challenge obliges us to make the first move towards reconciliation and forgiveness even when the offender or the perpetrator does not do so and to readily accept reconciliation and forgiveness from those who offend us. Paul exhorts each of us, “never let the sun set on your anger or else you will give the devil a foothold” (Eph 4. 26). “Any bitterness or bad temper or anger or shouting or abuse must be removed from you as must every kind of malice. Be generous to one another, sympathetic, forgiving each other as readily as God forgave you in Christ” (Eph 4.31-32; see Col 3.9-15).
- The reconciliation of humankind with God is already objectively perfected in Christ, once and for all but it has to be subjectively realized in individual people in the world. So in spite of being reconciled to God, the human person, the baptized Christian inclusive, remains free, and for that reason it is possible for him/her to set himself/herself again at enmity with God. Therefore, each person has to continually make his/her individual act of reconciliation and renew his/her personal loving relationship to God and his/her neighbour. Each Christian in Africa, and in every field of human endeavour, must become an ambassador of reconciliation and forgiveness. Similarly, all the people of Africa and the world, without exception, must be involved in the promotion of peace, unity, solidarity, dialogue, mutual understanding and respect.
- Our reconciliation with God and with each other, challenges us to embrace a new worldview and vision in which we live no longer for ourselves but for Christ and for each other. For Paul, everyone whom God has reconciled to himself through Christ is re-

created by God as a new person or a new creature because he/she has entered a new realm of being and God is the source of this new order of creation. In this newness of life he/she has acquired a new set of standards. He/she no longer judges things by the standards of the world but by God's standards. "You have stripped off your old behaviour with your old self, and you have put on a new self which will progress towards true knowledge the more it is renewed in the image of its Creator, and in that image there is no room for distinction between Greek and Jew, between the circumcised and the uncircumcised or between barbarian and Scythian, slave or free. There is only Christ; he is everything and he is in everything" (Col 3.10-11; cf. Eph 4.22-24).

- Although we inevitably require God's grace to achieve the new realm of existence, we must make concrete daily efforts to give up our evil desires and tendencies. This involves an interior disposition to God and a personal encounter with Christ, best achieved through deep reflection, prayer and devotion. It is through a personal encounter with Christ that he can transform each of us into a new person, a new being, a new creature and an authentic witness to him.

- To work for a reconciled Africa, frequent communal celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation should be encouraged.

### **3.3 Non Implementation of the recommendations of *Ecclesia in Africa***

The *Instrumentum Laboris* notes that:

"In some places, the exhortation has not been sufficiently distributed and implemented, despite its clear recommendations (no.18).

"The Second Assembly must redress the lack of a systematic follow-up in implementing the results of the *First Assembly* and the contents of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation" (no. 20).

#### **3.3.1 Proposal on Evaluation and Implementation of *Ecclesia in Africa***

In line with the *Instrumentum Laboris* the specialists in this field throughout the continent should "make a thorough evaluation of the reception of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to show what has been done and what still remains to be done" (IL nos. 13, 20).

- This should include continued efforts on the part of each particular Church on the African continent to disseminate the message of *Ecclesia in Africa*, "which always remains pertinent and timely" (IL no. 18).

- Each particular Church on the African continent should see to the translation of *Ecclesia in Africa* into all languages her people can better understand.
- Each particular Church should further see to it that *Ecclesia in Africa* is incorporated in catechetical classes, seminary and formation curricula.

### **3.3.2 Image of Church-as-Family of God**

The *Instrumentum Laboris* draws attention to the image of Church-as-Family of God adopted by the Synod Fathers present at the *First Special Assembly for Africa* for the continent in particular and the world in general. Founded on the Fatherhood of God, the image “highlights the African family-values of solidarity, sharing, respect for others, hospitality, togetherness, etc.

This model has opened hearts and spirits in conflict-management by combining dialogue under the “palaver tree” and the rites of reconciliation, which are for Christ’s disciples the word of God, heard and shared, the sacrament of penance and the Eucharist which seals communion” (no. 88). It is, therefore, important to resolve on concrete ways to live out the image of Church-as-Family of God throughout the continent (cf. IL nos. 15, 17, 40, 45, 54).

In order to act as the Church-Family of God, sons and daughters of the one Father in the only-begotten Son must constantly bear in mind that:

- “Belonging to Christ puts differences in origin aside and brings people together as true brothers and sisters in one family of the sons and daughters of God” (IL no. 87).
- All Christians in Africa should imitate the exemplary life of the Holy Family.
- The Church in Africa should foster solidarity among all the peoples at every level (parish, diocesan, national, regional continental).

### **3.3.3 Formation of Christians and Responsibilities of the Lay Faithful**

The *First Special Assembly for Africa* also recommended, among other things, the formation of Christians but not much has been done in this direction. And the *Instrumentum Laboris* “addresses the issue of ecclesial identity often to be closely linked with the hierarchy when lay people are not given or do not assume their responsibility also within the Church”.

- The Church in Africa should intensify efforts towards the formation of the lay faithful at all levels (parish, diocese, national, regional and continental). It is in this way that they will be “committed to their faith, so that they can work in politics to bring the many different people in society to live together in peace”. The same applies to the formation of priests and religious “who are eager to be signs of and witnesses to the Kingdom” (IL no. 54).
- The Church in Africa should develop a notion of leadership based on participation and subsidiarity, these are, indeed, tasks long overdue.
- Each particular Church in Africa should elaborate on lay ministries and their responsibilities.

### **3.3.4 The Family**

Responses to the *Lineamenta* show that creativity is necessary in addressing the spiritual and moral needs of the family (cf. IL no. 20).

- Given the important role of the family as a domestic Church, family apostolate should form part and parcel of the pastoral plan or programme on each particular Church on the continent.

## **3.4 Cultural and negative Traditional Challenges**

It is noted in the *Instrumentum Laboris* that everywhere on the African 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” (no. 59).

In the name of culture or ancestral traditions, women are victimized and abused in different ways.

### **3.4.1 Proposal on the Dignity of Women**

To bring the above to an:

- Leaders in both the Church and the society should urgently foster and promote the dignity of women. This can be best achieved through education and the concrete engagement of women in Church and state structures and programmes. As advised in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, “the role of women will be more effective, if the Church-Family enlists them in her mission in a more visible, straightforward manner. In this way, they can give a more humane tone to African societies” (no. 117).

### **3.4.2 Proposal on Witchcraft:**

The *Instrumentum Laboris* remarks that “some false beliefs and practices from African cultures demand special attention” e.g. witchcraft is said to be “tearing villages and urban societies apart” (no. 32).

- Each particular Church in Africa should embark on a campaign against belief in witchcraft and other negative and harmful traditional practices.

### **3.4.3 Proposal on Inculturation**

Closely related to the above is “the challenge of inculturation”, which is said to be “more crucial than ever for African societies, whose cultures are being threatened” (IL no. 70). “The Gospel is grounded in the human terrain of culture. African societies show how powerless they are in the breakdown of cultures. If the Church is to form authentic Christians, she must give serious attention to grounding the Gospel message in culture” (IL no. 73). Moreover, “the gap between the Christian faith and day-to-day life in Africa will only be overcome by a profound inculturation not only of liturgies and rites, but also of Church structures and of institutions run by the Church”. A “profound inculturation has to take into account the ambivalence of both African traditional culture... and of today’s dominant cultures, called modernity, that in so many ways have changed the life of Africans”. Therefore:

- Each particular Church should see to it that theologians as well as theological faculties in their vicinity address this issue and provide a blueprint on how the Gospel can be incarnated into African culture.
- Each particular Church on the African continent should intensify efforts in promoting African indigenous languages and oral literature, which at the moment are treated with disdain (cf. IL no. 66).

- Each particular Church should continue to promote the study of African anthropology and traditional religions.

### **3.5 A Call to Justice**

The *Instrumentum Laboris* notes that:

“Seeking peace and justice is an integral part of the Church’s prophetic mission in proclaiming the Gospel (cf. Lk 4: 16-19; IL no. 20).

The Church is therefore called upon to serve the justice of the kingdom by living this justice within herself, i.e., in her members, so that Africa’s brothers and sisters will choose the arduous road of redemption and follow it (IL no. 45). However, a just salary for Church workers remains a critical concern (IL no. 17). Salaries of workers are insufficient, if indeed they are paid at all (IL no. 25). What needs attention is: “how can the intrinsic unity be shown between seeking peace and justice and the Church’s proclamation of the Gospel” (IL no. 20)

#### **3.5.1 Proposals on Justice**

- Every Church institution must pay just wages and foster the dignity of workers.
- The Church in Africa should intensify efforts concerning self-reliance at all levels. Each particular Church ought to invest in microfinance projects.
- Each particular Church should see to it that ‘self-reliance’ is included in the curricula of the seminaries and formation houses.
- Church leaders at parish, diocesan, national and regional levels should participate in forums where policy formulations and implementations are discussed in order to give moral guidance on issues affecting people’s lives, especially the poor and disadvantaged groups in society.
- Church leaders at all levels of the African Church should remain committed to, and provide adequate resources for their Justice and Peace Commissions.
- Church leaders at all levels must be actively involved in advocacy and speak out against injustice even when the interests of one’s tribe are at risk.

### **3.6 Theological Challenges**

On the theological level, the *Instrumentum Laboris* talks about the two images of salt

and light, which it says “express the dual aspects of the identity of the disciple of Christ” (IL no. 37). “The image of ‘salt of the earth’ looks to the disciples as the active means of transforming the places where their sisters and brothers live. In effect, just as salt changes the flavour of food to which it is added, so Christ’s disciples are called to live in their local surroundings in such a way as to improve the flavour of humanity. Just as salt dissolves and becomes invisible, the initial impact of the disciple’s life escapes notice” (IL no. 37).

The second image “calls upon the disciples to identify themselves as the ‘light of the world’..... light is destined to shine; it cannot be hidden”. For this reason, “disciples, who are the light, cannot pass unnoticed”. They do this through their “good works of feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and aged, showing concern for the prisoner etc (cf. Mt 25.35-36; IL no. 38).

### **3.6.1 Proposal on being Salt and Light of the World**

- In order to become “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” (Mt 5.13-14) all Christians in Africa must eschew every form of selfishness and greed, and must put the interest of others above personal interest.

### **3.6.2 Proposal on Examination of Conscience**

In general, talking about reconciliation, justice and peace, indirectly confronts the Church in Africa with the question of her own credibility. For instance in reporting on the experiences of reconciliation, justice and peace outside and inside the Church in chapter two, the analysis of the obstacles in society is regrettably more elaborate than the one within the Church.

- This calls for a critical examination of conscience on the part of all the members of the Church in Africa.

## **3.7 A call to an improved Catholic Media**

The *Instrumentum Laboris* notes that making “radio authentically Catholic still requires effort” (no. 20). It further encourages that the:

“Media must be evangelised through the formation of those who work in its various segments”. The new technologies of communication are today an inescapable place for Evangelisation (no. 20).

The questions to be addressed are, how the Church can make use of these technologies, and in what ways she can become more involved.

### **3.7.1 Proposals on the Catholic Media**

- Each particular Church in Africa should establish Catholic radio stations, televisions, magazines and newspapers where they are non-existent.
- Each particular Church on the continent should strengthen and improve the capacity and quality of those already working in media institutions.
- Each particular Church should actively involved in media network and collaboration in Africa.
- The Church in Africa should organize workshops and seminars on conflict resolution, ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue at all levels.

### **3.8 The Challenge of Globalisation**

The *Instrumentum Laboris* notes that globalisation,

“is tending to marginalise Africa. To speak of problems and solutions in Africa is impossible without considering the other continents, their economic institutions, financiers and their network of information, all of which have a considerable impact on African society” (IL no. 13).

For this reason, the “ecclesial communities in Africa look to the Synod Fathers to examine this formidable situation for which African societies are partly responsible and partly victims” (IL no. 13) and proffer solutions. It is within “the context of this phenomenon” that the Synod Fathers are expected to “look for ways the Church can foster a greater integration of societies and countries on the continent” (IL no. 72).

#### **3.81 Proposals on Globalisation**

- The Church in Africa should improve on networking and collaboration with institutions (e.g., MISEREOR, CIDSE, Caritas, African Union and the Pan-African Parliament) in influencing change at all levels of decision-making.
- Each particular Church on the continent should endeavour to participate, where possible, in national, regional and, or international conferences and give inputs on

matters affecting the life of many societies.

- Each particular Church in Africa should set up parliamentary chaplaincies or liaison offices in her locality.
- Each particular Church should equally set up advisory councils or expert- working-groups in social and political matters to help in advocacy work.
- Each particular Church should develop and encourage the use of the *Basic Needs Basket* (BNB) concept as an advocacy tool for her Justice and Peace Commission.

## **Conclusion**

In our corporate personality, every African is not only implicated in the ills of the continent but each one must also be personally involved in the effort to transform Africa, beginning with us Christians. From the parish to the regional levels, all priests, religious and Bishops must live as members of one family and become points of unity wherever we are.

This must be accompanied by a firm commitment on the part of each one of us to forgiveness and reconciliation. It is in this way that the Church in Africa would “become for all, through the witness borne by its own sons and daughters, a place of true reconciliation”, justice and peace. “Forgiven and mutually reconciled, these sons and daughters will thus be able to bring to the world the forgiveness and reconciliation which Christ our Peace (cf. Eph 2:14) offers to humanity through his Church” (cf. IL no. 86).

To the maternal intercession of Mary, Our Lady of Africa and Queen of Peace, we entrust the apostolic efforts of the Synod Fathers at the *Second Special Assembly for Africa*, “under the wise and devoted guidance of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI” (Preface p. vi).

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