



PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM  
DE IUSTITIA ET PACE

30th Anniversary Conference of the  
Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN)  
Notre Dame University, 2 March 2013

## ***Roots and Routes of Justice Ministry in Africa***

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In the name of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, I extend warmest greetings to everyone. It is a great honour and pleasure for me to join you on this important anniversary. The Africa Faith and Justice Network [<http://www.afjn.org/>] was established in 1983 followed by the Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network [<http://www.aefjn.org/>] in 1988. Their mission is to educate and advocate for just policies and just relations with the peoples of Africa. We give thanks to God for the many years of sustained efforts, for their sharing of good news and denunciation of evils, for the hearts they have touched, and for the development they have encouraged in Africa, in North America and in Europe.

My contribution to the anniversary conference is entitled “Roots and Routes of Justice Ministry in Africa”. We will begin with the roots and routes revealed in the Old Testament and culminating in Jesus Christ. Then, making the Mission of Christ our own, we see how the three Synods we’re looking at – 1971, 1994 and 2009 – underpin and give direction to the justice ministries of the Church in and for Africa. Finally, we notice what this anniversary reflection indicates about future Christian evangelization for Africa and beyond.

### **II. THE DIVINE MISSION AND JUSTICE**

#### ***Mission and Justice Meet in the Old Testament: the Call of Abraham/Israel***

The mission of Jesus that has become the mission of the Church began in the Old Testament as the going forth of the word of God to form Israel, the children of Abraham, into God’s people. The mission, then, of God’s word in the Old Testament was to call Abraham and his children to faith in the Lord. Through Abraham’s faith in the Lord, *righteousness* was imputed to him (Gen.15:6). And as it emerged, the imputation of *righteousness* to Abraham also constituted his mission to cultivate an offspring of “justice” and “righteousness”: “*I have*

*chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the ways of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice*” (Gen.18:6); and the association of the notice of Israel’s vocation to justice with the condemnation of Sodom and Gomorrah for their lack of justice, *because the outcry against its people had become great before the Lord* (Gen.19:13) is very significant. It was as if Abraham’s cultivation of “*an offspring of justice and righteousness*” was ending a Sodom era of unrighteousness. This same contrasting presentation of the lack of justice in Sodom and Gomorrah with the vocation of Israel to justice will later lend great power to Isaiah’s denunciation of an Israel that had become unjust like Sodom and Gomorrah in his *song of the unfruitful vineyard* (Is.5:1-7).

At a later stage, the mission of Abraham towards his children would become the mission of Israel towards the nations; and the content of the latter would be presented, on the one hand, as the saving power of the Lord, experienced by Israel as divine justice and vindication before her enemies, and on the other hand, as knowledge of the *ways of the Lord, instruction and the word of God* (Is.2:3ff.).

During this phase of Israel’s history, the Word of God would go forth as the *word of the call and mission of Moses* to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage (Ex.3ff.). It would go forth as the *word of the covenant* to draw Israel to faith in the LORD and to be taught the *commandments of life* (Baruch 3:9ff; Ex.20-23; Dt.4ff.). But, at the same time, Israel’s experience with the Word of the covenant will make Israel a *wise nation and a witness/a sign of God’s presence with his people* (Dt.4:6ff.). God’s word, indeed, would go forth in the mission of Joshua, the Judges, Kings and prophets to bring about justice, each in his own way, for Israel. Some brought Israel an experience of justice, delivering her from injustices and oppression. Others exhorted and taught her the path of righteousness before God and man, denounced her infidelities and inveighed against her injustices and oppression of the poor, the widow, the orphan and the stranger in her midst. The cumulative experience of these divine interventions sought to constitute Israel as a *witness* and a *sign* of God’s justice and saving power before the nations. “The Lord prepared Israel over the course of centuries to expect a salvation which was social in its form with justice as its content.”<sup>1</sup> But alas! Isaiah’s *song of the unfruitful vineyard*, his denunciations (Is.58; 59) and those of Amos bespeak Israel’s difficulty in witnessing to the LORD’s justice and saving power before the nations.

### ***The Mission of the Servant-Messiah and Justice***

As a result, however, of Israel’s experience of these especially endowed individuals, an idealized future figure was conceived by Israel, one who would have the courage of a judge, the royal ways of another David, and the piercing message of the prophets. Like Moses himself, this Messiah would lead Israel out of her constant condition of victim of others’ injustices. And once she was vindicated through the Messiah she awaited, Israel would

---

<sup>1</sup> John C. Haughey S.J., “Jesus as the justice of God”, in *The Faith that does Justice*, Examining the Christian Sources for Social Change, ed. John C. Haughey, Woodstock Studies 2, 1977 (Paulist Press, N.Y.), p. 266.

become the epicenter of international peace and justice and order, the nation to which all nations would come, where God would be Lord of all nations and acclaimed as such by them.<sup>2</sup>

In the hands of Isaiah, the *vocation* and the *mission* of Israel (Jerusalem) would be presented as those of a *servant-figure*. The servant of the Lord, who was endowed with His Spirit to be a *covenant* to the people and *light to the nations* (Is. 42:6; 49:8ff.) was also to bring justice to the nations: “*He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint... until he has established justice in the earth*” (Is.42:1, 3-4; 51:4). His call and constitution as “*covenant and light to the nations*” was to enable the Lord’s salvation to reach the ends of the earth; but this was salvation that he would himself experience (Is.49:7). In these *servant passages*, “*justice and light*”, represent knowledge of the Law and of the salvation of God; they are universal gifts of God that are destined to reach all people through his servant.

### ***Jesus Christ and Justice***

At the fullness of time and through his incarnation (mission), Jesus fulfilled in himself the *vocation* and the *mission* of the Servant-Messiah. As the Word of God, conceived under the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit and in whom the Father was well-pleased, Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament attributes of the Servant-Messiah. Mt.4:16 quotes Is.9:2 and alludes to the star at the birth of Jesus to underline the continuation and fulfilment, in Jesus, of the revelatory and salvific symbolism of *light* in the Old Testament. Luke 4:16-19 quotes Is.61:1-2, to announce the advent of the messianic deliverance in Jesus; and Mt.12:18-21 quotes Is.42:1-4 to announce the fulfilment in Jesus of the messianic proclamation of *justice to the gentiles*.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, Jesus would go around preaching the advent of God’s reign, curing diseases and setting free all who were in the power of the devil. On the other hand, he would be “*handed over to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification*” (Rom.4:25). Jesus is the “*light of God’s salvation*” (Jn.1:5; 3:19; 8:12; 12:46); and he is the “*light of God’s Word/Law/Wisdom*” (Jn.1:4; 9:5; 12:36, 46). He dies and rises to “*proclaim light both to the people and to the gentiles*” (Acts 26:23).

### ***The Apostles of Jesus, the Church and Justice***

Jesus already made it clear, in the course of his ministry, that he intended his apostles to share in his mission and to carry it on after him. The choice of the twelve and their investiture with power and authority to preach, heal and expel demons (Mk.3:14-15; 6:6-13; Mt.10:1, 7-8; Lk.9:1-6) indicate that. At the end of his ministry on earth, Jesus entrusted the apostles to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit for the same purpose of continuing his mission to the ends of the earth. For, “*thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead...., and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations...*”

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Haughey, "Jesus as the Justice," p. 267.

<sup>3</sup> This Isaian quote in the Gospel of Matthew, with its note of “proclaiming justice to the gentiles”, is very significant, seeing that Jesus limits the mission of the apostles to the house of Israel (Mt.10:5-6).

*You are my witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised...* (Lk.24:46-49).<sup>4</sup>

The Church, the Christian community of “*those who will believe in Jesus through the word of the apostles*”,<sup>5</sup> continues the mission of Jesus in the world in the power of the same Spirit. Indissolubly united to Christ as his body, and to the Kingdom of God as its seed, sign and instrument,<sup>6</sup> the Church advances the mission of Christ, serves the Kingdom of God, and contributes “to mankind’s pilgrimage of conversion to God’s plan” through her preaching, witness, establishing communities and local churches, spreading “*gospel values*”, and “through such activities as dialogue, human promotion, commitment to justice and peace, education and the care of the sick, and aid to the poor and to children”.<sup>7</sup>

### ***The Mission of the Son of God***

The evangelizing mission of the Church is the mission of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It flows from the *fountain of love* within the Father. From him, who is *origin without origin*,<sup>8</sup> the Son, coeternal with the Father, is begotten. Various going forth from the Father as the *Word of God*, in the Old Testament, the Son became man at the fullness of time to reveal the love of the Father and to redeem humankind. In the power of the Holy Spirit, this Servant announced the advent of the *reign of God*, cured the sick and set free all who were in the possession of the devil. Still Servant, he gave himself to death, the sinless for the sinner, and rose from the dead to grant salvation to all who believe in him, as a gift of God’s grace and mercy to be received in faith.

Jesus entrusted the story of his mission as the *Gospel (good-news) of salvation* to his apostles and to all who through the word of the apostles would come to believe in him (Jn.17:20). He endowed them with the Holy Spirit to proclaim this *Gospel of salvation*, in word and deed, and to make followers (disciples) from all nations of the world and to the end of time (Mt.28:19).

Evangelization is the announcing in the power of the Spirit, in word and deed, this mission of Jesus Christ to draw humanity into the life of the Trinity and to faith. It is “*the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit*” (2Cor.13:13) made available in order to “*make all things new*” (Rev.21.5) and to lead humankind in the Spirit and through the Son back to the Father, so that “*God may be all in all*” (1Cor.15:28).

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. too, Acts 1:4-5; Mt.28:18; Jn.14:26; 16:13-15; *Ad Gentes*, §4

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Jn.17:20.

<sup>6</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, §18.

<sup>7</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, §20. To these activities correspond various decasteries of the Holy See.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Ad Gentes*, §2

## *Mission, Faith and Justice*

This *mission* and *faith* are inextricably bound: faith in the one who sends and in the one who is sent. It is by faith that we accept our share in a mission, even the mission of Jesus himself and even when that mission is to establish justice. Indeed the quest for justice is integral to faith in the God of Abraham, Moses, the prophets and Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> The image of the God of the Old Testament and of Jesus Christ is a God who loves *justice* and *righteousness*. What he loves, he brings to pass and establishes it as a *mission* for those who experience it (e.g., liberation from slavery and oppression, education in holiness, denunciation of sinfulness, lifting up the poor and needy). Further, the sense of *justice* in the Bible, in general terms, is *fidelity to the demands of relationship, especially, the three-fold relationships by which life is maintained, the Lord, fellow Israelite and the land.*<sup>10</sup> So the contemporary realization that faith must be involved in the quest for and expression of justice is not foreign to biblical thought. Rather it recovers a core of the biblical heritage which, when neglected, brings the danger of reducing this heritage to a manual of personal piety.<sup>11</sup>

### **III. BRINGING JUSTICE MINISTRY TO THE CENTRE OF CHRISTIAN LIFE: THE 1971 SYNOD ON JUSTICE IN THE WORLD**

The Second Vatican Council encyclical *Gaudium et spes* addresses one of the central concerns of the Council: the relationship between the Church and the modern world. It calls all Christians to live their faith in serving generously and effectively, thus setting the pace and tone for renewal in the Church: “Therefore, by holding faithfully to the Gospel and benefiting from its resources, by joining with everyone who loves and practices justice, Christians have shouldered a gigantic task for fulfillment in this world.”<sup>12</sup> This is the context for the three Synods we will consider.

As you may know, General Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops began to be held regularly, from 1967 onwards. These provided valuable opportunities for the Church in Africa to make its voice heard in the Church throughout the world. Thus, at the Second Ordinary General Assembly (1971), the Synod Fathers from Africa happily took the occasion offered them to appeal for greater justice in the world.<sup>13</sup> So it was that, less than six years after the close of the

---

<sup>9</sup> On the centrality of the concept of *Justice* in the Bible, cf. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, tr. D.M. Stalker (Harper & Row, NY, 1962), 1, 370. “There is absolutely no concept in the OT with so central a significance for all relationships of human life as that of *דקָה צ* justice/righteousness.” Cf. too, H.H. Schrey, *The Doctrine of Justice and Law*, Ecumenical Biblical Studies, no.3 (London SCM, 1955), p. 50. “It can be said without exaggeration that the Bible, taken as a whole, has one theme: The history of the revelation of God’s righteousness.”

<sup>10</sup> John C. Donahue S.J., “Biblical Perspectives on Justice”, in *The Faith that does Justice*, Examining the Christian Sources for Social Change, ed. John C. Haughey S.J., Woodstock Studies 2, 1977 (Paulist Press, N.Y.), p. 77. Cf. too, P.K. Turkson, *Relatio ante disceptationem*, II Synod for Africa, 2009, pp. 20-21.

<sup>11</sup> Donahue, “Biblical Perspectives,” pp. 69-70.

<sup>12</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, § 93, the final paragraph of the Pastoral Constitution.

<sup>13</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, § 4.

Council, 210 representatives of the world's Bishops gathered in Rome to reflect upon the challenges they witnessed around them, especially the major patterns of injustice, and in response, to bring justice ministry to the center of Christian life.<sup>14</sup> Reflecting the Second Vatican Council desire to relate the Gospel to existing worldwide and local circumstances, they addressed the world's pressing issues including human rights, economic exploitation, poverty and hunger, discrimination in access to opportunities, income disparity, persecution of minority groups, torture of political prisoners, the rejection and marginalization of vulnerable people and the liberation of the weak from oppressive situations. Thus *Justice in the World* followed an approach to evangelization ministry that reads the "signs of the time" by observing, analyzing and evaluating reality as they present themselves in a given context so as to respond effectively to the situation. It calls us to listen to "the cry of those who suffer violence and are oppressed by unjust systems and structures".<sup>15</sup>

In their reflection, the Bishops outlined an eight-point program for international action, and recommended that the Church on the local level foster education and ecumenical collaboration in the field of justice. They observed that God's "plan of liberation and salvation which is once and for all fulfilled in the Paschal Mystery of Christ" is intricately bound with the pursuit of justice. They affirmed that "action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."<sup>16</sup> They affirmed too that charity – Christian love of God and neighbor – implies an absolute demand for justice, shown through pursuit of the cause of justice in the world.<sup>17</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, in the 2009 post Synodal exhortation *Africae Munus*, also emphasized that charity to the poor must presuppose justice since a charity that is unaccompanied by justice is false (*Africae Munus* §18).

Action for justice must address not only the personal dimension of sin but the systemic dimensions and structures of oppression too, since structures socialize people and reinforce personal action. So the Bishops called on those who advocate for justice to be just themselves, to self-examine such that, by themselves, their lifestyles and actions positively preach the good news to the poor.<sup>18</sup>

The Bishops called on those who reach out to developing countries in their development efforts to do so in justice and as cooperators, so as to enable the beneficiaries to become

---

<sup>14</sup> Synod 30.09-6.11.1971. *Iustitia in Mundo*. <http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/resources/synodjw.htm>

<sup>15</sup> *Justice in the World*, § 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Justice in the World*, §6.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Justice in the World*, §§ 34, 35.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Justice in the World*, §§ 40, 48.

principal architects of their own economic and social development<sup>19</sup> in accordance with their own culture (*Justice in the World* §71).

The challenge to Christians is to denounce injustice courageously, firmly and prudently.<sup>20</sup> The Bishops called every Christian to participate to the extent of their ability and status, to understand that participation is a right and duty to be applied both in the economic and in the social and political field such that Christians all over the world act as leaven of that transforms the society.<sup>21</sup> The Bishops also challenged the idea of linear progress and the assumption that poverty would be overcome by trickle-down economics, by which the poor are consigned to relying on ‘the crumbs that fall from the table’ (Luke 16:21).

The reflection on justice in the world proved to be prophetic. Many of the concerns the Bishops raised forty-two years ago have become acute and alarming.

*Justice in the World* called the Church to engage the political events of the day as part of its evangelization ministry. The pursuit of justice as a means of lasting peace was underlined by Pope Paul VI in his 1972 Message of World Day of Peace. Referring to the Prophet Isaiah, "Justice will bring about Peace" (Is.32:17), the Holy Father emphasized that the invitation to celebrate Peace is an invitation to practice Justice, and he summed it up in an incisive and dynamic formula: "If you want Peace, work for Justice".

Pope Paul’s call was heard. For example, the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) was established in 1983 and its European counterpart Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN) in 1988, prompted by the injustices against the peoples of Africa and by their negative portrayal in Western media. Over these many years, AFJN and AEFJN have engaged in a sustained mission to educate about justice and to promote just policies and just relations with the peoples of Africa. AFJN and AEFJN stand out as major international responses to *Justice in the World*.

So too, conferences of bishops have become engaged. The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) convened for the first time during the visit of Pope Paul VI to Uganda in 1969. By choosing the word Symposium, instead of Conference, the Founding Fathers of SECAM wanted to emphasize their desire for communion and fellowship. *Symposium* means meal or banquet in Greek. In his opening speech, the late Paul Cardinal Zoungrana explained the concept of symposium by using the image of the Eucharistic table which gathers the community of brothers and sisters together. In that explanation, we already find the seeds of the Church as Family of God – to which we now turn.

---

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Peter K.A. Turkson, Statement at U.N. General Assembly to Summit of Heads of State and Government on the Millennium Development Goals, September 20, 2010; <http://www.holyseemission.org/statements/statement.aspx?id=125>

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Justice in the World*, §§ 57, 36.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Justice in the World*, §§ 18, 38.

#### IV. FIRST SYNOD AND THE CHURCH'S EVANGELIZING MISSION

Unlike the 1971 Synod, which was an Ordinary General Assembly, we now examine a Special Assembly. The first *Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa* was announced by Pope John Paul II on January 6, 1989.<sup>22</sup> It was to be held under the theme: *The Church in Africa and her Evangelizing Mission towards the year 2000: "You shall be my witnesses"* (Acts 1:8); and it was to consider evangelization as *proclamation, inculturation, dialogue, justice and peace and communication*. The First Synod, then, was announced in the final stages of the Pope's encyclical on mission, *Redemptoris Missio*. Having been promulgated in 1990, this encyclical on mission accompanied and guided the preparation of the First Synod. Its impact was to underline the Synod's great concern for the Church's mission on the continent.

It is noteworthy, however, that the actual celebration of the First Synod, from April 10 to May 8, 1994, was marked by two reminders of another concern which stalked and stalled the mission of the Church in Africa. The collapse of the apartheid regime in South Africa, a vestige of colonial imperialism, culminated with democratic elections on April 27, 1994. The Rwandan genocide, the naked face of ethnocentrism in Africa, began with the assassination of Rwanda's president on April 6, 1994. These contrasting events pushed to the fore the sorry state of **justice** on the continent. While the collapse of apartheid set a euphoric tone, the Rwandan genocide gave it a grim and sombre conclusion. All this notwithstanding, it was still called a *synod of resurrection!*

Indeed, this *Synod of resurrection and hope* took place during the Easter season. The significance was not lost on the Synod Fathers; the Synod "*intended to be an occasion of hope and resurrection, at the very moment when human events seemed to be tempting Africa to discouragement and despair*"<sup>23</sup>. In the light of the Gospel message and in the spirit of the same Easter hopefulness,<sup>24</sup> the Synod became, in its turn, a bearer of "*a word of hope and encouragement*",<sup>25</sup> which was meant to "*strengthen in all Africans hope of genuine liberation*"<sup>26</sup>. The mission of the Church on the continent was to proclaim the hope of Easter morning, the victory of light over darkness, of life over death, and of freedom from the slavery of sin in its various manifestations within individuals, societies and structures.

The subsequent adoption of the ecclesiological model: *Church-Family of God*, in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, was a conscious, careful choice of a pertinent **locus** and **imagery**. It asserted that the Church in an Africa beset by estranging experiences (e.g., ethnocentrism, conflicts, injustices, abuse of human rights and dignity, and

---

<sup>22</sup> While the official names are *First* or *Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops*, for convenience we refer to them as First Synod or Second Synod ["for Africa" understood].

<sup>23</sup> Donahue, "Biblical Perspectives," pp. 69-70.

<sup>24</sup> First Synod, *Message of the Synod* (6 May 1994), 2; cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, §§13, 57.

<sup>25</sup> John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa*, §13.

<sup>26</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, §13.

so forth) could promote and provide an experience of **living in communion** – in family – by promoting death to sins of division and estrangement, and by providing daily resurrection to new life of communion, to manifest the coherence of the life of a disciple with his or her faith.

To this end, the gathering of the fruits of the First Synod in *Ecclesia in Africa* of Pope John Paul II, did two things principally:

1. It adopted a paradigm, *Church Family of God*, with which it sought to describe the **identity** and **nature** of the Church (in Africa) as called to live in the *communion* of an inclusive belonging of every tribe and people (as in the Kingdom of God) in response to the Gospel.
2. And it formulated a set of pastoral priorities that were also missionary in nature: **evangelization as Proclamation, evangelization as Enculturation, evangelization as Dialogue, evangelization as Justice and Peace and evangelization as Communication**, to help build the *Church Family of God*.

With these measures, Pope John Paul II and the First Synod hoped to give the Church in Africa a new impulse and a new *élan* for her life and activity on the continent, as a *missionary Church*, namely, a Church with a mission *to evangelize, enculturate, dialogue, do justice and peace* and discover ways of *communicating* with its cultures and traditions as well as with a rapidly emerging modernity. This imagery of Church as Family of God expresses the Church's nature appropriately and powerfully for the locus of Africa.

The challenges facing implementation of *Ecclesia in Africa* were certainly formidable. The Church-Family of God dedicated itself to persevering and renewing strength and giving firmly-grounded hope to a continent badly bruised variously by ethnic and religious conflicts (sometimes politically exploited), bad governance, oppressive and unfair investor-packages, migration, environmental degradation, poverty, disease, corruption, trafficking in arms and drugs and human trafficking.

## **V. SECOND SYNOD AND THE CHURCH'S MINISTRIES OF RECONCILIATION, JUSTICE AND PEACE**

The First Synod had gathered against the background of a predominantly pessimistic world view of Africa, and of a peculiarly challenging and a “deplorably unfavourable”<sup>27</sup> situation of the continent for the evangelizing mission of the Church in those closing years of the

---

<sup>27</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Address to the 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Post-Synodal Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops for the Special Assembly for Africa*, 15 June 2004.

twentieth century. But it had also been described as a “synod of resurrection and hope”; and it was expected to mark a turning point in the history of the continent.<sup>28</sup>

But by 2009, when the Bishops of the Church in Africa gathered for a second time in synod with the Holy Father and other Bishops, the situation on the continent had changed considerably.<sup>29</sup> Thus it was hoped that the pursuit of *reconciliation, justice and peace*, made particularly Christian by their rootedness in Gospel values, love and mercy, would restore wholeness to the *Church-Family of God* on the continent and heal wounded human hearts.

### ***From a Synod of Resurrection and Hope to a Synod of a new Pentecost***

The First Synod had considered the Church in Africa in its **identity** and **self-understanding** as “*witness of Christ*” (with an evangelizing mission) and “*family of God*”. Fifteen years later, the Second *Special Synod of Bishops for Africa* gathered to consider the Church’s **activity** and **mission** as “*salt of the earth*” and “*light of the world*”, and as “*servants of reconciliation, justice and peace*”. The *Church-Family of God* was to consider, in the second Synod, her **mission** on the continent and in the world. Accordingly, at the first gathering of the Synod assembly, reflecting on the words of the opening song of the mid-morning prayer: “*nunc, sancte, nobis Spiritus*”, the Holy Father said: “*We pray that Pentecost may not only be an event of the past, at the very beginning of the Church, but that it may be today, indeed, ‘nunc, sancte, nobis Spiritus.’*” He went on then to exhort the Synod assembly: “*Let us pray the Lord to give us the Holy Spirit, that he may inspire a new Pentecost and help us to be his servants in the world at this time*”.<sup>30</sup> Being “servants: servants of reconciliation, justice and peace” in the world was the desired fruit of the new Pentecost of the Second Synod for Africa.

### ***From being “Church-family of God” to being Church-Ministers/Servants of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace***

A significant clue to the self-understanding of the Church in Africa as she emerged from the Second Synod resides in the passage from her characterization in the First Synod as *Church-Family of God* to the Second Synod's invitation to understand herself as *servant of reconciliation, justice and peace*, and as “*salt of the earth and light of the world*”.

Indeed, when the Second Synod was announced, some notable Church-groups on the continent wondered whether it was not too early to convoke a second Synod for Africa. But once it was underway and it became clear, especially from its theme, that it had to do with social justice issues—issues of human society, living in society and the challenges and exigencies of inter-personal relationships—opinions about the Synod began to change.

---

<sup>28</sup> First Synod, *Instrumentum Laboris*, 1993 §1. The same document affirmed: “An hour of Africa appears to have come, a favourable hour which calls on Christ’s messengers to launch out into the deep in order to haul in an abundant yield for Christ”, *Instrumentum Laboris*, § 24.

<sup>29</sup> Cfr. *Ecclesia in Africa*, §§ 13-14, 39-42, 51; II Synod, *Lineamenta*, *Preface* and §§ 6-8.

<sup>30</sup> Benedict XVI, *Reflection* during the First General Congregation, 5 October 2009.

It began to dawn on people that they needed to distinguish between the concerns of the two Synods, and yet see how closely related they are. The First Synod, in considering the Church as *witness* and *family of God*, had dealt with the issue of the **identity** and **nature** of the Church. The Second Synod, by contrast, undertook to deal with the **mission** (activity) of the *Church-Family of God*, the “works of a faith-group”.

The imagery of *Church-Family of God* was first and foremost one which described **communion** as the basic nature and identity of the Church. The *Church-Family of God*, therefore, is the expression of the **identity** of the Church as a reality in **communion** – **in communion with God** and **in communion with one another** (and the world). In this light, the theme of the Second Synod follows upon that of the I Synod as an expression of **mission** (activity) for a *church-witness* and a *church-family* whose identity and nature are **communion with God and with one another**.

Also noted was the dialectical tension between the **identity** and the **mission** of the Church. In dealing with this dialectical tension, the Church in Africa realizes her historical character and begins to respond to it and her identity as *witness* and *Church-Family of God*.

- The Church in Africa will become a *church-witness* and a *church-family* to the extent that she promotes an African Church and society that are truly **family of God**: where people are **reconciled** over and above tribal and ethnic ties, their racial and caste determinations, and their gender prejudices.
- The Church in Africa must embody and promote an African society that is sincere in its respect for law and order, the rights of others, and equal access to the resources of the land and water – in sum, a society that does *social justice* and lives in communion and enjoys peace.

In other words, *Church-Family of God* realizes her nature and identity as family and brotherhood to the extent that she causes “*family*” and “*brotherhood*” to happen: to the extent that she becomes incarnate on earth, in the Christian communities, in human society and in human history. Indeed, the Church in Africa must be the historical form of the *Kingdom of God* on the continent, causing justice and Kingdom values to sprout everywhere. For the Church cannot have an identity that does not become historical and real in history. So, the invitation to the *Church-Family of God* in Africa by the Synod theme to be *servants of reconciliation, justice and peace*, as *salt of the earth and light of the world* is a challenge to the Church in Africa to live up to her nature in the historical and concrete life of the continent – *to inculturate* – by promoting reconciliation, justice and peace. It is a challenge to historical relevance and to concrete witness of identity in the life and experiences of the continent.

Now, an issue that arises from the need to *inculturate* the **identity** of the Church in Africa and to make her *relevant* and *responsive* to the *social justice* experiences of the people on the continent is that of **method**: *what must be done to inculturate the Church-Family of God and*

*make it relevant? What must be done to make social justice and peace prevail on the continent?*

Indeed, the image and identity of the Church as *witness* and *family of God* cannot be a mere affirmation. It must engender a mission, an action; for it is ideological to merely make proposals without moving on to action. Accordingly, reflecting on the theme of the Second Synod to the Roman Curia, as mission-statement for the Church in Africa, the Holy Father observed: “The task of Bishops was to transform theology into pastoral care, namely into a very concrete pastoral ministry in which the great perspectives found in sacred Scripture and Tradition find application in the activity of Bishops and priests in specific times and places.”<sup>31</sup> In doing this, however, it is very important that one does not confuse “*pastorals*” with “*politics*.” Clarity about one’s identity and the consciousness of being a Church with a specific and an irreplaceable identity, namely, a *Church-Family of God* and a *witness to God*, safeguards against confusing “*pastoral action*” with “*political action*”.

This, indeed, is how the First Synod and its adoption of the ecclesiological model: *Church-Family of God*, finds its greatest significance and pertinence; and these reside in how the ecclesiological model: *Church-Family of God*, makes a distinction between *sociology*, *political philosophy* and *cultural anthropology*, on one side, and *theology* and *pastoral care*, on the other.<sup>32</sup> It is clarity about the Church’s identity as *witness* and *family of God* which directs how the Church pursues social justice and peace issues are pursued and also how it interacts with the rich cultures and traditions of the continent.

Thus, the second Synod is inseparable from the first. In them the Church in Africa is challenged to spring into action without delay, serving the *reconciliation-needs*, the *justice-needs* and the *peace-needs* of the continent, but maintaining its focus on its specific **identity** as *Family of God*. It is this focus on the specific **identity** of the Church, as *Family of God* from the First Synod which keeps the **mission** and apostolic activity of *being salt of the earth* and *light of the world* of the second Synod from straying into politics and becoming political ideologies.<sup>33</sup> For, it is in its theological content and character as *Family of God* that the **Church-Family** becomes an image of and a foreshadowing of the *kingdom of God* on earth and in history, animating the African society and the world with values of the *kingdom of God*, namely, *conversion of heart*, *reconciliation*, *justice*, *truth* and *peace*. When the Church in Africa left the Second Synod, it hoped that her promotion and pursuit of *reconciliation*, *justice* and *peace*, made particularly Christian by their rooting in genuine conversion and

---

<sup>31</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address to the Members of the Roman Curia*, 21 Dec. 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Purely immanent actions cannot attain the needs of man, nor offer solutions to the problems of society: “Ignorance of the fact that man has a wounded nature inclined to evil gives rise to serious errors in the area of education, politics, social action and morals.... The conviction that man is self-sufficient and can successfully eliminate the evil present in history by his own action alone has led him to confuse happiness and salvation with immanent forms of material prosperity and social action” (*Caritas in veritate*, §34).

<sup>33</sup> *Caritas in veritate*, §34, and Donahue, “Biblical Perspectives,” pp. 69-70.

values of the *kingdom*, would restore wholeness to the Church, to the continent and its people, and grant them to experience justice and their God-given opportunities and endowments.

## VI. CONCLUSION: MISSION/FAITH THAT DOES JUSTICE IN THE WORLD

Disregard for justice – for the just demands of relationship – causes many abuses to communion and the social order on the continent. And the injustices are of many kinds: political, economic, social, religious, ethnic and tribal, environmental, and so forth. The restoration of communion and just order in such cases is what *reconciliation* stands for; and its form is the re-establishment of *justice*, which alone restores peace and harmony to the Church-Family of God and the family of society.

The theme, therefore, of the Second Synod, “*the church in Africa in the service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*”, has to do with human life in society. This is not a political theme, at least not primarily, but theological and pastoral. While it fulfills the image of *Church-Family of God* of the first Synod, it also it calls on pastors “*to transform theology into pastoral care, namely into very concrete pastoral ministries in which the great perspectives found in sacred Scripture and Tradition find application in the activity of Bishops and priests in specific times and places,*”<sup>34</sup> for human flourishing and justice on all levels.

Accordingly, just as the Holy Father found reason to remind the Synod that it was not primarily “*a study session*”, so did the Synod fathers themselves repeatedly remind themselves that their gathering was not a “*a type of the United Nations General Assembly*”, where some political line of action was to be discussed and adopted.

The second Synod was guided rather by one simple thought: *Those who are justified by faith are called on to be faithful not only to the demands of the relationship with God, but faithful to the relationships with all people.*<sup>35</sup> This is justice. A clear lesson could be drawn from some experiences in Latin America where the application of the theology of liberation in addressing the needs of oppressed and badly wounded peoples for justice and peace brought Church ministers into fields of ideological and partisan landmines. Making one’s way through such fields is very tricky business, like balancing on a tightrope! Some pastors in Latin America and also in Africa and Asia forsook pastoral ministry to pursue political options. Faced with widespread and overwhelming injustices, some ordained ministers seemed to believe more in political than in pastoral solutions to the miseries of their communities, and opted to act as political rather than pastoral leaders.<sup>36</sup>

But we must also seek *conversion*. The Apostle James asks: “*those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from the cravings that are at war within you? ... Where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and*

---

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Donahue, “Biblical Perspectives,” p. 77.

<sup>35</sup> Donahue, “Biblical Perspectives,” p. 95.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Africae Munus*, §§ 102, 108

*wickedness of every kind*” (James 4:1ff., 3:16). As Jesus indicated, what really defiles a man comes from within, from the heart: “wounded human hearts [are] the ultimate hiding place for the causes of everything destabilizing the African continent”.<sup>37</sup> With its message of conversion of heart and the rich patrimony of Gospel values and *Social Doctrine of the Church*, the *way of the shepherd* is the way along which *mission* and *faith* must travel to spread *justice* and *peace*!

Just before I close, I wish to celebrate some of the ways in which the Shepherd’s call has been heard. It began in a formal way with the establishment of the Justice and Peace Commission in 1967, later becoming the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in 1976. I have already mentioned the founding of your organization and its European counterpart. All over the world, there are social justice committees, peace development teams and similar groups at the parish and diocesan levels. So too, religious communities have made peace and social justice part of their charism. Guiding their activities as well as learning from them, one finds national or regional episcopal bodies articulating their vision, as in United States Bishop’s pastorals on War and Peace (1983), Economic Justice (1986), and “Solidarity with Africa” (2001). There are courses on Catholic Social Teaching in schools throughout the world.

Truly the emphasis on mission has given extra vigor to our focus. For the concerns that I share with you have not been matters of personal albeit urgent concern and interest, nor of sporadic charitable do-good-ism. Rather, mission along with faith and worship define our essence as Christians, and this mission calls AFJN/AEFJN and all of us to justice.

Cardinal Peter K. A. Turkson  
President

---

<sup>37</sup> John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Poenitentia*, § 2.