

A SPECIAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS FOR AFRICA II:

LE PROFEZIE, RISORSE, RICADUTE .¹

Facoltà Teologica, Firenze, 1 March 2010.

INTRODUCTION:

Honourable and distinguished guests, dear friends, ladies and gentlemen: I bring you warm greetings from the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace at the Vatican, and on its behalf, I bring you all prayerful wishes for God's blessings on your observance of lent. To the clerics among you: *May God direct and guide your reflection on the gift and the mystery of your priesthood in this "year of priests"*.

The mission of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, as you know very well, consists in the promotion of justice and peace in the world according to the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Church. Recognizing that the *Roman Curia* and all who work in its offices have primarily the task of assisting the Holy Father in his ministry of pastoral care, teaching, guiding, bridge-building (cfr. *Vat II for better definition*), the staff of the Pontifical Justice of Peace also considers it a matter of utmost importance and topmost priority to seek what the Holy Father's vision of that dicastery presently is, and what suggestions and ideas he may have to guide our work, including even the implementation of the conclusions of the just-ended Synod II of Bishops for Africa.

The universal Church, indeed, is still awaiting the *Post-synodal Exhortation* of the Holy Father on the second Synod of Bishops for Africa, but it would be curious to hear how the Holy Father would respond to precisely what you are asking me to do this morning, namely, to discuss *le profezie, risorse e ricadute che vengono dall' Africa tramite il recente Sinodo*.

¹ After Vatican II, Pope Paul VI instituted the "Synod of Bishops" as a way of continuing the experience and work of the Council. Since 1967, there have been 22 such assemblies. The first Synod for Africa was in April 1944, just when Rwandan genocide broke out, and just when Mandela was being elected president of South Africa. In September 1995, Pope John Paul II published his post-synodal exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, the most important Church teaching on Africa.

FROM THE SYNOD OF BISHOP FOR AFRICA I TO SYNOD FOR AFRICA II:

With the promulgation of the Apostolic Exhortation, “*Ecclesia in Africa*”, the Supreme Pontiff, Pope John Paul II, did not only give to the Church in Africa and Madagascar the fruits of the first Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa, often referred to as “*synod of the resurrection and hope*”². Pope John Paul II also found a way of following the experiences, which his Apostolic Exhortation would make on the African continent, and how the Church in Africa and Madagascar would live it. So, on the tenth (10th) anniversary of the conclusion of the African Synod and at the 12th Meeting of the Post Synod Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops for the Special Assembly for Africa, the Pope observed: “*Has not the time come to deepen this African Synod experience, for which many pastors of Africa have been pressing? The exceptional growth of the Church in Africa, the rapid succession of pastors, the new challenges that the continent must face demands responses that can stem only from a persevering and concerted effort to implement ‘Ecclesia in Africa’, thereby restoring renewed strength and more firmly-grounded hope to the continent in difficulty*”.³

When finally in his apostolic discernment, the Holy Father recognized that the time was ripe to pass from implementing “*Ecclesia in Africa*” to convoking another synod, he did not hesitate to make his intention known. On 13th November, 2004, on the 1650th anniversary of the birth of St. Augustine of Hippo, and at an audience granted to a group of African (SECAM) and European (CCE) Bishops, who had gathered in a symposium to consider *Communion and Solidarity between Africa and Europe*, Pope John Paul II made public his intention to convoke a “***second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops***”.⁴

In the wake of his announcement of a Second African Synod, but within the context of the celebration of the year of the Eucharist, Pope John Paul II wrote to the Special Council for Africa

² Cfr. *Ecclesia in Africa*, #13.

³ Cfr. *Address to the 12th Meeting of the Post Synodal Council of the General Secretariat of Synod of Bishops for the Special Assembly for Africa* (15th June 2004). Later too, on 17th September 2005, the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, Most Rev. Nicola Eterović, would travel to the Cameroon to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Apostolic Exhortation, “*Ecclesia in Africa*”.

⁴ Pope John Paul II said: “Welcoming the aspirations of the Post- Synodal Council, an expression of the hopes of the African Pastors, I take the occasion to announce my intention to convoke a Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. I entrust this project to your prayers, warmly inviting you all to implore the Lord for the precious gift of communion and peace for the beloved land of Africa” (*Discourse to the Participants at the Symposium of Bishops of Africa and Europe* [13/11/2004] in *L’Osservatore Romano*: Weekly Eng. Edition, 24/11/2004, pg. 5).

of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops about the future African Synod, dropping a hint about its theme of *reconciliation* against a background of a survey of Africa's woes: "...Africa is always confronted by terrible scourges, such as armed conflicts, persistent poverty,..... All this weakens Africa and exhausts her energy, decimates her young generations and mortgages her future. To build a prosperous and a stable society, Africa needs all her children to join forces..... May the **future special assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops** also encourage the strengthening of faith in Christ, our Saviour, our **genuine reconciliation!** The year of the Eucharist which we are celebrating is a particularly appropriate moment to strengthen or re-establish communion in relations between people and between human and religious groups as well as between nations....⁵

Pope Benedict XVI graciously confirmed the project of his predecessor; and on 22th June 2005, (about the 10th anniversary of the promulgation of "*Ecclesia in Africa*") again before the Special Council for Africa of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, he announced his decision to convoke a "**second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops**". This Special Assembly was to take place under the theme: "**The Church in Africa at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace, 'You are the Salt of the Earth..... You are the Light of the World'**".⁶

THE CHANGED SITUATIONAL SETTING OF SYNOD FOR AFRICA II:

The first synod had been convoked against the background of a predominantly pessimistic world view of Africa, and against a background of a peculiarly challenging and a "deplorably unfavourable"⁷ situation of the continent for the evangelizing mission of the Church in those closing years of the twentieth century. But it had also been described as "synod of resurrection

⁵ Emphasis is mine. Cfr. *Letter of Pope John Paul II to Archbishop Nikola Eterovic on the occasion of the Meeting of the Special Council for Africa of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops*, Vatican, 25 Feb., 2005.

⁶ On 26 June 2006, at a Press Conference in the Vatican, addressed by Cardinal Francis Arinze, the Special Council for Africa of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops made public the *Lineamenta* of the 2nd Synod of Africa; and on 19 March 2009, at Yaoundé, the Holy Father presented the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the 2nd Synod of Africa.

⁷ Cfr. *Address of John Paul II to the Participants in the 12th Meeting of the Post-Synodal Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops for the Special Assembly for Africa*, 15th June, 2004.

and hope”; and it was expected to mark a turning point in the history of the continent.⁸ To this end, the gathering of the fruits of the first synod in the *Post Synod Exhortation: Ecclesia in Africa*, of Pope John Paul II did, principally, two things:

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 belongingness of every tribe and people (as in the Kingdom of God).
2. And it formulated a set of pastoral priorities: **evangelization as Proclamation**, **evangelization as Inculturation**, **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 hoped⁹ to deepen the experience of the synod, and to implement *Ecclesia in Africa* in a persevering and concerted effort to restore renewed strength and a more firmly-grounded hope to a continent badly bruised variously by ethnic and religious conflicts (sometimes politically exploited), bad governance, oppressive and unfair investor-packages, arms and drug trafficking, migration, environmental degradation, poverty, disease etc.

Indeed, the Post Synod Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, is still being implemented, and the fruits of the first synod are still being gleaned in many local churches in Africa. But at the time the Bishops of Africa gathered for a second time in synod with the Holy Father and other Bishops, the situation on the continent had changed considerably. Although “*the situation of the continent, its islands, and of the Church still bears some of the “lights and shadows”*”¹⁰ that occasioned the first synod, it has also “*changed considerably. This new reality requires a thorough study in view of renewed evangelization efforts, which call for a more in-depth analysis of specific topics, important for the present and future of the Catholic Church on the great continent.*”¹¹

⁸ *Instrumentum Laboris: Special Assembly for Africa*, 1993 #1. The same document believed: “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*, 1993 #24).

⁹ Cfr. *Address to 12th Meeting of the Post-Synodal Council of the General Secretariat.....*, 15th July, 2004.

¹⁰ Cfr. *Ecclesia in Africa* #13-14, 39-42, 51; *Lineamenta: II Special Assembly for Africa*, # 6-8.

¹¹ *Lineamenta: II Special Assembly for Africa*, “Preface”.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* identified several facets of this new African reality, and the *Relatio ante Disceptationem* of the synod for Africa II considered a good deal of them, after which it concluded: At the end of this survey, which is admittedly incomplete, it is clear that, although the continent and its Church are not yet out of the woods, they can still modestly rejoice in their achievement and positive performance, and begin to disclaim stereotypical generalizations about its conflicts, famine, corruption and bad governance. The forty-eight countries that make up Sub-Saharan Africa show great differences in the situations of their churches, their governance and their socio-economic life. Out of these forty eight nations, only four: Somalia, Sudan, Chad and parts of Democratic Republic of Congo are presently at war; and at least two are at war because of foreign interference: mineral prospectors in the Congo, and religious politics in the Sudan.

Increasingly, war mongers and war criminals are being denounced, held accountable for crimes and prosecuted. An official of the Democratic Republic of Congo has been prosecuted, Charles Taylor of Liberia is before the international court, and the President of the Sudan is being blamed and threatened with arrest for the war in the Darfur.

The truth is that Africa has been burdened for too long by the media with everything that is loathsome to humankind; and it is time to “shift gears” and to have the *truth about Africa told with love*, for as *La Stampa* admits: “*Non è piu il tempo di colpire lo stomaco dei lettori, cercando di emozionarli con immagini della morte e della fame. Non è servito a molto in questi anni. Dobbiamo parlare al cervello..... e spiegare che è una opportunità per tutti che l’Africa si sviluppi: sarebbe una soluzione per l’economia, la sicurezza e l’ambiente*”.¹² The G-8 countries and the countries of the world must *love Africa in truth!*¹³

Generally considered to occupy the tenth position in world economy, Africa is however the second emerging world market after China. Thus, it is as the just ended G8 summit labelled it, ***a continent of opportunities***. This needs to be true also for the people of the continent. It is hoped that the pursuit of *reconciliation, justice and peace*, made particularly Christian by their rootedness in love and mercy, would restore wholeness to the Church-family of God on the continent, and that the latter, as *salt of the earth and light of the world*, would heal “wounded

¹² *La Stampa* Sunday 5 July 2009, pg.3. In 2003, too, when President Clinton visited Ghana, *The Herald Tribune* wrote: “*We have been told that Clinton is coming to change the way Americans think about of Africa, from a continent of despair to a place of opportunity and hope*”.

¹³ Cfr. the latest Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, Vatican 2009.

human hearts, the ultimate hiding place for the causes of everything destabilizing the African continent”.¹⁴ Thus, will the continent and its islands realize their God-given opportunities and endowments.

This is the **mission** of the *church family of God* in Africa! Accordingly, when the *Special Synod of Bishops for Africa* gathered again fifteen years after its first instance, it was no longer to consider the Church in Africa in its **identity** and **self-understanding** as “*witness of Christ*” and “*family of God*”. It was to consider, this time, her **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).

THE SECOND SYNOD FOR AFRICA: THE CHURCH IN AFRICA AT THE SERVICE OF RECONCILIATION, JUSTICE AND PEACE. “YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH,...

AND YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD” (Mt.5:13-14).¹⁵

Appreciation for African Faith and Worship:

Every synod, as you know, is preceded by a long period of preparation, involving several experts, translators and staff who are never seen in the synod hall. These prepare the *Lineamenta*, and then the *Instrumentum Laboris*, with which synod Fathers arrive for the synod. In the case of the last synod for Africa, the visit of the Holy Father to Africa: to Cameroon and Angola, to deliver the *Instrumentum Laboris* to presidents of Episcopal Conferences, was also part of the preparation for the synod. That visit and the liturgical celebrations gave the Holy Father an experience of the faith and the life of the people, for whom he had convoked a synod. Africa’s growth in faith and her maturity in the worship the God of her faith were no longer in doubt.

In the liturgical celebrations, the Holy Father saw the liturgical renewal of Vatican Council II at work. As a celebration of *conciliar ecclesiology*, the liturgies in Africa already prepared for the

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Poenitentia*, # 2.

¹⁵ The II Synod texts may easily be found at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/index.htm in Italian and other languages.

communion of the synod. The Holy Father, indeed, attested to African worship (Eucharistic) as celebrations of *deep faith in the presence of the sacred* and of *shared joy, uniting people from within, leading them to a communal praise of God, a praise which at the same time inspires love of neighbour and mutual responsibility.*¹⁶ When the body came to the help of the soul in the celebration of the liturgy in song and dance, the Holy Father did not find the worship distracting. Rather, recalling the words of St. Cyprian: “*Our Father, let us remember we are in God’s sight. We must be pleasing in God’s eyes, both in the attitude of our bodies and in the use of our voices*”,¹⁷ the Holy Father attested: “*We had this awareness that we were standing before God.*”

A Celebration of Communion and Collegiality:

The Holy Father’s visit to Africa also gave rise to a celebration of an aspect of the Pope’s ministry which the synod was to uphold. The union of the Bishops with and around the Pope in collegiality, which the synod would celebrate, would be observed by the Pope during his African visit: “*What became clear above all during my visit to Africa was the theological and pastoral import of the papal primacy as a point of convergence for the unity of God’s family.*”¹⁸

The synod was an exercise of a truly universal, ecclesial and a collegial character. It is clear that most of the participants of the synod assembly were African or related to Africa; but this was not to detract from and to diminish the truly universally ecclesial character of the gathering. It was an exercise of *ecclesial communion*. The synod, like every Synod, celebrated the close bond/union between the Supreme Pontiff and the Bishops as they assist the Bishop of Rome with his universal mission. Thus, either present to pray with the Holy Father and the Synod Fathers and express their views or absent, but united in thought and prayer with the Synod assembly, it was the universal Church which was gathered in Synod about her presence in Africa (Church in Africa). This is an exercise of a universal *family of God* and a *mystical body..... belonging together and sharing a common life in Christ*. It was, therefore, not an exclusive African affair and assembly with non-African participants. It was rather the universal Church’s discernment

¹⁶Cfr. *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Members of the Roman Curia.....* , Clementine hall, Monday 21 Dec., 2009 pg. 2-3.

¹⁷ *Idem*, 3; *De Dom. Or.*, 4: CSEL III, 1, pg.269.

¹⁸ *Idem*, .3.

about how to keep *Africa's enormous spiritual lung* healthy for humanity, in fulfilment of her mission.

The inspiration was drawn from the synod, as an exercise of ecclesial communion, to encourage the development of structures of ecclesial communion with and among local churches, such as *SECAM, RECOWA, CELAM, CCEE, FABC, MAC etc.*

The Collegial Exercise of a Synod and Listening to Prophetic Voices:

At the inaugural Eucharistic celebration, Pope Benedict XVI reminded us that: a Synod is not primarily a study session. Rather, it is God's initiative, calling us to listen – listen to God, to one another and to the world around us, in an atmosphere of prayer and reflection. And the Holy Father went on to elaborate: “The confusion born from egoism and man's pride, the effect being the inability to understand each other, must be overcome by the force of the Spirit, which unites without standardizing, which gives unity in plurality.” And indeed, it proved to be an extraordinary gathering, characterized by a lot of patient listening to one another.

The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, attended 13 of the 20 General Assemblies (plenary sessions) and, except for prayer and a greeting, he just listened attentively and silently read the texts of interventions placed before him. Such *listening* was the most original and most basic disposition for prophetic insights and for listening to each other in “*charity and in truth*”.

The Synod Assembly was made up of 220 Synod Fathers, mostly from Africa, but also with representatives of the Churches in East Asia, Oceania, Europe, Latin America and the United States. It was a meeting of the universal Church: not an African synod, but a special assembly of Bishops of the universal Church for Africa.

The 220 Synod Fathers (Bishops) were joined by five Fraternal Delegates from other Christian Churches, 49 auditors (20 women), 29 experts (10 women), three guest speakers, countless media and a very efficient support staff.

The business of the synod was dealt with in general congregations or assemblies and in *circuli minores* (workshop groups). The latter met nine times to discuss and to digest material shared in

the plenary sessions and to finally propose the 57 propositions which were voted on and passed on to the Holy Father, the President of the synod assembly, as recommendations of the synod Fathers. These recommendations, with all the other interventions in the plenary assemblies (including workshop reports), are the material which will feed into the Holy Father's *Post Synod Exhortation*.

The Theme of the Synod for Africa II:

Just as the Holy Father reminded the synod that it was not primarily “*a study session*”, as observed above,¹⁹ so was the synod gathering of Bishops also regularly reminded that it was not “*a type of United Nations General Assembly*”, where some political line of action had to be discussed and adopted.

The theme of the second synod for Africa, “*in the service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*”, indeed, has to do with human life in society; but it is not a political theme. The theme is a theological and a pastoral one, which naturally fulfils the image of *Church-family of God* of the first synod for Africa.

As already known, the first synod of Bishops for Africa enriched our understanding of the Church by considering her a *family of God*. 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**.

The imagery, indeed, was a socio-cultural one which evoked the socio-cultural realities of parenthood, generation and filiation, kinship and fraternity, as well as networks of relationship which are generated by these social realities in which the members of a family stand. It also evoked such values as care for others, solidarity, dialogue, trust, acceptance and warmth which are manifested among members of a family.

But what the relationships do is to build a life of **communion**; and the expression, *Church-family of God*, is a statement of **identity** of an entity or a body that sees itself and its life as rooted in **communion** with God and among the members who make up the body.

¹⁹ Cfr. pg. 8.

In this light, the theme of the second synod for Africa follows upon that of the first synod as an expression of **mission** for a *Church-family of God* whose identity and nature is **communion**. Engaged in the *service of reconciliation, justice and peace*, the *Church-family of God* seeks to respond to the truth of her identity as **living in communion**. The *Church-family of God*, characterised by **communion**, is the historical form of the Kingdom of God on earth. Its identity as **communion** is also an identity that must be made manifest in history and on earth; and it is this mission of *serving reconciliation, justice and peace*, which makes the Church's identity real in history and on earth. The Church cannot have an identity which does not become historical and real in history. As **communion**, the *Church-family of God* must, as- it- were become incarnate in the spirituality and pastoral life and activities which make for **communion** among people. Thus, observing on the theme of the second synod, the Holy Father observes: "*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.*"²⁰

Many are the challenges and abuses to communion and social order which the disregard for the just demands of relationship causes on the continent. The challenges and abuses are political, economic, social, religious, ethnic and tribal, environmental etc. The restoration of communion and just order in such cases is what *reconciliation* stands for; and it takes the form of the re-establishment of *justice*, which only restores peace and harmony to the Church-family of God and the family of society.

The theme of the second synod invites the *Church-family of God* to live out its vocation and identity (called to live in communion) in the way of the "*shepherd*" (as subject of pastoral care and not as an exponent of mere theological theory nor as an agent of immediate political action).

- by *serving reconciliation*: working for the re-establishment of justice between man and God, among men and between man and all the institutions of life,
- by *serving justice*: promoting and being truthful and fair to the demands of relationships in which people stand and

²⁰ *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Members of the Roman Curia.....*, 21 Dec. 2009, pg.3-4

- by *serving peace*: promoting peace.

Beside this identification of the crucial logical (theological and pastoral) relationship between synod for Africa I and synod for Africa II, there were other interesting and noteworthy features of the synod for Africa II.

- The *Message* of the synod, with its passionate call on African Heads of State to embrace the path of good governance. “Many Catholics in high office have fallen woefully short in their performance in office. The Synod calls on such people to repent, or quit the public arena and stop causing havoc to the people and giving the Catholic Church a bad name.”
- Appeal to multinational and others to stop the criminal devastation of the environment in their inordinate exploitation of natural resources. The devastating exploitation of natural resources such that people’s livelihoods and nature itself are destroyed – actually assisting the process of desertification by destroying the sources of water, too. This come-and-take-and-go-away-and-leave-a-mess-behind happens over and over. The bishops strongly condemned the economic and political elite for their “tragic complicity and criminal conspiracy” with outside forces colluding to exploit the continent and its people: “obscene enrichment”.
- In the past ten years, whenever you heard about Africa, you often heard about HIV-AIDS. AIDS does not obviously, directly or explicitly connect with the theme of *Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*. Yet in the course of the Synod, we discovered how deeply connected they are. Africans cannot be completely in peace and reconciled with ourselves and others while this challenge is cruelly assaulting us in our families, our communities, our societies.

Without exaggerating it as the only or *the* most important issue, the Synod handled HIV-AIDS sensitively and maturely and with due proportion. The pandemic now takes its rightful place amidst the great challenges, the long-term and inter-related problems facing Africa and engaged by the Church as servant of reconciliation, justice and peace. “The

Church is second to none in the fight against HIV/AIDS and the care of people infected and affected by it in Africa. The Synod thanks all those who are generously involved in this difficult apostolate of love and care. We plead for sustained support to meet the needs of many for assistance.”

- The Synod Fathers recognized women as, paradoxically, both “the back bone of the local Church” and “deprived of their rights.” The bishops “vigorously condemn all inhumane, unjust and violent acts against women” and regret that “the development of girls and women is often disproportionate to that of boys and men.” Women’s contribution “not only in the home as wife and mother but also in the social sphere should be more generally acknowledged and promoted. We charge you, our Catholic women to be fully involved in the women’s programmes of your nations, with your eyes of faith wide open.” At the same time, “the Synod calls on you, our Catholic men, to play your important roles as responsible fathers and good and faithful husbands” as well as in society. And everyone, youth and adults alike, should enjoy integral human (intellectual, professional, moral, spiritual, theological) formation and, once exercising leadership in economic or political or social spheres, have qualified Catholic chaplains to accompany them.
- It is easy to say “Africa” and thoughtlessly treat it as just an undifferentiated mass of land and people, and the same “the Church in Africa”. But such expressions are even less accurate than saying “Europe and the European Church”. The Church is present in Africa in varying degrees – a foreigner church in North Africa, a minority church in southern Africa, and a strong presence in equatorial Africa, and under various degrees of pressure from Islam and from sects. Understanding Africa deeply is essential for taking up the last *sfida* – at once most difficult and most important – namely the *implementation* of the II Synod.

Card. Peter Turkson

(President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace)