

AFRICAE MUNUS AND WHAT IS AT STAKE FOR MISSION IN THE CHURCH-FAMILY OF GOD IN AFRICA

Richard Kuuia Baawobr (Missionary of Africa).

At the end of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops (4-25 October 2009), we all read the final message of the participants of the Synod with interest, as well as the 57 proposals submitted to the Holy Father in view of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. We waited two years for this Exhortation and when we had almost forgotten about it, suddenly the Exhortation's imminent signing was announced with the title (*Africae Munus* = Africa's commitment), with the date and place that this event was due to take place (19th November 2011) at Ouidah, Benin).

In a world in which Africa is only spoken of when things go awry, this Exhortation is like a breath of fresh air, an invitation to believe in Africa, to see it as a 'spiritual lung'! In the present article, I would like to bring out this freshness and some other issues, which I hope, will help us to make of this Exhortation our working document for the Church Family in Africa in the course of the next few years.

In doing so, I would like to:

- Present some elements **for a proper understanding of the text**¹.
- Mention some issues and challenges for the **mission of** the Church Family in Africa
- Examine '**silences**' in the *Exhortation*;
- Then, to draw a conclusion **for us**, as consecrated persons, originating or not from this continent, who give themselves body and soul for the African Church to be truly at the service of reconciliation, justice and peace and for it to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

1. Some elements for a proper understanding of the text

1.1 The symbolism

It is not insignificant that Pope Benedict XVI would have chosen Benin for his second journey to Africa.² For many years, the Pope knew and (from reliable sources) held Cardinal

¹ I am taking my inspiration from the article by Mathieu Ndomba, SJ & Paul Beré, SJ, '*Africae munus commenté*', Abidjan, 2011. For other presentations of the Exhortation, see Pierre-Yves Pecqueux & Pierre Diarra, 'Présentation de l'Exhortation de Benoît XVI, donnée à Ouidah, au Bénin, le 19 novembre 2011'; Emmanuel Ngona, MAfr. 'Some suggestions for reading '*Africae munus*, the post-Synodal apostolic exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI', in *Petit Echo*, (2012/03), pp. 153-155. For a presentation from another perspective, see Bernard Ugeux, MAfr. '*Africae munus: réconciliation, justice et paix en Afrique. Une application: Pour que nos communautés deviennent des espaces sûrs pour tous, particulièrement les exclus et les plus fragiles*', Bukavu, 15 February 2012.

Bernardin Gantin in high esteem, particularly when Cardinal Gantin worked at the Roman Curia. His trip to Benin, to the tomb of Cardinal Gantin (at Ouidah), enabled the Pope to pay homage to this son of the African Church who had served the Universal Church. The impression made on Benedict XVI by Cardinal Gantin cannot be measured, but I venture to suggest that the positive image of Africa which the Pope bears comes for a great part from his knowledge and esteem for this illustrious son of the African continent with whom he was in close contact for a long time at Rome.

Secondly, I would say that the choice of Ouidah was also symbolic on the level of interreligious dialogue. By its proximity to the centre of Vaudou, even without physical contact, it sent a message about dialogue with African traditional religion, a very present reality in Africa and which the church cannot ignore. I will speak about it a little longer further on in my conference.

There is also the sad recollection of the 'Gate of no return' through which passed African slaves brought to the Americas. **By his message, the Pope intended to reconcile Africa with its agonizing past.**

1.2 The internal dynamism of the *Exhortation*

Experts of the 2nd African Synod have pointed out that the *Exhortation* follows a schema in three parts, which is not 'see-judge-act' but 'vision – mission – pastoral action'.³ It will be important to bear this in mind for a proper reading of the text as these three parts are linked. There are:

- The '**Vision**': The Introduction (*AM*, nn. 1-13), contrary to the 'see' element in social analyses, presents us with a positive image of Africa (*AM*, n. 13). This is certainly contrary to what we would have expected and to the Afro-pessimism which our media make us used to experiencing. As early on as this, we notice a difference in comparison to the image of Africa of the 1st Synod. It is no longer a wounded Africa, lying by the roadside waiting for the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), but an Africa that is healed from its paralysis and that is invited to rise and take up its bed and walk (Jn 5:8).
- The '**Mission**': the 1st part (*AM*, nn. 14-99) is the task that Christ initiated to give us life in all its fullness (Jn 10:10). This mission flows from the vision and is a participation in the actual mission of Jesus. An important place is naturally given to the ministry of reconciliation by Christ and the way he makes us partakers in this ministry.
- The '**Pastoral Action**': the 2nd part (*AM*, nn. 99-158). This pastoral action varies according to the gifts the Spirit of Jesus has given to each member of the Church Family of God in Africa, but it aims to contribute to the realisation of the vision stated from the opening of the *Exhortation*.

² The first journey to Africa was to Cameroon and Angola in 2009 to deliver the *Instrumentum laboris* to the Bishops. Let us recall that *Ecclesia in Africa* was signed on the 14 September 1995 at Yaoundé in Cameroon.

³ Mathieu NDOMBA, SJ, Paul BÉRÉ, SJ, '*Africae munus commenté*', pp. 3-4.

1.3 The ecclesial context of *Africae munus*

While it is quite normal to find in *Africae munus* references to the first *Exhortation* which followed the First African Synod (*Ecclesia in Africa* [1994]), it is nonetheless somewhat surprising to find references to other synodal documents such as *Verbum Domini* (after the Synod on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church [2008]). Above all, references came from the next synod on the *New Evangelisation* (October 2012; cf. *AM*, n. 159-171) 'new in its ardour, methods and expression', to promote encounter with the person of Jesus (*AM*, n. 165).

In my view, this way of proceeding teaches us two things. Firstly, it reminds us that there is a link between the two African Synods and demonstrates how the results of the second do not revoke those of the first. On the contrary, account should be taken of them for the implementation of evangelisation in Africa. It is a little like the Gospel in relation to the Law. Now, in the light of the second Synod, we need to continue to plumb the very depth of the message of the first Synod and observe how it links up to the second.

Secondly, these references to other texts underline that the Church Family of God in Africa does not live separated from the rest of the Universal Church. There is reciprocity. What is being lived in Africa (or elsewhere) concerns the entire Family of God. Therefore, already in *Verbum Domini*, n. 99-103, the Pope echoes the African Synod on reconciliation, justice and peace for the whole Church and, in *Africae munus*, nn. 15-16, he refers to the Synod on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church. By this fact alone, he demonstrates the importance of being rooted in the Word of God in order to live reconciliation, justice and peace. The insertion of a whole section on the New Evangelisation invites us to take part in this mission of the whole Church based on the *Missio ad gentes*.

From this comes my conviction that the way we put into practice the orientations of the Post Synodal *Exhortation* will have consequences for the whole Church as well as for all humanity. Let us now listen to what Pope Benedict XVI tells us about what is at stake and the challenges for mission in Africa today.

2. Mission: what is at stake and some challenges

2.1 Another ... more beautiful ... Africa!

Africae munus casts an **exemplary look at Africa**. It is a positive view that acknowledges the maturity of the continent (*AM*, n. 4). It considers it a land of promise (*AM*, n. 5) in spite of the scars of its past (*AM*, n. 9). Africa is also a continent of hope because of its intellectual, cultural and religious heritage (*AM*, nn. 9.11.13). This is to be preserved, explored and made known. It is a continent with an immense richness (*AM*, nn. 24.79) which Africa is capable of providing for the well-being of all.

Africa lives and is led to explore (*AM*, n. 1), looking towards the future (*AM*, n. 11), and is in the process of taking up its challenges and moving forward (*AM*, n. 15). Respect for the aged and

the place they are given are qualities to be imitated elsewhere (AM, n. 47-50). Young people are part of its richness (AM, n. 60).

In virtue of all this, Africa has in itself 'pathways of hope'; through religious, social political and economic dialogue, a deep spiritual renewal is possible (AM, n. 11). From the outset, Africa is presented as a 'spiritual lung' (AM, n. 13) and this image is repeated at the end of the document (AM, n. 177). Some people regret that this positive image is at the price of a negative image for the rest of the west (at least), which is presented as '*a humanity that appears to be in a crisis of faith and hope*' (AM, n. 13), which could poison Africa and from which Africa will have to defend itself to avoid contamination.⁴

The world will not be able to reconcile itself to a more positive image of Africa if we, sometimes in our campaigns to raise funds for our projects present a negative image of Africa. This positive image of Africa cannot leave us indifferent. The invitation to reconciliation become all the more urgent if we do not wish to lose or be mistaken about the intellectual, cultural and religious heritage of Africa.

2.2 A ... prophetic ... Church-Family of God!

The mission of the Church-Family in Africa for reconciliation through justice and peace is a **prophetic** mission. The Church

- **announces** God's plan for African society (God's vision for Africa);
- **denounces** the counterfeits (AM, n. 21) (the counter-values, the evils) ;
- **commits itself in the name of God** on the side of people: the workshops, (through the Church itself as Sacrament, education, health and modern means of communication), (1 Cor 14:3).

This appeal to the Church Family of God in Africa to assume its prophetic vocation fully is present from the beginnings of the Church in Africa and has been reiterated several times over these last few years⁵. However, it has to be aware that its public role is not political, without however escaping into the spiritual and withdrawing into itself (AM, n. 23). The Church is to form consciences (AM, n. 22) according to its social doctrine (AM, n. 22) and in the areas of justice, peace and the integrity of creation (AM, n. 23). This is in order to become aware that the love of justice and love go together, (AM, n. 25).

Before preaching to others, the leaders of the community of Jesus' disciples are invited to put their own house in order:

⁴ Maurice Cheza, « *Africae munus* » in *Afrique et Parole* 94 (March 2012), p. 3

⁵ Cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 70; *Populorum Progressio*, n. 281; *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 572.

- **Bishops** towards their priests, and an exemplary and transparent management of dioceses (*AM*, n. 101-104) ;
- **Priests** by their example and unity, even when there are different tribes, by ongoing formation, by a serious spiritual life, by a radical choice to follow Jesus, chase, poor and obedient (*AM*, n. 108), and so on;
- The prophetic witness shown by **consecrated persons** by their example of reconciliation, justice and peace, in particular in their community life.

As we are often reminded, actions speak louder than words. The sub-topic of the Synod which served as the golden thread for the Exhortation is precisely Jesus' invitation to his disciples to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5:13-14). We are invited to be examples by living our lives according to Gospel values even when, as the Beatitudes tell us, they are in conflict with more popular values (*AM*, nn. 26-27). What we live gives credibility to our prophetic voice towards socio-political structures and enables us to challenge as well as propose changes in society.

2.3. Reliable formation for all!

2.3.1 Initial Formation

Africae munus invites the Church Family of God in Africa to take **Initial and Ongoing Formation** seriously. For **seminarians**, for example, the document calls for holistic formation: theological, spiritual, psychological, human, pastoral, and social, rooted in Gospel values (*AM*, nn. 121-123). The personal relationship with Christ is to be found at the core of this formation. He is the one who reconciles us with the Father through his death and resurrection; he reconciles us with ourselves and other, making us ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-20).⁶ Peter Henriot, sj, suggests that the image of the 'spiritual lung' invites precisely the person and in this case, seminarians also to mobilise their spiritual energies (*AM*, n. 98) to be truly the salt of the earth and the light of the world (*AM*, n. 97)⁷. I suppose that these guidelines are also valid, to a very great extent, for the Initial Formation of Sisters.

2.3.2 Ongoing Formation

Among the elements making up Ongoing Formation, I would like to draw attention to two of them: **Holy Scripture** (the Word of God) (*AM*, n. 16), and the **Social Doctrine of the Church** (*AM*, n. 32). The first element of Ongoing Formation – the Word of God - addresses:

- Knowing it in an objective way as an object of study (*AM*, nn. 61.109) ;
- Praying it (*Lectio divina*) (*AM*, nn. 16.127.150-151);

⁶ R. Baawobr, "Paul's Call for Reconciliation and its Relevance for the Church with Particular Reference to Africa", in *Missionalia*, vol. 59 (2010), pp. 179-212.

⁷ Cf. Peter Henriot, sj. "*Africae munus* and priestly formation: some practical questions", (Lilongwe, 2012).

- Above all, to experience it as the Word of Life that reconciles us with God and our neighbour, guiding us in ‘a *necessary path for building a community of individuals and peoples*’ (AM, nn. 16).

We note that when the Pope speaks of the members of the Church (AM, nn. 99-131), despite the pyramidal structure that is used and of which I shall dwell, no group is exempt from exposure to the Word of God as Word of Life.

- Families (AM, n. 45) ;
- The elderly (AM, n. 47) ;
- The youth (AM, nn. 61.63) ;
- Adult literacy to provide access to the Scriptures (AM, n. 76) ;
- a source for Reconciliation, Justice and Peace (AM, nn. 95.150) ;
- Bishops – a deeper understanding of Jesus Christ (AM, n. 103) ;
- Priests (AM, n. 109) ;
- Seminarians (AM, n. 121) ;
- Catechists (AM, n. 127) ;
- For the New Evangelisation (AM, n. 161) ;

The second element in Ongoing Formation, highlighted in a striking way, is **the Social Doctrine of the Church:**

- For women (AM, n. 59),
- For youth (AM, n. 63),
- For priests (AM, n. 109) ;
- For laypeople in economic, social and political responsibilities (AM, n. 128) ;
- For education (AM, n. 134.137).
- It is an indispensable too for educating consciences and for socio-political involvement (AM, n. 22) in view of working for the common good (AM, n. 103);
- At the service of the truth which frees (AM, n. 24) ;
- And an imperative source for living Reconciliation, Justice and Peace (AM, n. 95).

This insistence on the Word of God and the Social Doctrine of the Church justifies the (diocesan and national) Commissions for Justice and Paix (and the integrity of Creation) to better respond to something, which since the 1970s⁸, is recognised as a constitutive element of Evangelisation – Justice and Peace. From now on, this is accepted by almost all Missionary Societies and Congregations⁹ ! Ongoing formation is to be offered to all.

⁸ The *Justitia in mundo* Synod (30th November 1970), and especially the one of 1974, and the Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*. (1975).

⁹ Stephen B. Bevans & Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context. A Theology of Mission for today*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2004, pp. 369-378; Missionaries of Africa, *Capitular Acts, XXVII General Chapter. Rome 10 May – 12 June 2010*, pp. 29

In this sense, we can say that the Pope strongly supports us in our various charisms, so that we may continue to try to educate every person (*AM*, nn. 22-74) in order that the Church remains an architect of peace, an agent of reconciliation and a herald of justice (*AM*, n. 23). What are we waiting for? What are our dioceses waiting for?

2.3.3 Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue ... is vital

At a time when we can be tempted to undervalue or neglect ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, the Pope reminds us that it is vital. Division between Christians is a scandal that weakens the witness of communion for which Jesus prayed (Jn 17:21) (*AM*, n. 91-94). Commitment to reconciliation, justice and peace concerns all believing communities, whether they are long-established Christians or new Churches, Muslims or followers of traditional religion. From this comes the urgent appeal to persevere in dialogue with Muslims (*AM*, n. 94). Later on, I shall make some remarks on African traditional religion. Whatever we do, let us acknowledge the importance of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue if we take part in the actual mission of God and not in a mission that we have created for ourselves.

3. We would have like to but!

It is inevitable that the final document, *Africae munus*, could not reflect all the richness of the Proposals and *final message* of the Second African Synod. Pope Benedict XVI himself recognised that:

‘I was impressed by the quality of the speeches given by the Synod Fathers and the others who spoke at the sessions. Their realistic and far-sighted contributions demonstrated the Christian maturity of the continent. They were not afraid to face the truth and they sought to reflect sincerely on possible solutions to the problems facing their particular Churches and the Universal Church.’ (*AM*, n. 4).

As he says at the end of the Introduction to the *Exhortation*:

‘With this document I wish to make available the encouraging fruits proposed by the Synod, and I invite all people of good will to look to Africa with faith and love, to help it become – through Christ and through the Holy Spirit – the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. *Mt* 5:13-14)’ (*AM*, n. 13).

Nevertheless, the reading of the *Exhortation* raised a few questions:¹⁰ why were some fruits and encouragements, reckoned opportune by the Assembly, not emphasised by the Pope in his

¹⁰ Cf. Here I take inspiration here and elsewhere from the article by Franco Moretti, ‘Secondo Sinodo africano / due documenti a confronto’, in *Nigrizia* (February 2012), pp. 58-64. For other critiques, see Peter Henriot, SJ., ‘Steps forward and backward’, *The Tablet* 3 (December 2011), p.11-12; Paulin Poucota, ‘*Africae munus*: deux idées force!’.

message to the Church-Family of God in Africa? Did this demonstrate some disagreement? Alternatively, did the Pope in this way wish to invite each local Church to make its effort for the contextualising of the *Exhortation* (AM, n. 14)? It's up to you!

3.1 The Image of the Church

In the second chapter of the first part of the *Exhortation*, the Pope sets out the pathways for reconciliation, justice and peace (AM, nn. 31-96). After emphasising attentiveness to the human person and the importance of *metanoia* - a genuine conversion - (AM, nn. 32-41), he indicates the places at the heart of society where reconciliation, justice and peace will be exercised, in this order:

- The Family (AM, nn. 42-46) ;
- The Elderly (AM, nn. 47-50) ;
- Men (AM, nn. 51-54) ;
- Women (AM, nn. 55-59) ;
- Youth (AM, nn. 60-64) ;
- Children (AM, nn. 65-68) ;

It is not the same order which was followed in the first chapter of the second part. Let us take a brief look at it.

Even if *Africae munus* uses the term Church-Family of God from the First African Synod (1994)¹¹, and also takes to itself the Pauline image of the Body of Christ, (1 Cor 12), nevertheless when addressing the members of this family, we rediscover a hierarchy close to another image of the church, a **Hierarchical and Pyramidal Church**. It begins with the Bishops (AM, n. 99-107) and finishes with laypeople (AM, n. 131). A comparison¹² between the presentations of the same members of the Church-Family in the *Exhortation* of John Paul II after the 1st African Synod, and those of the *Proposals* of the Fathers of the 2nd Synod and *Africae munus* clearly demonstrates the ecclesiologies of each document (from below or from above, depending on the case)!

	1st Synod (1994) <i>Ecclesia in Africa</i>	2nd Synod (2009) <i>Proposals of the Frs & Mthrs</i>	2nd Synod (2011) <i>Africae munus</i>
1	Small Christian Communities (n. 89)	Small Christian Communities (n. 35)	Bishops (nn. 99-107)
2	Laitiy (n. 90)	Laitiy (n. 37)	Priests (nn. 108-112)

in *Afrique et Parole*, n. 94 (March 2012), pp. 1-13; and Maurice Cheza, 'Africae munus' in *Afrique et Parole* 94 (March 2012), pp. 3-4.

¹¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Ecclesia in Africa*, Vatican, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995, n° 6.

¹² Cf. Franco Moretti, 'Secondo Sinodo africano / due documenti a confronto', p. 62.

	Catechists (n. 91)	Families (n. 38)	Missionaries (nn. 113-114)
3	Families (n. 92)	Priests (n. 39)	Permanent deacons (nn. 115-116)
4	Youth (n. 93)	Seminarians (n. 40)	Consecrated Persons (nn. 117-120)
5	Consecrated Persons (n. 94)	Permanent deacons (n. 41)	Seminarians (nn. 121-124)
6	Seminarians s (n. 95)	Religious (n. 42)	Catechists (nn. 125-127)
7	Deacons (n. 96)	Catechists (nn. 43-44)	Laity (nn. 128-131)
8	Priests (n. 97)		
9	Bishops (n. 98)		

Ecclesia in Africa is placed in continuity with the Second Vatican Council with its image of the **Church People of God** (used 18 times in John Paul II's *Exhortation*) and is addressed to the entire People of God (*EIA*, n. 14) as agents of Evangelisation (*EIA*, n. 88). It seems to me that the Synod Fathers and other men and women participants repeated this image of of a Church communion in Africa and its neighbouring islands. Moreover, they accorded a significant role to the laity (*Prop. 37-38*) as agents of reconciliation.

At the opening of the *Exhortation* of Benedict XVI, by contrast, we read:

Africa's commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ is a precious treasure which I entrust at the beginning of this third millennium to the bishops, priests, permanent deacons, consecrated persons, catechists and lay faithful of that beloved continent and its neighbouring islands (*AM*, n. 1).

It is true that in some parts of Africa, even if there are only two people, **they absolutely must have a chief**. There is a story that in some part of West Africa, someone fell into a deep hole. While he was lamenting his fate, another person fell into the same hole. When the second began to lament, the first one told him, 'Be quiet; I am the chief here because I arrived before you!'

It is also true that since the challenges to take up are considerable, a cool head is required. A Chinese proverb says that 'a fish rots by the head'. I do not deny that we have to start somewhere and someone has to be in charge, not everyone. When everyone is in charge, ultimately no one is. When the boat sinks, the captain is blamed, not his crew, even if he says he was advised to act as he did by the (even very competent) crew! Pope Benedict XVI sought, through this ecclesiology, to indicate that the Bishops are in the first place responsible!

As he stated:

To you in the first place belongs the task of seeking unity, justice and peace since you have the responsibility for the local Churches (AM, n. 104).

However, before this, he also underlines:

One can never be a Christian alone. The gifts given by the Lord to each – bishops, priests, deacons and religious, catechists and lay people – must all contribute to harmony, communion and peace in the Church herself and in society. (AM, n. 97).

We know how much a given image of a consecrated person in Africa is a cause of problems for a number of Christian communities. However, when the hierarchical order is reiterated in mentioning the members of the Body of Christ, (AM, n. 99-131), i.e., this hierarchised image of the Church-Family of God, in the Third Millennium, at the service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace, we can then begin to worry! What is at stake is too important for us to spend too long on the place we occupy in the pyramid. It is up to us to discover how we can avoid falling into the trap of a power which is not authority at the service of the People of God. The small ecclesial communities sometimes give a good example of it; (but also less good). Being a leader/in charge in the Church is to serve as Christ did (Mark 9: 33-35)¹³ !

3.2 Which voice are we hearing?

Benedict praises the boldness of the Synod Fathers, but he did not take up all their propositions and when he does so, he does not go to the full extent of what they proposed. There were significant modifications, quotations, referrals and omissions. Let us examine some cases, without the pretension of knowing the why and wherefore!

3.2.1 The editing work

The table below gives us some examples of the editing work through which some *Proposals* passed before appearing in *Africae munus*.

<i>Proposals</i>	<i>Africae munus</i>	<i>Remarques</i>
By her very nature, the Church is a communion which brings about an organic, pastoral solidarity. Bishops, in communion with the Bishop of Rome, are the foremost promoters of communion and collaboration in the Church's apostolate, in which priests, deacons, consecrated	105 : <i>The Synod recalled that "the Church is a communion that gives rise to an organic pastoral solidarity. The bishops, in communion with the Bishop of Rome, are the first promoters of communion and cooperation in the Church's apostolate.</i>	Omission: ' priests, deacons, consecrated persons and the lay faithful participate. '

¹³ For titles on Leadership see, Cf. Donal Dorr, *Spirituality of Leadership. Inspiration, Empowerment, Intuition and Discernment*, Dublin, The Columba Press, 2006; Anselm Grün, *Diriger les hommes. Les éveiller à la vie*; Jim Boyd, *A Servant Leader's Journey. Lessons from Life*, New York, Paulist Press, 2008.

<p>persons and the lay faithful participate.</p>		
<p><i>Prop. 7: A great number of Christians in Africa adopt an ambiguous attitude towards the administration of reconciliation. While they are very scrupulous in carrying out the traditional rites of reconciliation, they give little value to the Sacrament of Penance. Therefore, a serious and in-depth study should be done on the traditional African ceremonies of reconciliation, such as "palaver" (where a team of sages do public arbitration of cases), and arbitration of conflicts by a "team of mediators".</i></p> <p><i>Similar bodies can be set up on Justice and Peace Commissions to assist Catholic faithful to seek conversion in a serious way through the celebration of the sacrament of Penance.</i></p>	<p><i>33 : The Synod members also emphasized the fact that a great many Christians in Africa take an ambivalent stance towards the sacrament of Reconciliation, whereas these same Christians are often very scrupulous in the use of traditional rites of reconciliation. In order to assist the Catholic faithful to walk an authentic path of metanoia in celebrating this sacrament, through which the whole person is refocused upon the goal of encounter with Christ, it would be helpful if the bishops were to commission a serious study of traditional African reconciliation ceremonies in order to evaluate their positive aspects and their limitations. These traditional pedagogical forms of mediation cannot in any way take the place of the sacrament.</i></p>	<p>OK, but one would say it is an appeal to be prudent ... is this a misunderstanding?</p>
<p><i>Prop. 13 : African Traditional Religion (ATR)</i></p> <p><i>Nostra aetate, n. 2: accept whatever is good!</i></p> <p><i>Knowledgeable people who are converts from African Traditional Religion can guide the Church to an ever greater and more precise knowledge of African cultures and religions, making the discernment of true points of opposition easier. Promote ATR studies in universities (even Roman) (not sustained in AM). A diocesan multi-disciplinary pastoral team is to devise a pastoral programme, that is grounded in rationality, deliverance and reconciliation.</i></p>	<p>92-93 : Traditional African Religions</p> <p><i>Nostra aetate, n. 2: accept whatever is good!</i></p> <p>It is worth singling out knowledgeable individual converts, who could provide the Church with guidance in gaining a deeper and more accurate knowledge of the traditions, the culture and the traditional religions. This would make it easier to identify points of real divergence.</p> <p>Withcraft; fear ; dual affiliation;</p>	<p>OK for a positive discernment of the positive and negative (36-37), but the emphasis seems to be laid more on the negative, fear and an appeal to prudence (113) than on an invitation to a genuine respectful dialogue as with Muslims (94). How can one be truly African and truly Christian?</p>
<p><i>Prop. 47-48 The role of women is essential:</i></p> <p><i>Acknowledgement of their great contribution to the family, society and the Church with their many talents and resources. Condemnation of their deprivation of rights and violence against them.</i></p> <p><i>All other inhumane and unjust acts against women are equally condemned.</i></p> <p><i>The Synod Fathers propose:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>- the integral human formation of girls and women (intellectual, professional, moral, spiritual, theological, etc.);</i> <i>- the creation of "shelters" for abused girls and women to find refuge and receive</i> 	<p>55 : acknowledgment of their contribution</p> <p>56 : combat violence; condemn and denounce it;</p> <p><i>In this context, it would be appropriate for conduct even within the Church should be a mode for society as a whole</i></p> <p>57: Quotation from <i>EIA</i>, n. 121 on their participation instead of <i>Proposals</i>!</p>	<p>Collaboration to put an end to women trafficking?</p> <p>Integration into decision-making structures?</p> <p>Commissions: (National and within the Pontifical Council for the Family)?</p>

<p><i>counselling;</i> - the close collaboration among episcopal conferences to stop the trafficking of women; - the greater integration of women into Church structures and decision-making processes; - the setting up of commissions on the Diocesan and national levels to address women's issues, to help them better carry out their mission in the Church and society; and - the setting up of a study commission on women in the Church within the Pontifical Council for the Family.</p>		
<p>Prop. 34-44 : The Church-Family of God; People of God (cf. 3.1 above)</p>	<p>99-131 : Hierarchical Church / pyramidal (cf. 3.1 above)</p>	<p>Danger! Fear?</p>
<p>Prop. 24 : The Synod Fathers therefore call on leaders conscientiously to exercise stewardship and to uphold the common good over the interests of family, clan, ethnic group or political party and to protect and promote the social, economic, political and religious rights of every citizen, as enshrined in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the African Charter of Human and People's Rights.</p>	<p>79 : all the members of the Church to work and speak out in favour of an economy that cares for the poor</p> <p>82 : Today, many decision makers, both political and economic, assume that they owe nothing to anyone other than themselves.... (+ Quotation from Caritas in veritate, n. 43).</p>	<p>Prop. 17.29 (cf. Note: footnote 120)! The texts were vigorous. See also Prop. 24.</p>

3.2.2 Quotations and cross-references

The most quoted documents in the 226 footnotes are not those of the Church-Family of God in Africa, but Pontifical and Roman documents¹⁴.

- 59 from Benedict XVI ;
- 28 from John-Paul II
- 5 from Paul VI
- 25 from encyclicals
- 8 from Roman Congregations (of which 5 from the Doctrine of the Faith)
- 4 from Vatican II (in cross-reference).

It is a decidedly Roman and universal/Catholic document addressed to:

¹⁴ Cf. Franco Moretti, "Secondo Sinodo africano", pp. 61-62.

...all people of good will to look to Africa with faith and love, to help it become – through Christ and through the Holy Spirit – the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. *Mt* 5:13-14). (cf. *AM*, n. 13),

and not only to Africa. One understands why, Benedict states:

I see no need to dwell at length on the various socio-political, ethnic, economic or ecological situations that Africans face daily and that cannot be ignored. Africans know better than anyone else how difficult, disturbing and even tragic these situations can very often be. (*AM*, n. 4).

It would be difficult, even impossible, to give satisfaction to all if, as some critics would have it, we set out to quote writings from African Bishops¹⁵ !

3.2.3 Omissions

Of the 57 *Propositions* made by the Synod Fathers and the participants, 53 were repeated in one way or another, but the 4 that were omitted raise questions for us. These are:

- *Proposition 16*: The brain drain!
- *Proposition 21*: peace (cf. The entire text)
- *Proposition 23*: the Arms Trade
- *Proposition 27*: Religious freedom (cf. *AM*, n. 94)

Even if there are no explicit references to these *Propositions*, the ideas are presented elsewhere in the text. Nevertheless, *Propositions* 16 and 23 are sensitive points that are worthy of attention. The brain drain impoverishes Africa and enriches other countries, thus contributing to the permanent marginalisation of some communities in Africa. This also goes for cooperation between Churches for pastoral workers. These can also suffer from the brain drain. Accordingly, the Pope encourages Bishops:

*Without weakening the missionary impulse ad gentes in the different countries, and indeed on the whole continent, the bishops of Africa should respond generously to the requests of their confreres in countries lacking vocations and assist the faithful deprived of priests. This form of cooperation, which should be governed by accords between the sending and the receiving Churches, becomes a concrete sign of the fruitfulness of the missio ad gentes. Blessed by the Lord, the Good Shepherd (cf. *Jn* 10:11-18), it provides valuable support for the new evangelization in countries of ancient Christian tradition, (*AM*, n. 167).*

In view of the lack of personnel in some Christian communities, we should make a discernment on the way of promoting and sustaining this cooperation so that it is not detrimental to these last-mentioned¹⁶. The body of Christian Churches acknowledges that Mission is no longer one-way (from North to South or from North to West) but that it is in all directions and that all are invited

¹⁵ Pace, Franco Moretti, "Secondo Sinodo africano", p. 62.

¹⁶ Cf. also the critique of Peter Henriot, SJ., 'Steps forward and backward', *The Tablet* 3 December 2011, p. 12.

to enter into this new dynamic and take part in God's Mission. Religious and Missionary Institutes and some dioceses are already doing so¹⁷. Nevertheless, in some cases, without a good preparation, and sometimes without a purification of motivations, the people who are sent there take root in the Church of the New Evangelisation and for various reasons no longer wish to return to Africa to serve in more modest conditions! It is not without importance to note that after studies or a period of service in Europe or the United States, they find it hard to return home.

3.2.4 Neglected Points?

When the document refers to missionaries, it could be said that those of the past (*AM*, n. 113; cf. already *EIA*, n. 33-34) interest the African Church more than those of today. The contribution of African missionaries, serving in other African dioceses in a permanent way or as *Fidei donum*, or else are members of Institutes or Congrégations '*Missio ad Gentes*' is not sufficiently taken into account.

3.2.5 A pointless addition?

One is amazed, at the end of the *Exhortation*, to see the space given by Pope Benedict to the *New Evangelisation* (*AM*, n. 159-171) in a document for the Church-Family of God in Africa whose main concern for all is primary evangelisation, dialogue, reconciliation, justice and peace. This addition opens the document to the other part of the Church and reminds us that the heart of all evangelisation is the encounter with the person of Jesus.

Being Christian is born not of an ethical decision or a lofty ideal, but an encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. (AM, n. 165).

Today we try to foster this encounter by using the means at our disposal. Almost all our institutes and Bishops' Conferences are on Internet sites, Facebook, twitter and so on. We use the Internet, Skype, Messenger, Youtube, etc, to communicate and I hope, to evangelise. These means of communication are indispensable. It is up to us to learn how to use them to good effect.

As the New Evangelisation passes through the evangelisation of the evangeliser, as we live reconciliation, justice and peace personally and in our communities, we are taking part, even without using the word, in the new evangelisation.

4. Towards a conclusion

Some publishers will print other texts of the Synod (Karthala in Paris, Paulines Africa in Nairobi, Kinshasa and elsewhere). Let us take advantage of them to complete what may be lacking. Over and above the appreciations of the *Exhortation*, the unease and criticism that one could have towards this document, I take seriously the Pope's statement when speaking about Africans:

¹⁷ Cf. Stephen B. Bevans & Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, p. 351.

I can assure them that the Church loves and respects Africa. In the face of the many challenges that Africa seeks to address in order to become more and more a land of promise, the Church, like Israel, could easily fall prey to discouragement; yet our forebears in the faith have shown us the correct attitude to adopt.... (AM, nn. 4-5).

May these words remind you of the dignity of your calling as children of God and members of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church! This calling consists in radiating in a world often grown dark the clarity of the Gospel and the splendour of Jesus Christ, the true light which “enlightens everyone” (Jn 1:9). Christians must give all men and women a desire for God the Father, the joy of his creative presence in the world. They are also called to cooperate with the grace of the Holy Spirit, so that the miracle of Pentecost may spread throughout the continent of Africa, and everyone may become ever more an apostle of reconciliation, justice and peace. (AM, n. 176).

The document cannot say everything on all situations. Accordingly, we should take seriously the words of the Holy Father at the beginning of the first part when he says,

The Synod made it possible to discern the principal parameters of mission for an Africa that seeks reconciliation, justice and peace. It falls to the particular Churches to translate these parameters into “resolutions and guidelines for action”. For it is “in the local Churches that the specific features of a detailed pastoral plan can be identified – goals and methods, formation and enrichment of the people involved, the search for the necessary resources – which will enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mould communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in [African] society and culture. (AM, n. 14).

To conclude, I take for my own the words of some Biblicists and theologians who took part in the Synod. For Fr. Paulin Poucouta, Professor Exegesis at the Institut Catholique de Yaoundé:

All in all, for Benedict XVI, repeating the words of the Synod Fathers, reconciliation, justice and peace are only possible when Christians write the Gospel of love and life in letters of daily commitment and testimony, and if necessary, in letters of blood. (Africae Munus, 34)¹⁸.

For two Jesuits who teach at Abidjan, one in Social Ethics, the other in Exegesis,

¹⁸ Another expert on the Synod! Paulin Poucouta, ‘Africae munus: deux idées force!’, in *Afrique et Parole*, n. 94 (March 2012), p. 3.

By the relevance of his discourse and the boldness of his prophetic appeals, Pope Benedict XVI entrusts the Church of the continent with a control panel calling for a demanding and exhilarating Christian witness to the extent of the stature of Christ¹⁹.

The Exhortation offers us the seeds, not asking for its fruit right away. It is up to us to plant these seeds, to water them and care for them until the tree bears the desired fruits reconciliation, justice and peace. It is unthinkable to die of hunger when there is bread on the table!

5. Questions for discussion

1. Which image of Africa struck you most? Why? What link do you see between your image and that of *Africae munus* ?
2. Which aspect of the Exhortation *Africae munus* moved you most? In what way?

Translated into English by Fr. Donald MacLeod, m.afr.

¹⁹ Mathieu NDOMBA, SJ, Paul BÉRÉ, SJ, professors at the Institute of Theology of the Company of Jesus (ITCJ) at Abidjan ; (in Côte d'Ivoire. Paul Beré is also an expert on the Synod !

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