

INTRODUCTION

1. It was a special gift of grace and like a last will and testament to Africa when the Servant of God Pope John Paul II, towards the end of his life, on November 13th, 2004, announced his intention to convoke a Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. This same intention was confirmed by his successor, our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, on the 22nd of June, 2005, in one of the first major decisions of his pontificate. As we gather here for this Synod, from all countries of Africa and Madagascar and the adjacent Islands, with brother bishops and colleagues from all continents, with and under the Head of the Episcopal College, with the participation of some fraternal delegates from other Christian traditions, we thank God for this providential opportunity to celebrate the blessings of the Lord on our continent, to assess our stewardship as Pastors of God's flock, and to seek fresh inspiration and encouragement for the tasks and challenges that lie ahead. It is now fifteen years since the First Assembly in 1994. The teachings and directives of the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* have not ceased to be a valid guide for our pastoral efforts. In this follow-up assembly, however, the Synod has been able to concentrate on a theme of the greatest urgency for Africa: our service to reconciliation, justice and peace in a continent that is very much in dire need of these graces and virtues.

2. We started our work here with an inaugural celebration of the Holy Eucharist, presided over by His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, invoking the Holy Spirit to "lead us into all truth" (Jn 16:13). On that occasion, the Pope reminded us that the 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.

3. As we prepare to disperse to our various places of assignment, with renewed commitment and courage, we wish to address this message to the whole Church, Family of God, especially to the Church in Africa: to our brother bishops on whose behalf we are here; to the priests, deacons, religious and all the lay

faithful, and to all whose hearts God may open to listen to our words.

PART I

LOOKING AT AFRICA TODAY

4. We live in a world full of contradictions and deep crisis. Science and technology are making giant strides in all aspects of life, equipping humanity with all that it takes to make our planet a beautiful place for us all. Yet tragic situations of refugees, abject poverty, disease and hunger are still killing thousands on a daily basis.

5. In all this, Africa is the most hit. Rich in human and natural resources, many of our people are still left to wallow in poverty and misery, wars and conflicts, crisis and chaos. These are very rarely caused by natural disasters. They are largely due to human decisions and activities by people who have no regard for the common good and this often through a tragic complicity and criminal conspiracy of local leaders and foreign interests.

6. But Africa must not despair. The blessings of God are still abundant, waiting to be prudently and justly employed for the good of her children. Where the conditions are right, her children have proved that they can reach, and have indeed reached, the height of human endeavours and competence. There is much good news in many parts of Africa. But the modern media often tend to emphasize bad news and thus seem to focus more on our woes and defects than on the positive efforts that we are making. Nations have emerged from long years of war and are moving gradually along the path of peace and prosperity. Good governance is making appreciable positive impact in some African nations, challenging others to review past and present bad habits. Signals abound of many initiatives seeking to bring effective solutions to our problems. This Synod, precisely by its theme, hopes to be part of such positive initiatives. We call on all and sundry to join hands to address the challenges of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Africa. Many are suffering and dying: there is no time to waste.

7. Our office as bishops obliges us to consider

everything in the light of faith. Soon after the publication of EIA, the bishops of Africa, through the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), published a pastoral letter, with the title: “Christ our Peace” (cf. Final Document of the Plenary Assembly of SECAM at Rocca di Papa, 1-8 October 2000, published in Accra, 2001). During this assembly, we have frequently reminded ourselves that the initiative for all reconciliation and peace comes from God. As the Apostle Paul declares: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself”. This is done by his gratuitous gift of pardon without condition, “not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor 5:17-20) and thus introducing us to his peace. As for justice, this too is God’s doing, through his justifying grace in Christ.

8. In the same passage, St. Paul goes on to say that God is “entrusting to us the message of reconciliation”, and has indeed appointed us “ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us”. This is the exalted mandate that we have received from our merciful and compassionate God. The Church in Africa, both as family of God and as individual faithful has the duty to be instruments of peace and reconciliation, after the heart of Christ, who is our peace and reconciliation. And it shall be able to do this to the extent that she is herself reconciled to God. Her strategies for reconciliation, justice and peace in society must go beyond and deeper than how the world handles these matters. Like St. Paul, the Synod calls on all the people of Africa: “We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20). In other words, we call on all to allow themselves to be reconciled to God. It is this that opens the way to genuine reconciliation among persons. It is this that can break the vicious circle of offence, revenge and counter attack. In all this, the virtue of pardon is crucial, even before any admission of guilt. Those who say that pardon does not work should try revenge and see. True pardon promotes the justice of repentance and reparation, leading to a peace that goes to the roots of conflict, making friends, brothers and sisters out of former victims and enemies. Since it is God who makes this kind of reconciliation possible, we must give adequate place for prayer and the sacraments in this

ministry, especially the Sacrament of Penance.

PART III TO THE WORLD-CHURCH

9. This Synod is beaming its light of concern and solidarity on the continent of Africa. We thank the Holy Father for walking with Africa in her struggles and defending her cause with the full weight of his enormous, moral authority. Like his predecessors, he has always been a true friend of Africa and of Africans. In addressing our challenges, we have been enriched and guided by the treasures and wisdom of the magisterium of the Popes on socio-political issues. In this regard, The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church is a vademecum and resource-material which we hereby earnestly recommend to all our lay faithful, especially those in high office in our communities.

10. The Holy See has set up many direct initiatives for the development and good of Africa. A case in point is the John Paul II Sahel Foundation to fight against desertification of the Sahel regions. Nor can we underestimate the great services which the pontifical representatives render in our local Churches. Today, the Holy See has nuncios in 50 out of the 53 nations of Africa. This is a strong indication of the commitment of the Holy See to the service of the continent. For this, the Synod expresses deep appreciation.

11. We greet with fraternal affection the entire Church beyond the coasts of Africa, all of us members of the same Family of God scattered all over the world. The presence and active participation of delegates from other continents at this assembly confirms our bond of effective and affective collegiality. We thank all those local Churches who have been reaching out to render service in and for Africa in both the spiritual and material domains. In the area of reconciliation, justice and peace, the Church in Africa will continue to count on the effective advocacy of Church leaders in those rich and powerful countries whose policies, actions or inactions go to cause or aggravate the predicament of Africa. There is a special historic link between Europe and Africa. In this regard, therefore, the existing relationship between the two continental episcopal bodies,

the Council of Episcopal Conferences of Europe (CCEE) and SECAM needs to be strengthened and deepened. We also welcome with joy the emergent fraternal rapport between the Church in Africa and the Church in the Americas.

12. Many sons and daughters of Africa have left home to seek abode in other continents. Many of them are doing well, contributing validly to the life of their new resident countries. Others are just struggling to survive. We recommend them all to the adequate pastoral care of the Church-Family of God, wherever they are. "I was a stranger and you made me welcome" (Mt 25:35) is not only a parable about the end of the world but also a duty to be accomplished today. The Church in Africa thanks God for many of her sons and daughters who are missionaries on other continents. In this holy exchange of gifts, it is important that all the stakeholders continue to work for a transparent, fair, dignified and Christian relationship. During the Synod session, the Church in Africa accepted the challenge to take an interest in people of African descent in other continents, especially the Americas.

13. At this point, this Synod feels the duty to express deep appreciation to the many missionaries, clergy, religious and lay faithful, from other continents who have brought the faith to most of the countries of Africa, many of whom are still working there with zeal and heroic dedication. Special thanks go to those who have remained with their people even in times of war and grave crisis. Some have even paid for their fidelity with their very lives.

PART IV THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

14. We recall with just pride that Christianity has been in Africa since its very beginning, in Egypt and Ethiopia, and soon after in other parts of North Africa. This ancient Church has enriched the universal Church with prestigious theological, spiritual and liturgical traditions, illustrious saints and martyrs, as Pope John Paul II has so eloquently pointed out (cf. EIA, 31). The Churches of Egypt and Ethiopia, which have survived numerous trials and persecutions, deserve high regard, and closer

collaboration with the much younger Churches in the rest of the continent. Such collaboration is particularly important if we consider the thousands of migrants and young students from south of the Sahara doing higher studies in the Maghreb. Many of them are Catholics, bringing with them their attachment to the faith, which greatly refreshes the local Church of their place of residence. The Church in these places, and other places made up mainly of foreigners, counts on the solidarity of the Sister-Churches of Africa to send *Fidei Donum* priests and other missionaries.

15. All over the continent, the Church will continue to march in solidarity with her people. The joys and sorrows, the hopes and aspirations of our people are our own too (cf. GS,1). We are convinced that the first and most specific contribution of the Church to the people of Africa is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. We are therefore committed to pursuing vigorously the proclamation of the Gospel to the people of Africa, for "life in Christ is the first and principal factor of development", as Pope Benedict XVI says in *Caritas in veritate* (CV, 8). For a commitment to development comes from a change of heart, and a change of heart comes from conversion to the Gospel. In this light, we accept our responsibility to be instruments of reconciliation, justice and peace in our communities, "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor 5:20), who is our peace and reconciliation. In this regard, all members of the Church, clergy, religious and lay faithful, must be mobilised to work together in the unity that brings strength. We are challenged and encouraged by the African proverb which says that "an army of well organised ants can bring down an elephant". We should not be afraid of, less still be discouraged, by the enormity of the problems of our continent.

16. The Church in Africa gladly welcomes the call made in the Synod Hall for a "South-South" collaboration in our efforts. Many of the problems of and pressures on Africa are found also in Asia and Latin America. We believe that we have a lot to gain by not only comparing notes but also joining hands. May the Lord show us the way forward in this direction.

17. SECAM is the institution of the organic

pastoral solidarity of the Church hierarchy in Africa (cf. EIA, 16). Unfortunately, this irreplaceable organ has not received the support that it should have, even from the bishops of Africa. We thank God that this Synod has been a blessed opportunity to highlight the importance of SECAM. There is every reason to believe that the calls made by many Synod Fathers for greater commitment to SECAM have not fallen on deaf ears. As we prepare to return home, we are committed to give SECAM the little that it needs to fulfil its mission. Established at the initiative of SECAM and operating in loyal communion with her, the Confederation of Conferences of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar (COMSAM), is gradually growing into an effective instrument of promoting on the continental level organic pastoral solidarity in the life and apostolate of the religious in Africa. The Synod welcomes their valid contribution to the life and mission of the Church in Africa.

18. As bishops, we challenge ourselves to work in unity in our various Episcopal Conferences and Assembly, giving our nations a model of a reconciled and just national institution, ready to offer ourselves as artisans of peace and reconciliation, whenever and wherever called upon. We commend those bishops who have been playing such roles, especially on an ecumenical and/or interfaith basis, as we have seen them do in places like Mali, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Niger and others. The unity of the episcopacy is a source of great strength, while its absence wastes energies, frustrates efforts and gives room for the enemies of the Church to neutralise our witness. An important area where such national cooperation and cohesion is very useful is in the media and social communications. Since EIA was published, there has been a veritable explosion of Catholic radio stations in Africa, from only about 15 in 1994 to over 163 today in 32 nations. We commend those nations which have encouraged this development. We call on those nations which still have reservations in this regard to review their policies, for the good of their nations and people.

19. Each bishop must put issues of

reconciliation justice and peace high up on the pastoral agenda of his diocese. He should ensure the establishment of a Justice and Peace Commission at all levels. We should continue to work hard on forming consciences and changing hearts, through effective catechesis at all levels. This must go beyond the “simple catechism” for children and catechumens preparing for the sacraments. We need to put in place an on-going formation programme for all our faithful, especially those in high positions of authority. Our dioceses must be models of good governance, transparency and good financial management. We have to continue to do our best to tackle poverty, which is a major obstacle to peace and reconciliation. Here suggestions for micro-finance schemes deserve careful attention. Finally, as head of his local Church, the bishop has the duty to mobilise all his faithful, and get them involved in their appropriate roles in the planning, formulating, implementing and evaluating of diocesan policies and programmes for reconciliation, justice and peace.

20. The priest is the “necessary and closest collaborator of the bishop”. In this Year for Priests, dear brothers in the priesthood, we address you in particular, who occupy a key position in the apostolate of the diocese. You represent the face of the clergy most visible to the people, both within and outside the Church. Your example of living together in peace across tribal and racial lines can be a powerful witness to others. This is demonstrated, for example, as you gladly welcome whoever the Holy See appoints as bishops over you, irrespective of place of birth. On you will depend much of the implementation of diocesan pastoral plans for reconciliation, justice and peace. Catechesis, formation of the laity, the pastoral care of people in high office; none of these will go far without your full commitment in your parishes and different places of assignment. The Synod exhorts you not to neglect your duty in this area. You will achieve greater success, if you are able to work on the basis of a collaborative ministry, bringing on board all other segments of the parish community; deacons, religious, catechists, laity, men and women and the youth. In many cases, the priest is among the most enlightened in the local community and

sometimes would be expected to play some leadership role in the affairs of the community. You should know how best to offer your services in a non-partisan, pastoral and evangelical way. Your fidelity to the priestly commitment, particularly to a life of celibacy in chastity, as well as detachment from material things is an eloquent witness to the People of God. Many of you have left Africa to offer your missionary services in other continents. When you work in full respect of good order, you project a good image of Africa. The Synod commends your commitment to the missionary task of the Church. May you all receive the reward promised to all those “who have left home... for the sake of the Kingdom” (Lk 18:28).

21. Africa in recent years has also become very fertile ground for religious vocations: priests, brothers and sisters. We thank God for this great blessing. We commend you, our dear consecrated men and women, for the witness of your religious life of evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, which often make you prophets and models of reconciliation, justice and peace, in circumstances of extreme pressures. The Synod exhorts you to give maximum effectiveness to your apostolate through loyal and committed communion with the local hierarchy. In particular, the Synod congratulates you, women religious, for your dedication and zeal in your apostolate of health, education and other areas of human development.

22. This Synod turns with deep affection to the lay faithful of Africa. You are the Church of God out in the market places of society. It is in and through you that the life and witness of the Church are made visible to the world. You therefore share in the mandate of the Church to be “ambassadors for Christ” working for reconciliation of people to God and among themselves. This requires of you to allow your Christian faith to permeate every aspect and facet of your lives; in the family, at work, in the professions, in politics and public life. This is no easy task. That is why you must assiduously access the means of grace, through prayer and the sacraments. The scripture text of the theme of our Synod, addressed to all followers of Christ, refers in a special way to

you: “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world” (Mt 5:13-14). Here we would like to reiterate the recommendation of Ecclesia in Africa about the importance of Small Christian Communities (cf. EIA, 93). Beyond prayer, you must also arm yourself with sufficient knowledge of the Christian faith to be able to “give a proof of the hope that you bear” (1 Pet 3:15) in the market places of ideas. Those higher up among you have the duty to acquire a commensurate level of religious culture. In particular, we strongly recommend the basic sources of Catholic faith: the Holy Bible, The Catechism of the Catholic Church, and most relevant to the theme of the Synod, The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church. All these are available at affordable costs. There is no excuse to remain ignorant in the faith. In this regard, EIA fervently recommended the establishment of Catholic Universities. We thank God that many such institutions have emerged in the last 15 years, and many more are in the pipe-line. This is a project of capital importance. It also costs a lot of money. But it is necessary, if we are to invest for a future of well formed Catholic laity, including members of new ecclesial Movements, especially intellectuals, ready and able to stand up and witness to the faith in the world of today. This is certainly an area where the universal solidarity of the Church-Family of God is greatly needed.

23. The Synod has a very important and special message for you, our dear African Catholics in public life. We commend the many of you who, not minding all the dangers and uncertainties of politics in Africa, have generously offered yourselves for the public service of your people, as an apostolate to promote the common good and God’s kingdom of justice, love and peace, in line with the teachings of the Church (cf. GS, 75). You can always count on the encouragement and support of the Church. EIA expressed the hope that saintly politicians and heads of state would emerge in Africa. This is by no means a futile wish. It is heartening that the cause of the beatification of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania is already on course. Africa needs saints in high political office: saintly politicians who will clean the continent of corruption, work for the good of the people, and know how to galvanize other men and women of good will

from outside the Church to join hands against the common evils that beset our nations. The Synod has strongly recommended that local Churches intensify their apostolate for the spiritual care of people in public office, to create effective chaplaincies for them and organize high level liaison offices to evangelise legislative houses. We exhort you, all our lay faithful in politics, to take full advantage of any such programmes, where they exist. 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.

24. We now turn our attention to our dear Catholic families of Africa. We congratulate you for doggedly remaining true to the ideals of the Christian family and retaining the best values of our African family. We alert you to be on your guard against some virulent ideological poisons from abroad, claiming to be “modern” culture. You should continue to welcome children as gift from God, and train them in the knowledge and fear of God, to be people of reconciliation, justice and peace in future. We are aware that many of our families are under great stress. Poverty often makes parents unable to take good care of their children, with disastrous consequence. We call on governments and civil authorities to remember that a nation whose legislation destroys its own families does so at its own detriment. Most families are asking for just what is enough for survival. They have a right to live.

25. The Synod has a special word for you, Catholic women. You are often the back bone of the local Church. In many countries, the Catholic Women Organisations are a great force for the apostolate of the Church. EIA recommended that in the Church, “women should be properly trained so that they can participate at appropriate levels in their apostolic activity” (n.121). In many places, progress has been made along these lines. But a lot still needs to be done. The specific contribution of women, not only in the home as wife and mother but also in the social sphere should be more generally acknowledged and promoted. The Synod recommends to our local

Churches to go beyond the general statement of EIA, and put in place concrete structures to ensure real participation of women “at appropriate levels”. The Holy See has given us good example in this regard by appointing women to very high levels of office. All over Africa, there is much talk about women’s rights, especially through the plans of action of some UN agencies. Much of what they say is right and in line with what the Church has been saying. But there is need for caution in the concrete projects being advocated, often with a hidden agenda. 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. Armed with good information and the social teachings of the Church, you should make sure that the good ideas are not high jacked by the peddlers of foreign and morally poisonous ideologies about gender and human sexuality. May our Mother Mary, the Seat of Wisdom, guide you in doing this.

26. Similarly, the Synod calls on you, our Catholic men, to play your important roles as responsible fathers and good and faithful husbands. Follow the example of St. Joseph (cf. Mt 2:13-23), in the care of the family, in the protection of life right from the moment of conception and the education of the children. Make sure that you organize yourselves into associations and Catholic Action Groups that would enable you to improve the quality of Christian life and commitment to the Church. This would also put you in a better position to play leading roles in society and to become more effective witnesses and promoters of reconciliation, justice and peace, as salt of the earth and the light of the world.

27. Finally, we address you, our sons and daughters, the youth in our communities. You are not just the future of the Church: you are with us already in big numbers. In many countries of Africa, over 60% of the population are under 25. The ratio in the Church would not be much different. You should be in the forefront of positive social change and instruments of peace. We feel the need to pay particular attention to you, young adults. You are often neglected, left adrift as targets for all kinds of ideologies and sects. You are the ones most often recruited and used for violence. We urge all the local Churches to

consider the apostolate to the youth a high priority.

28. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me. To such belongs the kingdom of God" (Mt 19:14). The Synod has not forgotten you our dear little children. You are always the object of our care and attention. But we also acknowledge and are anxious to positively use your enthusiasm and effectiveness as active agents of evangelization, especially among your peers. You shall be given adequate space, facilities and direction to organize yourselves for the apostolate. We recommend to you especially the Pontifical Mission Societies organization for children: the Holy Childhood Association.

PART V AN APPEAL TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

29. The Family of God goes beyond the visible boundaries of the Church, including the whole humanity. When it comes to issues of reconciliation, justice and peace, we all meet at the deeper level of our common humanity. This project concerns all, and calls for our common action. We therefore raise our voices in appeal to all men and women of good will. In particular, we call on those with whom we profess the same faith in Jesus Christ and also to people of other faiths.

30. On the whole, the UN agencies are doing good work in Africa for development, peace keeping, defence of the just rights of women and the child, and combating poverty and diseases: HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis and other issues. The Synod commends the good work that they are doing. However, we call on them to be more consistent and transparent in implementing their programmes. We urge the countries of Africa to carefully scrutinise the services being offered to our people, to ensure that they are good for us. In particular, the Synod denounces all surreptitious attempts to destroy and undermine the precious African values of family and human life (e.g. the obnoxious art. 14 of the Maputo Protocol and other similar proposals).

31. 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 (cf. EIA, 31). This Synod, with the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, seriously warns that the problem cannot be overcome by the distribution of prophylactics. We appeal to all who are genuinely interested in arresting the sexual transmission of HIV/AIDS to recognise the success already obtained by programs that propose abstinence among those not yet married, and fidelity among the married. Such a course of action not only offers the best protection against the spread of this disease but is also in harmony with Christian morality. We address ourselves particularly to you, the youth. Let no one deceive you into thinking that you cannot control yourselves. Yes you can, with the grace of God.

32. To the great powers of this world, we plead: treat Africa with respect and dignity. Africa has been calling for a change in the world economic order, with unjust structures piled heavily against her. Recent turmoil in the financial world shows the need for a radical change of rules. But it would be a tragedy if adjustments are made only in the interest of the rich and again at the expense of the poor. Many of the conflicts, wars and poverty of Africa derive mainly from these unjust structures.

33. Humanity has a lot to gain, if it listens to the wise counsel of our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI in *Caritas in veritate*. A new and just world order is not only possible but necessary for the good of all humanity. A change is called for with regard to the debts burden against poor nations, which literally kills children. Multinationals have to stop their criminal devastation of the environment in their greedy exploitation of natural resources. It is short-sighted policy to foment wars in order to make fast gains from chaos, at the cost of human lives and blood. Is there no one out there able and willing to stop all these crimes against humanity?

PART VI

“AFRICA, RISE UP!”

34. It is said that the cradle of the human species is somewhere in Africa. Our continent has a long history of great empires and illustrious civilizations. The future history of the continent is still to be written. God has blessed us with vast natural and human resources. In the international ratings of material and development indices, the countries of Africa are often at the bottom of the table. But this is no cause for despair. There have been gross acts of historic injustices, like slave trade and colonialism, whose negative consequence still lingers on. But these are no longer any excuse for not moving on. Much is actually happening. We commend the efforts to liberate Africa from cultural alienation and political bondage. Now Africa must face the challenge of giving her children a dignified level of living conditions. On the political level, there is progress in continental integration, as the Organization for African Unity (OAU) developed into an African Union (AU). The AU and other regional groups, at times in collaboration with the UN, have undertaken initiatives for resolving conflicts and keeping peace in many crisis situations. On the economic front, Africa has tried to fashion for herself a strategic framework for development called NEPAD, New Economic Partnership for African Development. She has even made provisions for an APRM (African Peer Review Mechanism) to monitor and measure the compliance of nations. The Synod commends these efforts, because these programmes clearly link economic emancipation of Africa with the installation of good governance. Here, unfortunately, is the sticking point. For most African nations the beautiful documents of NEPAD are still a dead letter. We look forward to a general improvement of governance in Africa.

35. The Synod happily congratulates the few countries in Africa which have started on the route of genuine democracy. They are already witnessing the good dividends of doing things well. Some have emerged from many years of wars and conflict and are gradually building up their shattered nations. We hope that their good example will challenge others to change

bad habits.

36. The Synod is sad to note that the situation in many countries is a great shame. We think in particular about the sad situation in Somalia, engulfed in a virulent conflict for almost two decades, which is already affecting neighbouring countries. We do not forget the tragic plight of millions of people in the Great Lakes Region, and the still lingering crisis in Northern Uganda, South Sudan, Darfur, Guinea Conakry and other places. Those who control the affairs of those nations must take full responsibility for their woeful performance. In most cases, we are dealing with greed for power and wealth at the expense of the people and nation. Whatever may be the responsibility of foreign interests, there is always the shameful and tragic collusion of the local leaders: politicians who betray and sell out their nations, dirty business people who collude with rapacious multi-nationals, African arms dealers and traffickers who thrive on small arms that cause great havoc on human lives, and local agents of some international organizations who get paid for peddling toxic ideologies that they don't believe in.

37. The negative consequence of all this is there before the whole world: poverty, misery and disease; refugees within and outside the country and overseas, the search for greener pastures which leads to brain drain, clandestine migration and human trafficking, wars and blood shed, often by proxy, the atrocity of child soldiers and unspeakable violence against women. How can anybody be proud of “presiding” over such chaos? What has happened to our traditional African sense of shame? This Synod proclaims it loud and clear: it is time to change habits, for the sake of present and future generations.

PART VII

JOINING OUR SPIRITUAL FORCES

38. We wish to recall again what Pope Benedict XVI said in his homily at the inaugural Mass of this Synod: that Africa is the “spiritual lung” of the humanity of today. This is a precious resource, more valuable than our minerals and oil. But he warned us that this lung runs the risk of getting infected by the double virus of materialism and religious

fanaticism. In its determination to preserve our spiritual patrimony, against all attacks and infections, the Synod calls for ever greater ecumenical collaboration with our brothers and sisters of other Christian traditions. We also look forward to more dialogue and cooperation with Muslims, the adherents of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and people of other faiths.

39. Religious fanaticism is spreading all over the world. It is causing havoc in many parts of Africa. From our traditional religious culture, Africans have imbibed a deep sense of God, the Creator. They have brought this into their conversion to Christianity and Islam. When this religious fervour is misdirected by fanatics or manipulated by politicians, conflicts are provoked that tend to engulf everyone. But under proper direction and leadership, religions are a strong power for good, especially for peace and reconciliation.

40. The Synod heard the testimony of many Synod Fathers who have successfully walked the road of dialogue with Muslims. They have given witness to the fact that dialogue works and collaboration is possible and often effective. The issues of reconciliation, justice and peace generally are concerns for entire communities, irrespective of creed. Working on the many shared values between the two faiths, Christians and Muslims can contribute greatly towards restoring peace and reconciliation in our nations. This has already happened in many cases. The Synod commends these efforts and recommends them for others.

41. Dialogue and collaboration will thrive when there is mutual respect. We Catholic Bishops have clear guidelines for dialogue, holding firm to our faith but leaving others to freely choose. The Synod received good news of Islamic communities which allow the Church freedom of worship. They also gladly welcome and benefit from the social works of the Church. While we commend this, we insist that this is not enough. Freedom of religion includes also freedom to share one's faith, to propose, not impose it, to accept and welcome converts. Those nations which by law forbid their citizens from embracing the Christian faith are depriving their own citizens of their

fundamental human right to freely decide on the creed to embrace. Although this has been going on for a long time, it is time to revisit the situation in the light of respect for fundamental human rights. This Synod warns that such restriction of freedom subverts sincere dialogue and frustrates genuine collaboration. Since Christians who decide to change their religion are welcomed into the Muslim fold, there ought to be reciprocity in this matter. Mutual respect is the way forward. In the emerging world, we need to make room for every faith to contribute fully to the good of humanity.

CONCLUSION

42. Dear brothers in the episcopate, dear sons and daughters of the Church-Family of God in Africa, all you men and women of good will in Africa and beyond, we share with you the strong conviction of this Synod: that Africa is not helpless. Our destiny is still in our hands. All she is asking for is the space to breathe and thrive. Africa is already moving; and the Church is moving with her, offering her the light of the Gospel. The waters may be turbulent. But with our gaze on Christ the Lord (cf. Mt 14:28-32), we shall make it safely to the port of reconciliation, justice and peace.

43. We entrust this message and all our fervent commitments to the maternal intercession of the Most Holy Mary, Queen of Peace and Our Lady of Africa.
Africa, rise up, take up your pallet, and walk!
(Jn 5:8)

“In the meantime, brothers,
we wish you happiness.
Try to grow perfect,
help one another.
Be united; live in peace
and the God of love
and peace will be with you.”
(2 Cor 13:11)
Amen.