



POST-SYNODAL APOSTOLIC
EXHORTATION
AFRICAE MUNUS
OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE BENEDICT XVI
TO THE BISHOPS, CLERGY,
CONSECRATED PERSONS
AND THE LAY FAITHFUL
ON THE CHURCH IN AFRICA
IN SERVICE TO
RECONCILIATION, JUSTICE AND PEACE

“You are the salt of the earth ...
You are the light of the world”

(Mt 5:13-14)

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INTRODUCTION

1. **A**FRICA'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. Through this mission, Africa is led to explore its Christian vocation more deeply; it is called, in the name of Jesus, to live reconciliation between individuals and communities and to promote peace and justice in truth for all.

2. It was my wish that the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, held from 4 to 25 October 2009, should continue the work of the 1994 Assembly, "which was intended to be an occasion of hope and resurrection, at the very moment when human events seemed to be tempting Africa to discouragement and despair."¹ The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* of my predecessor, Blessed John Paul II, brought together the pastoral insights and proposals of the Synod Fathers for a new evangelization

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (14 September 1995), 1: *AAS* 88 (1996), 5.

of the African continent. It was appropriate, ten years into this third millennium, to rekindle our faith and hope, so as to help build a reconciled Africa by pursuing the paths of truth and justice, love and peace (cf. *Ps* 85:11). In union with the Synod Fathers, I recall that “unless the Lord build the house, in vain do its builders labour” (*Ps* 127:1).

3. Exceptional ecclesial vitality and a theological understanding of the Church as God’s Family² were the most visible results of the 1994 Synod. To give a new impulse, filled with evangelical hope and charity, to the Church of God on the African continent and the neighbouring islands, I thought it necessary to convoke a Second Synodal Assembly. Sustained by the daily invocation of the Holy Spirit and the prayers of countless members of the faithful, the Synod sessions bore fruit which I would like to transmit through this document to the universal Church, and in a particular way to the Church in Africa,³ that she may truly be the “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” (cf. *Mt* 5:13-14).⁴ Inspired by “faith working through love” (*Gal* 5:6), the Church seeks to offer the fruits of love: reconciliation, peace and justice (cf. *1 Cor* 13:4-7). This is her specific mission.

² Cf. FIRST SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AFRICA OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Final Message* (6 May 1994), 24-25; JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (14 September 1995), 63; *AAS* 88 (1996), 39-40.

³ Cf. SECOND SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AFRICA OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Propositio* 1.

⁴ Cf. *Propositio* 2.

4. 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. They also recognized that the blessings of God, the Father of all, are beyond counting. God never abandons his people. 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. I pay tribute to Africans and to all the Christians of that continent who face these situations with courage and dignity. Rightly, they want this dignity to be recognized and respected. I can assure them that the Church loves and respects Africa.

5. 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. Moses, the Lord's servant, "by faith ... persevered as though he saw him who is invisible" (*Heb 11:27*). As the author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* reminds us: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not

seen” (11:1). For this reason I call upon the whole Church to look to Africa with faith and hope. Jesus Christ, who invites us to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (*Mt* 5:13-14), offers us the power of the Spirit to help us come ever closer to attaining this ideal.

6. It was my intention that Christ’s words: “*You are the salt of the earth ... you are the light of the world*”, would be the unifying theme of the Synod and also of the post-synodal period. When I spoke in Yaoundé to all the faithful of Africa, I said this: “In Jesus, some two thousand years ago, God himself brought salt and light to Africa. From that time on, the seed of his presence was buried deep within the hearts of the people of this dear continent, and it has blossomed gradually, beyond and within the vicissitudes of its human history.”⁵

7. The Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* made its own the idea of “the Church as God’s Family”, which the Synod Fathers “acknowledged ... as an expression of the Church’s nature particularly appropriate for Africa. For this image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust.”⁶ The Exhortation invited Christian families in Africa to

⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to Members of the Special Council for Africa of the Synod of Bishops* (Yaoundé, 19 March 2009): *AAS* 101 (2009), 310.

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (14 September 1995), 63: *AAS* 88 (1996), 39-40.

become “domestic churches”⁷ so as to help their respective communities to recognize that they belong to one single Body. This image is important not only for the Church in Africa, but also for the universal Church at a time when the family is under threat from those who seek to banish God from our lives. To deprive the African continent of God would be to make it die a slow death, by taking away its very soul.

8. Within the Church’s living tradition and following the desire expressed in the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*,⁸ to see the Church as a family and a fraternity is to recover one aspect of her heritage. In this community where Jesus Christ, “the first-born among many brethren” (*Rom* 8:29), reconciled all people with God the Father (cf. *Eph* 2:14-18) and bestowed the Holy Spirit (cf. *Jn* 20:22), the Church for her part becomes the bearer of the Good News that every human person is a child of God. She is called to transmit this message to all humanity by proclaiming the salvation won for us by Christ, by celebrating our communion with God and by living in fraternal solidarity.

9. Africa’s memory is painfully scarred as a result of fratricidal conflicts between ethnic groups, the

⁷ Cf. No. 92: *AAS* 88 (1996), 57-58; cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11; Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11; JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 21: *AAS* 74 (1982), 104-106.

⁸ Cf. No. 63: *AAS* 88 (1996), 39-40.

slave trade and colonization. Today too, the continent has to cope with rivalries and with new forms of enslavement and colonization. The First Special Assembly likened it to the victim of robbers, left to die by the roadside (cf. *Lk* 10:25-37). This is why it was possible to speak of the “marginalization” of Africa. A tradition born on African soil identifies the Good Samaritan with the Lord Jesus himself, and issues an invitation to hope. It was Clement of Alexandria who wrote: “Who, more than he, took pity on us, when by the princes of darkness we were all but mortally wounded by our fears, lusts, passions, pains, deceits and pleasures? Of these wounds, the only physician is Jesus.”⁹ There are thus many reasons for hope and gratitude. For example, despite the great pandemics which decimate its population – such as malaria, AIDS, tuberculosis and others – diseases which medical science is still struggling to eliminate once and for all, Africa maintains its *joie de vivre*, celebrating God’s gift of life by welcoming children for the increase of the family circle and the human community. I also see grounds for hope in Africa’s rich intellectual, cultural and religious heritage. Africa wishes to preserve this, to deepen it and to share it with the world. By doing so, it will make an important and positive contribution.

10. The second synodal assembly for Africa dealt with the theme of reconciliation, justice and

⁹ *Quis dives salvetur* 29; PG 9, 633.

peace. The wealth of documentation that was handed to me after the sessions – the *Lineamenta*, the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the reports drawn up before and after the discussions, the speeches and the summaries prepared by working groups – calls for “transforming 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.”¹⁰

11. Hence it is with paternal and pastoral concern that I address this document to the Africa of today, which has lived through the traumas and conflicts that we know so well. Men and women are shaped by their past, but they live and journey in the present and they look ahead to the future. Like the rest of the world, Africa is experiencing a culture shock which strikes at the age-old foundations of social life, and sometimes makes it hard to come to terms with modernity. In this anthropological crisis which the African continent is facing, paths of hope will be discovered by fostering dialogue among the members of its constituent religious, social, political, economic, cultural and scientific communities. Africa will have to rediscover and promote a concept of the person and his or her relationship with reality that is the fruit of a profound spiritual renewal.

¹⁰ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the Roman Curia* (21 December 2009): *AAS* 102 (2010), 35.

12. In the Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, John Paul II observed that “despite the modern civilization of the ‘global village’, in Africa as elsewhere in the world the spirit of dialogue, peace and reconciliation is far from dwelling in the hearts of everyone. Wars, conflicts and racist and xenophobic attitudes still play too large a role in the world of human relations.”¹¹ The hope that marks authentic Christian living reminds us that the Holy Spirit is at work everywhere, in Africa as much as anywhere else, and that the power of life, born of love, always prevails over the power of death (cf. *S of S* 8:6-7). Hence the Synod Fathers could see that the difficulties encountered by the countries and particular Churches in Africa are not so much insurmountable obstacles, but challenges, prompting us to draw upon the best of ourselves: our imagination, our intelligence, our vocation to follow without compromise in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, to seek God, “Eternal Love and Absolute Truth”.¹² Together with all sectors of African society, the Church therefore feels called to respond to these challenges. It is, in some sense, an imperative born of the Gospel.

13. 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

¹¹ No. 79: *AAS* 88 (1996), 51.

¹² BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 1: *AAS* 101 (2009), 641.

Christ and through the Holy Spirit – the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. *Mt* 5:13-14). A precious treasure is to be found in the soul of Africa, where I perceive a “spiritual ‘lung’ for a humanity that appears to be in a crisis of faith and hope”,¹³ on account of the extraordinary human and spiritual riches of its children, its variegated cultures, its soil and sub-soil of abundant resources. However, if it is to stand erect with dignity, Africa needs to hear the voice of Christ who today proclaims love of neighbour, love even of one’s enemies, to the point of laying down one’s life: the voice of Christ who prays today for the unity and communion of all people in God (cf. *Jn* 17:20-21).

¹³ ID., *Homily at the Opening Mass of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops* (4 October 2009): *AAS* 101 (2009), 907.

PART ONE

“BEHOLD, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW”

(*Rev* 21:5)

14. 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”.¹⁴ 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.”¹⁵

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 3: *AAS* 93 (2001), 267.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29: *AAS* 93 (2001), 286.

CHAPTER I
IN SERVICE TO RECONCILIATION,
JUSTICE AND PEACE

I. AUTHENTIC SERVANTS OF GOD'S WORD

15. An Africa that moves forward, joyful and alive, makes manifest the praise of God, since, as Saint Irenaeus observed: “the glory of God is man fully alive”. But he immediately added: “and the life of man consists in beholding God”.¹⁶ Today too, an essential task of the Church is to bring the message of the Gospel to the heart of African societies, to lead people to the vision of God. As salt gives flavour to food, so this message makes those who live by it into authentic witnesses. All who grow in this way become capable of being reconciled in Jesus Christ. They become sources of light for their brothers and sisters. Thus, in union with the Synod Fathers, I invite “the Church ... in Africa to *be a witness* in the service of reconciliation, justice and peace, as ‘salt of the earth’ and ‘light of the world’,”¹⁷ so that her life may

¹⁶ *Adversus Haereses* IV, 20, 7: PG 7, 1037.

¹⁷ *Propositio* 34.

be a response to this summons: “Arise, Church in Africa, Family of God, because you are being called by the heavenly Father!”¹⁸

16. It is providential that the Second Synod for Africa took place soon after the one dedicated to the word of God in the life and mission of the Church. That Synod recalled the pressing duty of each disciple to understand Christ who calls us by his word. Through this word, we, the faithful, learn to listen to Christ and to let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit, who reveals to us the meaning of all things (cf. *Jn* 16:13). In fact, the “reading and meditation of the word of God root us more deeply in Christ and guide our ministry as servants of reconciliation, justice and peace”.¹⁹ As that Synod reminded us, “to become his brothers and his sisters, one must be like ‘those who hear the word of God and put it into practice’ (*Lk* 8:21). Authentic hearing is obeying and acting. It means making justice and love blossom in life. It is offering, in life and in society, a witness like the call of the prophets, which continuously united the word of God and life, faith and recititude, worship and social commitment.”²⁰ Listening to and meditating upon the word of God means letting it penetrate and shape our lives so

¹⁸ BENEDICT XVI, *Homily at the Closing Mass of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops* (25 October 2009): *AAS* 101 (2009), 918.

¹⁹ *Propositio* 46.

²⁰ TWELFTH ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Final Message* (24 October 2008), 10.

as to reconcile us with God, allowing God to lead us towards reconciliation with our neighbour: a necessary path for building a community of individuals and peoples. On our faces and in our lives, may the word of God truly take flesh!

II. CHRIST AT THE HEART OF AFRICAN LIFE:
THE SOURCE OF RECONCILIATION,
JUSTICE AND PEACE.

17. The three principal elements of the theme chosen for the Synod, namely reconciliation, justice and peace, brought it face to face with its “theological and social responsibility”,²¹ and made it possible also to reflect on the Church’s public role and her place in Africa today.²² “One might say that reconciliation and justice are the two essential premises of peace and that, therefore, to a certain extent, they also define its nature.”²³ The task we have to set for ourselves is not an easy one, situated as it is somewhere between immediate engagement in politics – which lies outside the Church’s direct competence – and the potential for withdrawal or evasion present in a theological and spiritual speculation which could serve as an escape from concrete historical responsibility.

²¹ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the Roman Curia* (21 December 2009): *AAS* 102 (2010), 35.

²² Cf. ID., Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 5-9: *AAS* 101 (2009), 643-647.

²³ ID., *Address to the Roman Curia* (21 December 2009): *AAS* 102 (2010), 35.

18. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you”, says the Lord, and he adds “not as the world gives do I give to you” (*Jn* 14:27). Human peace obtained without justice is illusory and ephemeral. Human justice which is not the fruit of reconciliation in the “truth of love” (*Eph* 4:15) remains incomplete; it is not authentic justice. Love of truth – “the whole truth”, to which the Spirit alone can lead us (cf. *Jn* 16:13) – is what marks out the path that all human justice must follow if it is to succeed in restoring the bonds of fraternity within the “human family, a community of peace”,²⁴ reconciled with God through Christ. Justice is never disembodied. It needs to be anchored in consistent human decisions. A charity which fails to respect justice and the rights of all is false. I therefore encourage Christians to become exemplary in the area of justice and charity (*Mt* 5:19-20).

A. “BE RECONCILED WITH GOD” (2 *Cor* 5:20b)

19. “Reconciliation is a pre-political concept and a pre-political reality, and for this very reason it is of the greatest importance for the task of politics itself. Unless the power of reconciliation is created in people’s hearts, political commitment to peace lacks its inner premise. At the Synod, the Pastors of the Church strove for that inner purification of man which is the essential prior condition for building justice and peace. But this

²⁴ ID., *Message for the 2008 World Day of Peace*. AAS 100 (2008), 38-45.

purification and inner development towards true humanity cannot exist without God.”²⁵

20. It is God’s grace that gives us a new heart and reconciles us with him and with one another.²⁶ Christ re-established humanity in the Father’s love. Reconciliation thus springs from this love; it is born of the Father’s initiative in restoring his relationship with humanity, a relationship broken by human sin. In Jesus Christ, “in his life and ministry, but especially in his death and resurrection, the Apostle Paul saw God the Father reconciling the world (all things in heaven and on earth) to himself, discounting the sins of humanity (cf. *2 Cor* 5:19; *Rom* 5:10; *Col* 1:21-22). Paul saw God the Father reconciling Jews and Gentiles to himself, creating one new man through the Cross (cf. *Eph* 2:15; 3:6). Thus, the experience of reconciliation establishes communion on two levels: communion between God and humanity; and – since the experience of reconciliation also makes us (as a reconciled humanity) ‘ambassadors of reconciliation’ – communion among men.”²⁷ “Reconciliation, then, is not limited to God’s plan to draw estranged and sinful humanity to himself in Christ through the forgiveness of sins and out of love. It is also the restoration of relationships between people through the settlement of differences

²⁵ ID., *Address to the Roman Curia* (21 December 2009): *AAS* 102 (2010), 37.

²⁶ Cf. *Propositio* 5.

²⁷ *Relatio ante disceptationem*, II, a.

and the removal of obstacles to their relationships in their experience of God's love."²⁸ This is illustrated by the parable of the prodigal son; in the return of the younger son (i.e. his conversion) the Evangelist shows us his need to be reconciled both to his father and, through the father's mediation, to his older brother (cf. *Lk* 15:11-32). Moving testimonies from the faithful of Africa, "accounts of concrete suffering and reconciliation in the tragedies of the continent's recent history",²⁹ have shown the power of the Spirit to transform the hearts of victims and their persecutors and thus to re-establish fraternity.³⁰

21. Indeed, only authentic reconciliation can achieve lasting peace in society. This is a task incumbent on government authorities and traditional chiefs, but also on ordinary citizens. In the wake of a conflict, reconciliation – often pursued and achieved quietly and without fanfare – restores a union of hearts and serene coexistence. As a result, after long periods of war nations are able to rediscover peace, and societies deeply rent by civil war or genocide are able to rebuild their unity. It is by granting and receiving forgiveness³¹

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the Roman Curia* (21 December 2009): *AAS* 102 (2010), 35.

³⁰ Cf. ID., *Homily at the Closing Mass of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops* (25 October 2009): *AAS* 101 (2009), 916.

³¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Message for the 1997 World Day of Peace*, 1: *AAS* 89 (1997), 1.

that the traumatized memories of individuals and communities have found healing and families formerly divided have rediscovered harmony. “Reconciliation overcomes crises, restores the dignity of individuals and opens up the path to development and lasting peace between peoples at every level”,³² as the Synod Fathers were anxious to emphasize. If it is to be effective, this reconciliation has to be accompanied by a courageous and honest act: the pursuit of those responsible for these conflicts, those who commissioned crimes and who were involved in trafficking of all kinds, and the determination of their responsibility. Victims have a right to truth and justice. It is important for the present and for the future to purify memories, so as to build a better society where such tragedies are no longer repeated.

B. BECOMING JUST AND BUILDING A JUST SOCIAL ORDER

22. There is no doubt that the building of a just social order is part of the competence of the political sphere.³³ Yet one of the tasks of the Church in Africa consists in forming upright consciences receptive to the demands of justice, so as to produce men and women willing and able to build this just social order by their responsible conduct. The model *par excellence* underlying the Church’s

³² *Propositio* 5.

³³ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005), 28: *AAS* 98 (2006), 238-240.

thinking and reasoning, which she proposes to all, is Christ.³⁴ According to her social teaching, “the Church does not have technical solutions to offer and does not claim ‘to interfere in any way in the politics of states.’ She does, however, have a mission of truth to accomplish ... [one] that the Church can never renounce. Her social doctrine is a particular dimension of this proclamation: it is a service to the truth which sets us free.”³⁵

23. Through her Justice and Peace Commissions, the Church is engaged in the civic formation of citizens and in assisting with the electoral process in a number of countries. In this way she contributes to the education of peoples, awakening their consciences and their civic responsibility. This particular educational role is appreciated by a great many countries which recognize the Church as a peacemaker, an agent of reconciliation and a herald of justice. It is worth repeating that, while a distinction must be made between the role of pastors and that of the lay faithful, the Church’s mission is not political in nature.³⁶ Her task is to open the world to the religious sense by proclaiming Christ. The Church wishes to be the sign and

³⁴ Cf. *Propositio* 14.

³⁵ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 9: *AAS* 101 (2009), 646-647.

³⁶ Cf. ID., Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005), 28-29: *AAS* 98 (2006), 238-240; INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Select Questions on the Theology of God the Redeemer* (29 November 1994), 14-20: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 14, Nos. 1844-1850.

safeguard of the human person's transcendence. She must also enable people to seek the supreme truth regarding their deepest identity and their questions, so that just solutions can be found to their problems.³⁷

1. *Living in accordance with Christ's justice*

24. On the social plane, human consciences are challenged by the grave injustices existing in our world as a whole and within Africa in particular. The plundering of the goods of the earth by a minority to the detriment of entire peoples is unacceptable, because it is immoral. Justice obliges us to "render to each his due": *ius suum unicuique tribuere*.³⁸ It is an issue, then, of rendering justice to whole peoples. Africa is capable of providing every individual and every nation of the continent with the basic conditions which will enable them to share in development.³⁹ Africans will thus be able to place their God-given talents and riches at the service of their land and their brothers and sisters. If justice is to prevail in all areas of life, private and public, economic and social, it needs to be sustained by subsidiarity and solidarity, and

³⁷ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 40; PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 49-51.

³⁸ Cf. SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theol.*, IIa-IIae, q. 58, a. 1.

³⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 35: *AAS* 83 (1991), 837.

still more, to be inspired by charity. “In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, neither the state nor any larger society should substitute itself for the initiative and responsibility of individuals and intermediary bodies.”⁴⁰ Solidarity is the guarantee of justice and peace, and hence of unity, so that “the abundance of some compensates for the want of others”.⁴¹ Charity, which ensures a bond with God, goes beyond distributive justice. For if “justice is the virtue which assigns to each his due ... anything that takes man away from the true God cannot be justice”.⁴²

25. God himself shows us what true justice is, for example when we see Jesus entering the life of Zacchaeus and offering the sinner the grace of his presence (cf. *Lk* 19:1-10). What, then, is this justice of Christ? Those present at the encounter with Zacchaeus observe Jesus (cf. *Lk* 19:7); their murmurs of disapproval purport to be an expression of their *love of justice*. However, they do not know *the justice of love* which gives itself to the utmost, to taking upon itself the “curse” laid upon men, that they may receive in exchange the “blessing” which is God’s gift (cf. *Gal* 3:13-14). Divine justice indicates to human justice, limited and imperfect as it is, the horizon to which it must tend if it is to become perfect. Moreover, it makes

⁴⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1894.

⁴¹ *Lineamenta*, 44.

⁴² SAINT AUGUSTINE, *De Civitate Dei*, XIX, 21,1: PL 41, 649.

us aware of our own poverty, our need for forgiveness and for God's friendship. This is what we experience in the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, which flow from the saving work of Christ. That saving work brings us to a justice by which we receive far more than we were entitled to expect, since in Christ, charity is the fullness of the law (cf. *Rom* 13:8-10).⁴³ Through Christ, their one model, the just are invited to enter the order of love – *agape*.

2. *Creating a just order in the spirit of the Beatitudes*

26. The disciple of Christ, in union with his Master, must help to create a just society where all will be able to participate actively, using their particular talents, in social and economic life. They will thus be able to obtain what they need in order to live in accordance with their human dignity in a society where justice is animated by love.⁴⁴ Christ does not propose a revolution of a social or political kind, but a revolution of love, brought about by his complete self-giving through his death on the Cross and his resurrection. The Beatitudes are built upon on this revolution of love (cf. *Mt* 5:3-10). They provide a new horizon of justice, inaugurated in the paschal mystery, through which we can become just and can build a better world. God's justice, revealed to us in the Beatitudes,

⁴³ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Message for Lent 2010* (30 October 2009): *Insegnamenti* V/2 (2009), 454.

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

raises the lowly and humbles those who exalt themselves. It will be perfected, it is true, in the kingdom of God which is to be fully realized at the end of time. But God's justice is already manifest here and now, wherever the poor are consoled and admitted to the banquet of life.

27. In the spirit of the Beatitudes, preferential attention is to be given to the poor, the hungry, the sick – for example, those with AIDS, tuberculosis or malaria – to the stranger, the disadvantaged, the prisoner, the immigrant who is looked down upon, the refugee or displaced person (cf. *Mt* 25:31-46). The response to these people's needs in justice and charity depends on everyone. Africa expects this attention from the whole human family as from herself.⁴⁵ However, it will have to begin by resolutely implementing political, social and administrative justice at home; this is part of the political culture needed for development and for peace. For her part, the Church will make her specific contribution on the basis of the teaching of the Beatitudes.

C. LOVE IN TRUTH: THE SOURCE OF PEACE

28. The social horizon opened up by Christ's work, based on love, surpasses the minimum demands of human justice, that is to say, giving the other his due. The inner logic of love goes beyond this justice, even to the point of giving away

⁴⁵ Cf. *Propositio* 17.

one's possessions:⁴⁶ "Let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth" (*1 Jn* 3:18). In the image of his Master, the disciple of Christ will go further still, to the point of laying down his life for his brethren (cf. *1 Jn* 3:16). This is the price of true peace in God (cf. *Eph* 2:14).

1. *Concrete fraternal service*

29. No society, however developed it may be, can do without fraternal service inspired by love. "Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such. There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbour is indispensable."⁴⁷ It is love which soothes hearts that are hurt, forlorn or abandoned. It is love which brings or restores peace to human hearts and establishes it in our midst.

2. *The Church as a sentinel*

30. In Africa's present situation the Church is called to make the voice of Christ heard. She wishes to follow Jesus' counsel to Nicodemus, who asked him whether it was possible to be born

⁴⁶ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 6: *AAS* 101 (2009), 644.

⁴⁷ ID., Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005), 28: *AAS* 98 (2006), 240.

again: “You must be born from above” (*Jn* 3:7). It was the missionaries who offered Africans this new birth “of water and the Spirit” (*Jn* 3:5), Good News that everyone has a right to hear in order to realize his vocation fully.⁴⁸ The Church in Africa draws her life from this heritage. For the sake of Christ and in fidelity to the lesson of life which he taught us, she feels the duty to be present wherever human suffering exists and to make heard the silent cry of the innocent who suffer persecution, or of peoples whose governments mortgage the present and the future for personal interests.⁴⁹ Through her ability to see the face of Christ on the face of children, the sick, the needy and those who suffer, the Church is helping slowly but surely to forge a new Africa. In her prophetic role, whenever peoples cry out to her: “Watchman, what of the night?” (*Is* 21:11), the Church wants to be ready to give a reason for the hope she bears within her (cf. *1 Pet* 3:15), because a new dawn is breaking on the horizon (cf. *Rev* 22:5). Only by rejecting people’s dehumanization and every compromise prompted by fear of suffering or martyrdom can the cause of the Gospel of truth be served. “In the world”, said Christ, “you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (*Jn* 16:33). True peace comes

⁴⁸ Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 53, 80: *AAS* 68 (1976), 41-42, 73-74; JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 46: *AAS* 83 (1991), 293.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Final Message*, 36.

from Christ (cf. *Jn* 14:27). It cannot be compared with the peace that the world gives. It is not the fruit of negotiations and diplomatic agreements based on particular interests. It is the peace of a humanity reconciled with itself in God, a peace of which the Church is the sacrament.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

CHAPTER II
PATHS TOWARDS RECONCILIATION,
JUSTICE AND PEACE

31. At this point, I would like to indicate some of the paths that the Synod Fathers identified for the Church's mission today in her concern to help Africa be freed from the forces that are paralyzing her. Did not Christ say first of all to the paralytic: "Your sins are forgiven" and then "Rise!" (Lk 5:20, 24)?

I. CARE FOR THE HUMAN PERSON

A. METANOIA: AN AUTHENTIC CONVERSION

32. The principal concern of the Synod members, as they looked to the situation of the continent, was to seek ways of inspiring in Christ's disciples in Africa the will to become effectively committed to living out the Gospel in their daily lives and in society. Christ calls constantly for *metanoia*, conversion.⁵¹ Christians are affected by

⁵¹ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization* (3 December 2007), 9: *AAS* 100 (2008), 497-498.

the spirit and customs of their time and place. But by the grace of their Baptism they are called to reject harmful prevailing currents and to swim against the tide. This kind of witness demands unswerving commitment in “ongoing conversion to the Father, the source of true life, who alone is capable of delivering us from evil and all temptations, and keeping us in his Spirit, in the very heart of the struggle against the forces of evil.”⁵² Such conversion is possible only if one is sustained by the convictions of faith, supported by a genuine catechesis. It is right, then, to “maintain a living connection between memorized catechism and lived catechesis, which leads to a profound and permanent conversion of life.”⁵³ Conversion is experienced in a unique way through the sacrament of Reconciliation, which calls for particular attention so that it can serve as a genuine “school of the heart”. At this school, the disciple of Christ gradually forges an adult Christian life marked by an attention to the spiritual and moral dimensions of his actions, and thus becomes capable of “confronting the difficulties of social, political, economic and cultural life”⁵⁴ through a life permeated with the spirit of the Gospel. The contribution of Christians in Africa will only be decisive if their understanding of the faith shapes their understanding of the world.⁵⁵ For that to

⁵² *Lineamenta*, 48.

⁵³ *Propositio* 43.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the Pontifical Council for the Laity* (21 May 2010): *Insegnamenti* VI/1 (2010), 758.

happen, education in the faith is indispensable, lest Christ become just one more name to adorn our theories. The word of God and the testimony of life go together.⁵⁶ But testimony on its own is not enough either, for “even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained and justified – what Peter called always having ‘your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have’ – and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus.”⁵⁷

B. EXPERIENCING THE TRUTH OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

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,⁵⁸ 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

⁵⁶ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 15.

⁵⁷ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 22: *AAS* 68 (1976), 20.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Propositio* 9.

limitations. These traditional pedagogical forms of mediation⁵⁹ cannot in any way take the place of the sacrament. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* of Blessed John Paul II clearly restated the proper minister and forms of the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.⁶⁰ The only way that traditional pedagogical forms of mediation can serve to reduce the anguish experienced by certain members of the faithful is by helping them to open themselves more deeply and more truly to Christ, the one great Mediator, and to receive the grace of the sacrament of Penance. Celebrated in faith, this sacrament has the power to reconcile us with God and with our neighbour.⁶¹ It is God who, in his Son, definitively reconciles us with himself and with one another.

C. A SPIRITUALITY OF COMMUNION

34. Reconciliation is not an isolated act but a lengthy process by which all parties are re-established in love – a love that heals through the working of God’s word. Reconciliation then becomes at once a way of life and a mission. In order to arrive at genuine reconciliation and to live out the spirituality of communion that flows from it, the Church needs witnesses who are profoundly root-

⁵⁹ Cf. *Propositio* 8.

⁶⁰ Cf. Nos. 28-34: *AAS* 77 (1985), 250-273. This teaching was confirmed by the Apostolic Letter issued *Motu proprio Misericordia Dei* (2 May 2002): *AAS* 94 (2002), 452-459.

⁶¹ Cf. *Propositio* 7.

ed in Christ and find nourishment in his word and the sacraments. As they strive to grow in holiness, these witnesses can become engaged in building communion among God's family, communicating to the world – if necessary even to the point of martyrdom – the spirit of reconciliation, justice and peace, after the example of Christ.

35. Here I would like to mention the conditions for a spirituality of communion which Pope John Paul II proposed to the whole Church: the ability to perceive the light of the mystery of the Trinity shining on the faces of brothers and sisters around us,⁶² to be attentive to “our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as ‘those who are a part of me’, in order to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship”;⁶³ the ability as well to recognize all that is positive in the other so as to welcome it and prize it as a gift that God gives me through that person, in a way that transcends by far the individual concerned, who thus becomes a channel of divine graces; and finally, the ability “to ‘make room’ for our brothers and sisters, bearing ‘each other’s burdens’ (*Gal* 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy.”⁶⁴

⁶² Cf. Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 43: *AAS* 93 (2001), 297.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

In this way, men and women mature in faith and communion, demonstrating courage in the truth and in self-denial, enlightened by joy. Thus they bear prophetic witness to a life consistent with their faith. They have a model in Mary, Mother of the Church, who welcomed the word of God: by listening to that word, she was able to understand our needs and to intercede for us in her compassion.⁶⁵

D. THE INCULTURATION OF THE GOSPEL
AND THE EVANGELIZATION OF CULTURE

36. In order to bring about this communion, it would be helpful to recall that the First Synodal Assembly for Africa spoke of the need for an in-depth study of African traditions and cultures. The Synod members noted a dichotomy between certain traditional practices of African cultures and the specific demands of Christ's message. In her concern for relevance and credibility, the Church needs to carry out a thorough discernment in order to identify those aspects of the culture which represent an obstacle to the incarnation of Gospel values, as well as those aspects which promote them.⁶⁶

37. Nonetheless, we must always remember that the Holy Spirit is the true agent of inculturation, "presiding in a fruitful way at the dialogue between the word of God, revealed in Christ, and

⁶⁵ Cf. *Propositio* 9.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Propositio* 33.

the deepest questions which arise among the multitude of human beings and cultures. In this way, the Pentecost-event continues in history, in the unity of one and the same faith, enriched by the diversity of languages and cultures.”⁶⁷ The Holy Spirit enables the Gospel to permeate all cultures, without becoming subservient to any.⁶⁸ Bishops should be vigilant over this need for inculturation, respecting the norms established by the Church. By discerning which cultural elements and traditions are contrary to the Gospel, they will be able to separate the good seed from the weeds (cf. *Mt* 13:26). While remaining true to itself, in total fidelity to the Gospel message and the Church’s tradition, Christianity will thus adopt the face of the countless cultures and peoples among whom it has found a welcome and taken root. The Church will then become an icon of the future which the Spirit of God is preparing for us,⁶⁹ an icon to which Africa has a contribution of her own to make. In this process of inculturation, it is important not to forget the equally essential task of evangelizing the world of contemporary African culture.

38. The Church’s initiatives for a positive appreciation and safeguarding of African cultures are

⁶⁷ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on some Aspects of Evangelization* (3 December 2007), 6: *AAS* 100 (2008), 494.

⁶⁸ Cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 19-20: *AAS* 68 (1976), 18-19.

⁶⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 40: *AAS* 93 (2001), 295.

well known. It is very important that this continue, at a time when the intermingling of peoples, while a source of enrichment, often weakens cultures and societies. The identity of African communities is at stake in these intercultural encounters. It is imperative therefore to make a commitment to transmit the values that the Creator has instilled in the hearts of Africans since the dawn of time. These have served as a matrix for fashioning societies marked by a degree of harmony, since they embody traditional formulae for peaceful coexistence. These positive elements therefore need to be emphasized, lit up from within (cf. *Jn* 8:12), so that Christians may truly receive the message of Christ, and in this way God's light may shine before the eyes of all. Then, seeing the good deeds of Christians, men and women will be able to give glory to "the Father who is in heaven" (*Mt* 5:16).

E. THE GIFT OF CHRIST: THE EUCHARIST AND THE WORD OF GOD

39. Beyond differences of origin or culture, the great challenge facing us all is to discern in the human person, loved by God, the basis of a communion that respects and integrates the particular contributions of different cultures.⁷⁰ We "must really open these boundaries between tribes, ethnic groups and religions to the universality of God's love."⁷¹ Men and women, in the variety of

⁷⁰ Cf. *Propositio* 32.

⁷¹ BENEDICT XVI, *Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops: Meditation after the Hour of Terce* (5 October 2009): *AAS* 101 (2009), 924.

their origins, cultures, languages and religions, are capable of living together in harmony.

40. Truly, the Son of God has pitched his tent among us; he has poured out his blood for us. In accordance with his promise to remain with us until the end of time (cf. *Mt* 28:20), he gives himself to us every day as nourishment in the Eucharist and in the Scriptures. In my Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, I wrote that “word and Eucharist are so deeply bound together that we cannot understand one without the other: the word of God takes flesh sacramentally in the event of the Eucharist. The Eucharist opens us to an understanding of Scripture, just as Scripture for its part illumines and explains the mystery of the Eucharist.”⁷²

41. Sacred Scripture testifies that the blood which Christ shed for us becomes, through Baptism, the principle and bond of a new fraternity. This is the very antithesis of division, tribalism, racism and ethnocentrism (cf. *Gal* 3:26-28). The Eucharist is the force which brings together the scattered children of God and maintains them in communion,⁷³ “since in our veins there circulates the very Blood of Christ, who makes us children of God, members of God’s Family.”⁷⁴ As we

⁷² No. 55: *AAS* 102 (2010), 734-735.

⁷³ Cf. *Propositio* 45.

⁷⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to Members of the Special Council for Africa of the Synod of Bishops* (Yaoundé, 19 March 2009): *AAS* 101 (2009), 313.

receive Jesus in the Eucharist and in the Scriptures, we are sent out into the world to proclaim Christ by placing ourselves at the service of others (cf. *Jn* 13:15; *1 Jn* 3:16).⁷⁵

II. LIVING IN HARMONY

A. THE FAMILY

42. The family is the “sanctuary of life” and a vital cell of society and of the Church. It is here that “the features of a people take shape; it is here that its members acquire basic teachings. They learn to love inasmuch as they are unconditionally loved, they learn respect for others inasmuch as they are respected, they learn to know the face of God inasmuch as they receive a first revelation of it from a father and a mother full of attention in their regard. Whenever these fundamental experiences are lacking, society as a whole suffers violence and becomes in turn the progenitor of more violence.”⁷⁶

43. The family is the best setting for learning and applying the culture of forgiveness, peace and reconciliation. “In a healthy family life we experience some of the fundamental elements of peace: justice and love between brothers and sisters, the role of authority expressed by parents,

⁷⁵ Cf. ID., Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007), 51: *AAS* 99 (2007), 144.

⁷⁶ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World* (31 May 2004), 13: *AAS* 96 (2004), 682.

loving concern for the members who are weaker because of youth, sickness or old age, mutual help in the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive them. For this reason, the family is the first and indispensable teacher of peace.”⁷⁷ By virtue of its central importance and the various threats looming over it – distortion of the very notion of marriage and family, devaluation of maternity and trivialization of abortion, easy divorce and the relativism of a “new ethics” – the family needs to be protected and defended,⁷⁸ so that it may offer society the service expected of it, that of providing men and women capable of building a social fabric of peace and harmony.

44. I therefore strongly encourage families to draw inspiration and strength from the sacrament of the Eucharist, so as to live the radical newness brought by Christ into the heart of everyday life, leading each person to be a radiant witness in his or her working environment and in the whole of society. “The love between man and woman, openness to life, and the raising of children are privileged spheres in which the Eucharist can reveal its power to transform life and give it its full meaning.”⁷⁹ It is clear that participation in the Sunday Eucharist is both demanded by the

⁷⁷ BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the 2008 World Day of Peace*, 3: *AAS* 100 (2008), 38-39.

⁷⁸ Cf. *Propositio* 38.

⁷⁹ BENEDICT XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007), 79: *AAS* 99 (2007), 165-166.

Christian conscience and at the same time serves to form it.⁸⁰

45. Moreover, to give prayer – individual and communal – its rightful place within the family is to respect an essential principle of the Christian vision of life: the primacy of grace. Prayer constantly reminds us of Christ’s primacy and, linked to this, the primacy of the interior life and holiness. Dialogue with God opens the heart to streams of grace and allows the word of Christ to be channelled through us with all its strength. For this, assiduous listening and attentive reading of sacred Scripture within families is necessary.⁸¹

46. In addition, “the educational mission of the Christian family” is “a true ministry through which the Gospel is transmitted and radiated, so that family life itself becomes an itinerary of faith and in some way a Christian initiation and a school of following Christ. In the family conscious of this gift, as Pope Paul VI noted, ‘all the members evangelize and are evangelized’. By virtue of their ministry of educating, parents are, through the witness of their lives, the first heralds of the Gospel for their children... they become fully parents, in that they are begetters not only of bodily life but also of the life that through the Spirit’s renewal flows from the Cross and Resurrection of Christ.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 73.

⁸¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 38 and 39: *AAS* 93 (2001), 293-294.

⁸² JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 39: *AAS* 74 (1982), 130-131; cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Ex-

B. THE ELDERLY

47. In Africa, the elderly are held in particular veneration. They are not banished from families or marginalized as in other cultures. On the contrary, they are esteemed and perfectly integrated within their families, of which they are indeed the pinnacle. This beautiful African appreciation of old age should inspire Western societies to treat the elderly with greater dignity. Sacred Scripture speaks frequently of the elderly. “Rich in experience is the crown of the aged, and their boast is the fear of the Lord” (*Sir* 25:6). Old age, despite the frailty which seems to accompany it, is a gift that should be lived each day in serene openness to God and neighbour. It is also a time of wisdom, since length of years teaches one the grandeur and the fragility of life. As a man of faith, the elderly Simeon with joy and wisdom offers not a sorrowful farewell to life but rather a song of thanksgiving to the Saviour of the world (cf. *Lk* 2:25-32).

48. It is because of this wisdom, sometimes obtained at a high price, that the elderly can influence the family in a variety of ways. Their experience naturally leads them not only to bridge the generation gap, but also to affirm the need for mutual support. They are an enrichment for all elements of the family, especially for young couples

hortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 71: *AAS* 68 (1976), 60-61.

and for children who find in them understanding and love. Not only have they given life, but they contribute by their actions to building up their family (cf. *Tit* 2:2-5), and by their prayer and their life of faith, they spiritually enrich every member of their family and community.

49. In Africa, stability and social order are still frequently entrusted to a council of elders or traditional chiefs. Through this structure, the elderly can contribute effectively to the building of a more just society which evolves, not on the basis of whatever experiences happen to come its way, but gradually and with a prudent equilibrium. The elderly are thus able to participate in the reconciliation of individuals and communities through their wisdom and experience.

50. The Church regards the elderly with great esteem. Echoing the words of Blessed John Paul II, let me repeat that “the Church needs you! ... But civil society also needs you! ... May you be able to use generously the time you have at your disposal and the talents God has granted to you ... Help proclaim the Gospel ... Devote time and energy to prayer.”⁸³

C. MEN

51. In the family, men have received a particular mission. In their role as husbands and fathers,

⁸³ JOHN PAUL II, *Homily for the Jubilee of the Elderly* (17 September 2000), 5: *AAS* 92 (2000), 876; cf. ID., *Letter to the Elderly* (1 October 1999): *AAS* 92 (2000), 186-204.

they exercise the noble responsibility of giving society the values it needs through marriage and the raising of children.

52. In union with the Synod Fathers, I encourage Catholic men, within their families, to make a real contribution to the human and Christian upbringing of their children, and to the welcoming and protection of life from the moment of conception.⁸⁴ I invite them to adopt a Christian style of life, rooted and grounded in love (cf. *Eph* 3:17). With Saint Paul, I exhort them once more: “Love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her ... husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church” (*Eph* 5:25, 28). Do not be afraid to demonstrate tangibly that there is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for those one loves (cf. *Jn* 15:13), that is to say, first and foremost, for one’s wife and children. Cultivate a serene atmosphere of joy in your home! Marriage is a “gift from the Lord”, in the words of Saint Fulgentius of Ruspe.⁸⁵ Your witness to the inviolable dignity of every human person will serve as an effective antidote to traditional practices which are contrary to the Gospel and oppressive to women in particular.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Final Message*, 26.

⁸⁵ *Epistula* 1, 11: *PL* 65, 306C.

53. In manifesting and in living on earth God's own fatherhood (cf. *Eph* 3:15), you are called to guarantee the personal development of all members of the family, which is the cradle and most effective means for humanizing society, and the place of encounter for different generations.⁸⁶ By the creative dynamic of the word of God itself,⁸⁷ may your sense of responsibility grow to the point where you make concrete commitments in the Church. She needs convinced and effective witnesses of the faith who will promote reconciliation, justice and peace,⁸⁸ and will offer their enthusiastic and courageous contribution to the transformation of their own milieu and of society as a whole. You are these witnesses through your work, which enables you constantly to provide for yourselves and for your families. What is more, by offering this work to God, you are associated with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ who gave an eminent dignity to labour by the work of his own hands at Nazareth.⁸⁹

54. The quality and impact of your Christian lives depend on a life of profound prayer, nourished by the word of God and the sacraments. So be vigilant in keeping alive this essential dimension of your Christian commitment; it is there that

⁸⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 25, 43: *AAS* 74 (1982), 110-111; 134-135.

⁸⁷ Cf. *Propositio* 45.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Final Message*, 26.

⁸⁹ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 67.

your witness of faith in everyday tasks and your participation in ecclesial movements find their source! In the process, you also become models whom the young will want to imitate, and so you will be able to help them embark upon a responsible adult life. Do not be afraid to speak to them about God and to introduce them, by your own example, to the life of faith and to commitment in social or charitable activities, and in this way lead them to discover that they are truly created in the image and likeness of God. “The signs of this divine image in man can be recognized, not in the form of the body, which is subject to corruption, but in the prudence of intelligence, in justice, moderation, courage, wisdom, education.”⁹⁰

D. WOMEN

55. Women in Africa make a great contribution to the family, to society and to the Church by their many talents and unique gifts. As John Paul II said: “woman is the one in whom the order of love in the created world of persons takes first root.”⁹¹ The Church and society need women to take their full place in the world “so that the human race can live in the world without completely losing its humanity.”⁹²

⁹⁰ ORIGEN, *De Principiis*, IV, 4, 10, SC 268, 427.

⁹¹ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (15 August 1988), 29: *AAS* 80 (1988), 1722; cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Meeting with Catholic Movements for the Promotion of Women* (Luanda, 22 March 2009): *Insegnamenti* V/1 (2009), 484.

⁹² BENEDICT XVI, *Meeting with Catholic Movements for the Promotion of Women* (Luanda, 22 March 2009): *Insegnamenti* V/1 (2009), 484.

56. While it is undeniable that in certain African countries progress has been made towards the advancement of women and their education, it remains the case that, overall, women's dignity and rights as well as their essential contribution to the family and to society have not been fully acknowledged or appreciated. Thus women and girls are often afforded fewer opportunities than men and boys. There are still too many practices that debase and degrade women in the name of ancestral tradition. With the Synod Fathers, I urge all Christians to combat all acts of violence against women, speaking out and condemning them.⁹³ In this area, the conduct of the members of the Church ought to be a model for society as a whole.

57. When I visited Africa, I insisted that: "we must recognize, affirm and defend the equal dignity of man and woman: they are both persons, utterly unique among all the living beings found in the world."⁹⁴ Unfortunately, the evolution of ways of thinking in this area is much too slow. The Church has the duty to contribute to the recognition and liberation of women, following the example of Christ's own esteem for them (cf. *Mt* 15:21-28; *Lk* 7:36-50; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; *Jn* 4:7-42). Giving women opportunities to make their voice heard and to express their talents through initia-

⁹³ Cf. *Propositio* 47.

⁹⁴ BENEDICT XVI, *Meeting with Catholic Movements for the Promotion of Women* (Luanda, 22 March 2009): *Insegnamenti* V/1 (2009), 484.

tives which reinforce their worth, their self-esteem and their uniqueness would enable them to occupy a place in society equal to that of men – without confusing or conflating the specific character of each – since both men and women are the “image” of the Creator (cf. *Gen* 1:27). Bishops should encourage and promote the formation of women so that they may assume “their proper share of responsibility and participation in the community life of society and ... of the Church.”⁹⁵ Women will thus contribute to the humanization of society.

58. You, Catholic women, carry on the Gospel tradition of those women who assisted Jesus and the apostles (cf. *Lk* 8:3). In the local Churches, you are a kind of “backbone”,⁹⁶ because your numbers, your active presence and your organizations are a great support for the Church’s apostolate. When peace is under threat, when justice is flouted, when poverty increases, you stand up to defend human dignity, the family and the values of religion. May the Holy Spirit unceasingly call forth holy and courageous women in the Church, who can make their precious spiritual contribution to the growth of our communities!

59. Dear daughters of the Church, sit constantly at the school of Christ, like Mary of Bethany,

⁹⁵ SECOND ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, Document *Justitia in Mundo* (30 November 1971), 45: *AAS* 63 (1971), 933; cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, 121: *AAS* 88 (1996), 71-72.

⁹⁶ *Final Message*, 25.

and learn to recognize his word (cf. *Lk* 10:39). Grow in knowledge of the catechism and the Church's social teaching, so as to acquire for yourselves the principles that will assist you in acting as true disciples. Thus you will be able to engage with discernment in the various projects involving women. Continue to defend life, for God has made you channels of life. The Church will always support you. Help young girls by your counsel and example, so that they may approach adult life serenely. Support one another! Show respect to the elderly in your midst. The Church counts on you to create a "human ecology"⁹⁷ through your sympathetic love, your friendly and thoughtful demeanour, and finally through mercy, values that you know how to instil in your children, values that the world so badly needs. In this way, by the wealth of your specifically feminine gifts,⁹⁸ you will foster the reconciliation of individuals and communities.

E. YOUNG PEOPLE

60. Young people make up the majority of Africa's population. This youthfulness is a gift and a treasure from God for which the whole Church is

⁹⁷ BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the 2010 World Day of Peace*, 11: *AAS* 102 (2010), 49; cf. ID., Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 51: *AAS* 101 (2009), 687.

⁹⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (15 August 1988), 31: *AAS* 80 (1988), 1727-1729; ID., *Letter to Women* (29 June 1995), 12: *AAS* 87 (1995), 812.

grateful to the Lord of life.⁹⁹ Young people should be loved, esteemed and respected. “Whatever their possible ambiguities, [they] have a profound longing for those genuine values which find their fullness in Christ. Is not Christ the secret of true freedom and profound joy of heart? Is not Christ the supreme friend and the teacher of all genuine friendship? If Christ is presented to young people as he really is, they experience him as an answer that is convincing and they can accept his message, even when it is demanding and bears the mark of the Cross.”¹⁰⁰

61. As I said on the subject of young people in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*: “Youth is a time when genuine and irrepressible questions arise about the meaning of life and the direction our own lives should take. Only God can give the true answer to these questions. Concern for young people calls for courage and clarity in the message we proclaim; we need to help young people to gain confidence and familiarity with sacred Scripture so it can become a compass pointing out the path to follow. Young people need witnesses and teachers who can walk with them, teaching them to love the Gospel and to share it, especially with their peers, and thus to become authentic and credible messengers.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Cf. *Final Message*, 27-28.

¹⁰⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 9: *AAS* 93 (2001), 271-272.

¹⁰¹ No. 104: *AAS* 102 (2010), 772.

62. In his Rule, Saint Benedict asks the abbot of the monastery to listen to the youngest monks. As he says: “It is often to a younger brother that the Lord reveals the best course”.¹⁰² So we should make every effort to involve young people directly in the life of society and of the Church, so that they do not fall prey to feelings of frustration and rejection in the face of their inability to shape their own future, especially in those situations where young people are vulnerable due to lack of education, unemployment, political exploitation and various kinds of addiction.¹⁰³

63. Dear young people, enticements of all kinds may tempt you: ideologies, sects, money, drugs, casual sex, violence... Be vigilant: those who propose these things to you want to destroy your future! In spite of difficulties, do not be discouraged and do not give up your ideals, your hard work and your commitment to your human, intellectual and spiritual formation! In order to grow in discernment, along with the strength and the freedom needed to resist these pressures, I encourage you to place Jesus Christ at the centre of your lives through prayer, but also through the study of sacred Scripture, frequent recourse to the sacraments, formation in the Church’s social teaching, and your active and enthusiastic participation in ecclesial groups and movements. Cul-

¹⁰² *Rule III*, 3; cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 45: *AAS* 93 (2001), 298-299.

¹⁰³ Cf. *Propositio* 48.

tivate a yearning for fraternity, justice and peace. The future is in the hands of those who find powerful reasons to live and to hope. If you want it, the future is in your hands, because the gifts that the Lord has bestowed upon each one of you, strengthened by your encounter with Christ, can bring genuine hope to the world!¹⁰⁴

64. When it comes to making life choices, when you find yourselves considering the question of a total consecration to Christ – in the ministerial priesthood or the consecrated life – turn to him, take him as your model, and listen to his word by meditating regularly. During the homily of the inaugural Mass of my pontificate, I spoke words to you that I want to repeat now, for they remain timely: “If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed ... Dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the XXV World Youth Day* (22 February 2011), 7: *AAS* 102 (2010), 253-254; Id., Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (30 September 2010), 104: *AAS* 102 (2010), 772-773.

¹⁰⁵ *AAS* 97 (2005), 712.

F. CHILDREN

65. Like young people, children are a gift of God to humanity, and they must be the object of particular concern on the part of their families, the Church, society and governments, for they are a source of hope and renewed life. God is particularly close to them and their lives are precious in his eyes, even when circumstances seem difficult or impossible (cf. *Gen* 17:17-18; 18:12, *Mt* 18:10).

66. Indeed, “as far as the right to life is concerned, every innocent human being is absolutely equal to all others. This equality is the basis of all authentic social relationships which, to be truly such, can only be founded on truth and justice, recognizing and protecting every man and woman as a person and not as an object to be used.”¹⁰⁶

67. This being the case, how can we fail to deplore and forcefully denounce the intolerable treatment to which so many children in Africa are subjected?¹⁰⁷ The Church is Mother and could never abandon a single one of them. It is our task to let Christ’s light shine in their lives by offer-

¹⁰⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995), 57: *AAS* 87 (1995), 466.

¹⁰⁷ The Synod Fathers referred to different situations, including those involving: children killed before birth, unwanted children, orphans, albinos, street children, abandoned children, child soldiers, child prisoners, children forced into labour, children ill-treated on account of physical or mental handicap, children said to be witches or warlocks, children said to be serpents, children sold as sex slaves, traumatized children without any future prospects, etc. Cf. *Propositio* 49.

ing them his love, so that they can hear him say to them: “You are precious in my eyes, and honoured, and I love you” (*Is* 43:4). God wants every child to be happy and to smile, and his favour rests upon them, “for to such belongs the kingdom of God” (*Mk* 10:14).

68. Christ Jesus always manifested his preferential love for the little ones (cf. *Mk* 10:13-16). The Gospel itself is deeply permeated by the truth about children. What, indeed, is meant by these words: “unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (*Mt* 18:3)? Does not Jesus make the child a model, even for adults? The child has something which must never be lacking in those who would enter the kingdom of heaven. Heaven is promised to all who are simple, like children, to all who, like them, are filled with a spirit of trusting abandonment, pure and rich in goodness. They alone can find in God a Father and become, through Jesus, children of God. Sons and daughters of our parents, God wants us all to become his adopted children by grace!¹⁰⁸

III. THE AFRICAN VISION OF LIFE

69. In the African worldview, life is perceived as something that embraces and includes ancestors, the living and those yet to be born, the whole of

¹⁰⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Children* (13 December 1994): *Insegnamenti* XVII/2 (1994), 1077.

creation and all beings: those that speak and those that are mute, those that think and those lacking thought. The visible and invisible universe is regarded as a living-space for human beings, but also as a space of communion where past generations invisibly flank present generations, themselves the mothers of future generations. This great openness of heart and spirit in the African tradition predisposes you, dear brothers and sisters, to hear and to receive Christ's message, to appreciate the mystery of the Church, and thus to value human life to the full, along with the conditions in which it is lived.

A. THE PROTECTION OF LIFE

70. Among the initiatives aimed at protecting human life on the African continent, the Synod members took into consideration the efforts expended by international institutions to promote certain aspects of development.¹⁰⁹ Yet they noted with concern a lack of ethical clarity at international meetings, and specifically the use of confusing language conveying values at odds with Catholic moral teaching. The Church is perennially concerned for the integral development of “every man and the whole man”, as Pope Paul VI put it.¹¹⁰ That is why the Synod Fathers took pains

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Final Message*, 30.

¹¹⁰ Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (26 March 1967), 14: *AAS* 59 (1967), 264; cf. BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 18: *AAS* 101 (2009), 653-654.

to emphasize the questionable elements found in certain international documents, especially those concerned with women's reproductive health. The Church's position on the matter of abortion is unambiguous. The child in his or her mother's womb is a human life which must be protected. Abortion, which is the destruction of an innocent unborn child, is contrary to God's will, for the value and dignity of human life must be protected from conception to natural death. The Church in Africa and the neighbouring islands must be committed to offering help and support to women and couples tempted to seek an abortion, while remaining close to those who have had this tragic experience and helping them to grow in respect for life. She acknowledges the courage of governments that have legislated against the culture of death – of which abortion is a dramatic expression – in favour of the culture of life.¹¹¹

71. The Church knows that many individuals, associations, specialized groups and states reject sound teaching on this subject. "We must not fear hostility or unpopularity, and we must refuse any compromise or ambiguity which might conform us to the thinking of this world (cf. *Rom* 12:2). We must be *in the world but not of the world* (cf. *Jn* 15:19; 17:16), drawing our strength from Christ, who by his death and resurrection has overcome the world (cf. *Jn* 16:33)."¹¹²

¹¹¹ Cf. *Propositio* 20.

¹¹² JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995), 82: *AAS* 87 (1995), 495.

72. Serious threats loom over human life in Africa. Here, as elsewhere, one can only deplore the ravages of drug and alcohol abuse which destroy the continent's human potential and afflict young people in particular.¹¹³ Malaria,¹¹⁴ as well as tuberculosis and AIDS, decimate the African peoples and gravely compromise their socio-economic life. The problem of AIDS, in particular, clearly calls for a medical and pharmaceutical response. This is not enough, however: the problem goes deeper. Above all, it is an ethical problem. The change of behaviour that it requires – for example, sexual abstinence, rejection of sexual promiscuity, fidelity within marriage – ultimately involves the question of integral development, which demands a global approach and a global response from the Church. For if it is to be effective, the prevention of AIDS must be based on a sex education that is itself grounded in an anthropology anchored in the natural law and enlightened by the word of God and the Church's teaching.

73. In the name of life – which it is the Church's duty to defend and protect – and in union with the Synod Fathers, I offer an expression of renewed encouragement and support to all the Church's institutions and movements that are working in the field of healthcare, especially with regard to AIDS. You are doing wonderful and important work. I ask international agencies to acknowledge

¹¹³ Cf. *Propositio* 53.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Propositio* 52.

you and to offer you assistance, respecting your specific character and acting in a spirit of collaboration. Once again, I warmly encourage those institutes and programmes of therapeutic and pharmaceutical research which seek to eradicate pandemics. Spare no effort to arrive at results as swiftly as possible, out of love for the precious gift of life.¹¹⁵ May you discover solutions and provide everyone with access to treatments and medicines, taking account of uncertain situations! The Church, indeed, has been pleading for a long time for high quality medical treatment to be made available at minimum cost to all concerned.¹¹⁶

74. The defence of life also entails the elimination of ignorance through literacy programmes and quality education that embraces the whole person. Throughout her history, the Catholic Church has shown particular concern for education. She has always raised awareness among parents, providing them with encouragement and assistance in carrying out their responsibility as the first educators of their children in life and in faith. In Africa, the Church's teaching establishments – her schools, colleges, high schools, professional schools, universities and so forth – place tools for learning at people's disposal without discrimination on the basis of origin, financial means or religion. The Church's makes her own contribution by recognizing and making fruitful the talents that

¹¹⁵ Cf. *Propositio* 51.

¹¹⁶ Cf. *Final Message*, 31.

God has placed in the heart of each person. Many religious congregations were founded with this end in view. Countless holy men and women understood that leading people to holiness first entailed promoting their dignity through education.

75. The Synod members noted that Africa, like the rest of the world, is experiencing a crisis of education.¹¹⁷ They stressed the need for educational programmes combining faith and reason so as to prepare children and young people for adult life. These solid foundations will be able to help them address the daily decisions arising in every adult life on the affective, social, professional and political plane.

76. Illiteracy represents one of the principal obstacles to development. It is a scourge on a par with that of the pandemics. True, it does not kill directly, but it contributes actively to the marginalization of the person – which is a form of social death – and it blocks access to knowledge. Teaching people to read and write makes them full members of the *res publica* and enables them to play their part in building it up;¹¹⁸ for Christians it provides access to the inestimable treasure of the sacred Scriptures that nourish their life of faith.

77. I ask Catholic communities and institutions to respond generously to this great challenge,

¹¹⁷ Cf. *Propositio* 19.

¹¹⁸ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 21: *AAS* 101 (2009), 655-656.

which is a real testing ground for civilization, and in accordance with their means, I ask them to multiply their efforts, independently or in collaboration with other organizations, to develop effective programmes adapted to people's needs. Catholic communities and institutions will only be able to meet this challenge if they maintain their ecclesial identity and remain zealously faithful to the Gospel message and the charism of their founder. This Christian identity is a precious good which must be preserved and safeguarded, lest the salt lose its flavour and end up being trampled underfoot (cf. *Mt* 5:13).

78. It is surely necessary to raise the awareness of governments so that they will increase their support for schooling. The Church recognizes and respects the role of the state in the educational domain. She nevertheless affirms her legitimate right to play her part, offering her particular contribution. And it would be helpful to remind the state that the Church has a right to educate according to her own rules and in her own buildings. This is a right which is part of that freedom of action "which her responsibility for human salvation requires".¹¹⁹ Many African states recognize the eminent and disinterested role played by the Church through her educational structures in building up their nations. I therefore strongly encourage governments in their efforts to support this educational work.

¹¹⁹ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 13.

B. RESPECT FOR CREATION AND THE ECOSYSTEM

79. Together with the Synod Fathers, I ask all the members of the Church to work and speak out in favour of an economy that cares for the poor and is resolutely opposed to an unjust order which, under the pretext of reducing poverty, has often helped to aggravate it.¹²⁰ God has given Africa important natural resources. Given the chronic poverty of its people, who suffer the effects of exploitation and embezzlement of funds both locally and abroad, the opulence of certain groups shocks the human conscience. Organized for the creation of wealth in their homelands, and not infrequently with the complicity of those in power in Africa, these groups too often ensure their own prosperity at the expense of the well-being of the local population.¹²¹ Acting in concert with all other components of civil society, the Church must speak out against the unjust order that prevents the peoples of Africa from consolidating their economies¹²² and “from developing according to their cultural characteristics”.¹²³ Moreover, it is incumbent upon the Church to strive that “every people may be the principal agent of its own economic and social progress ...

¹²⁰ Cf. *Propositiones* 17 and 29.

¹²¹ Cf. *Final Message*, 32.

¹²² Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 42: *AAS* 101 (2009), 677-678; cf. *Propositio* 15.

¹²³ SECOND ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, Document *Justitia in Mundo* (30 November 1971), *Proposition* 8a: *AAS* 63 (1971), 941.

and may help to bring about the universal common good as an active and responsible member of the human family, on an equal footing with other peoples.”¹²⁴

80. Some business men and women, governments and financial groups are involved in programmes of exploitation which pollute the environment and cause unprecedented desertification. Serious damage is done to nature, to the forests, to flora and fauna, and countless species risk extinction. All of this threatens the entire ecosystem and consequently the survival of humanity.¹²⁵ I call upon the Church in Africa to encourage political leaders to protect such fundamental goods as land and water for the human life of present and future generations¹²⁶ and for peace between peoples.

C. THE GOOD GOVERNANCE OF STATES

81. The body politic, whose essential duty is the implementation and administration of a just order, can be a major instrument at the service of reconciliation, justice and peace.¹²⁷ This order, in its turn, is at the service of the “vocation to the

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, *Propositions* 8b and 8c: *AAS* 63 (1971), 941.

¹²⁵ Cf. *Propositio* 22.

¹²⁶ Cf. *Propositio* 30.

¹²⁷ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life* (24 November 2002): *AAS* 96 (2004), 359-370.

communion of persons".¹²⁸ In order to put this ideal into practice, the Church in Africa must help to build up society in cooperation with government authorities and public and private institutions that are engaged in building up the common good.¹²⁹ Traditional chiefs have a very positive contribution to make to good governance. The Church, for her part, is committed to promoting within her own ranks and within society a culture that respects the rule of law.¹³⁰ By way of example, elections represent a platform for the expression of a people's political decisions, and they are a sign of legitimacy for the exercise of power. They provide a privileged opportunity for healthy and serene public political debate, marked by respect for different opinions and different political groupings. If conducted well, elections call forth and encourage real and active participation by citizens in political and social life. Failure to respect the national constitution, the law or the outcome of the vote, when elections have been free, fair and transparent, would signal a grave failure in governance and a lack of competence in the administration of public affairs.¹³¹

82. Today, many decision makers, both political and economic, assume that they owe nothing

¹²⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2419.

¹²⁹ Cf. *Propositio* 24; BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 58, 60, 67: *AAS* 101 (2009), 693-694, 695, 700-701; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1883, 1885.

¹³⁰ Cf. *Propositio* 25.

¹³¹ Cf. *Propositio* 26.

to anyone other than themselves. “They are concerned only with their rights, and they often have great difficulty in taking responsibility for their own and other people’s integral development. Hence it is important to call for a renewed reflection on how rights presuppose duties, if they are not to become mere licence.”¹³²

83. Rising crime rates in increasingly urban societies are a cause of great concern for all leaders and governments. Independent judiciary and prison systems are urgently needed, therefore, for the restoration of justice and the rehabilitation of offenders. It is time to put a stop to “miscarriages of justice and ill-treatment of prisoners”, and “the widespread non-enforcement of the law ... which represents a violation of human rights,”¹³³ as well as imprisonment either without trial or else with much-delayed trial. “The Church in Africa ... recognizes her prophetic mission towards all those affected by crime and their need for reconciliation, justice and peace.”¹³⁴ Prisoners are human persons who, despite their crime, deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. They need our care. With this in mind, the Church must provide for pastoral care in prisons, for the material and spiritual welfare of the prisoners. This pastoral activity is a real service that the Church offers to

¹³² BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 43: *AAS* 101 (2009), 679.

¹³³ Cf. *Propositio* 54.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

society, and it is one that the state should support for the sake of the common good. Together with the Synod members, I draw the attention of society's leaders to the need to make every effort to eliminate the death penalty¹³⁵ and to reform the penal system in a way that ensures respect for the prisoners' human dignity. Pastoral workers have the task of studying and recommending *restorative justice* as a means and a process for promoting reconciliation, justice and peace, and the return of victims and offenders to the community.¹³⁶

D. MIGRANTS, DISPLACED PERSONS AND REFUGEES

84. Millions of migrants, displaced persons and refugees are searching for a homeland and a peaceful country in Africa or elsewhere. The scale of this movement, which affects every country, reveals the hidden magnitude of the different types of poverty produced by deficiencies in public administration. Thousands of people have tried and continue trying to cross deserts and seas, searching for an oasis of peace and prosperity, better education and greater freedom. Unfortunately, many refugees and displaced persons encounter all kinds of violence and exploitation, even prison, and all too often, death. Some states have responded to this dramatic situation with repressive legislation.¹³⁷ The precarious situation

¹³⁵ Cf. *Propositio* 55.

¹³⁶ Cf. *Propositio* 54.

¹³⁷ Cf. *Propositio* 28.

of these poor people should awaken everyone's compassion and generous solidarity; yet it often gives rise to fear and anxiety. Many regard migrants as a burden and view them with suspicion, seeing them only as a source of danger, insecurity and threat. This perception provokes reactions of intolerance, xenophobia and racism. As a result, these migrants are forced, through the precariousness of their situation, to do low-paid work that is often illegal, humiliating or degrading. The human conscience can only respond with indignation to these situations. Migration inside and outside the continent thus becomes a complex drama which seriously affects Africa's human capital, leading to the destabilization or destruction of families.

85. The Church remembers that Africa offered a place of refuge for the Holy Family when they were fleeing the murderous political power of Herod,¹³⁸ in search of a land that could offer them security and peace. The Church will continue to make her voice heard and to campaign for the defence of all people.¹³⁹

E. GLOBALIZATION AND INTERNATIONAL AID

86. The Synod Fathers expressed their misgivings and concern with regard to globalization. I

¹³⁸ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Address to Members of the Special Council for Africa of the Synod of Bishops* (Yaoundé, 19 March 2009): *AAS* 101 (2009), 310.

¹³⁹ Cf. ID., Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 62: *AAS* 101 (2009), 696-697.

have already drawn attention to this phenomenon as a challenge that needs to be addressed. “The truth of globalization as a process and its fundamental ethical criterion are given by the unity of the human family and its development towards what is good. Hence a sustained commitment is needed so as to promote a person-based and community-oriented cultural process of world-wide integration that is open to transcendence.”¹⁴⁰ The Church is eager to see the globalization of solidarity progress to the point where it inscribes “in commercial relationships the principle of gratuitousness and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity”,¹⁴¹ while avoiding the temptation to regard globalization as the only lens through which to view life, culture, politics and the economy, and fostering an ongoing ethical respect for the variety of human situations in the interests of effective solidarity.

87. This globalization of solidarity is already demonstrated to some extent in the area of international aid. Today, news of a disaster spreads rapidly around the world and often leads to an upsurge of compassion and concrete acts of generosity. The Church provides a service of great charity by protecting the real needs of the beneficiary. Defending the rights of the needy and those who have no voice, and in the name of the respect and solidarity that they deserve, she asks that

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 42: *AAS* 101 (2009), 677.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 36: *AAS* 101 (2009), 672.

“international agencies and non-governmental organizations commit themselves to complete transparency” in their work.¹⁴²

IV. DIALOGUE AND COMMUNION AMONG BELIEVERS

88. As many social movements indicate, peace in Africa, as elsewhere, is conditioned by inter-religious relations. Hence it is important for the Church to promote dialogue as a spiritual disposition, so that believers may learn to work together, for example in associations for justice and peace, in a spirit of trust and mutual help. Families must be educated in attentive listening, fraternity and respect without fear of the other.¹⁴³ One thing only is necessary (cf. *Lk* 10:42) and capable of quenching every human person’s thirst for eternity and all humanity’s desire for unity: love and contemplation of him before whom Saint Augustine cried out: “Eternal Truth, true Love, beloved Eternity!”¹⁴⁴

A. ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE AND THE CHALLENGE OF NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

89. By inviting to the Synodal Assembly our fellow Christians – Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, and in particular His Holiness Abuna Paulos, Patriarch of the

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 47: *AAS* 101 (2009), 684; cf. *Propositio* 31.

¹⁴³ Cf. *Propositiones* 10, 11, 12, 13.

¹⁴⁴ *Confessions*, VII, 10, 16: *PL* 32, 742.

Tewahedo Orthodox Church of Ethiopia, one of the most ancient Christian communities of the African continent – I wanted to make clear that the path to reconciliation must first pass through the communion of Christ’s disciples. A divided Christianity remains a scandal, since it de facto contradicts the will of the Divine Master (cf. *Jn* 17:21). Ecumenical dialogue therefore seeks to direct our common journey towards Christian unity, as we listen assiduously to the word of God, faithful to fraternal communion, the breaking of bread and the prayers (cf. *Acts* 2:42). I call upon the whole ecclesial family – particular Churches, institutes of consecrated life as well as lay movements and associations – to pursue this path with ever greater determination, in the spirit of, and on the basis of, the guidelines given in the *Ecumenical Directory* and through the various existing ecumenical associations. I also ask that new ones be set up wherever this could serve as an aid for mission. Together let us undertake works of charity and protect our religious patrimonies, through which Christ’s disciples find the spiritual strength that they need for building up the human family!¹⁴⁵

90. In recent decades, the Church in Africa has been asking itself a great many questions about the emergence and growth of non-Catholic communities sometimes known as African In-

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *Propositio* 10.

dependent Churches. Frequently an offshoot of traditional Christian Churches and ecclesial communities, they adopt elements of traditional African cultures. These groups have recently made an appearance in the ecumenical field. The Pastors of the Catholic Church will have to take into account this new phenomenon affecting the promotion of Christian unity in Africa, and they will consequently have to find a response suited to the context, for the sake of deeper evangelization as a way of effectively communicating Christ's truth to the people of Africa.

91. Various syncretistic movements and sects have sprung up in Africa in recent decades. Sometimes it is hard to discern whether they are of authentically Christian inspiration or whether they are simply the fruit of sudden infatuation with a leader claiming to have exceptional gifts. Their nomenclature and vocabulary easily give rise to confusion, and they can lead people in good faith astray. These many sects take advantage of an incomplete social infrastructure, the erosion of traditional family solidarity and inadequate catechesis in order to exploit people's credulity, and they offer a religious veneer to a variety of heterodox, non-Christian beliefs. They shatter the peace of couples and families through false prophecies and visions. They even seduce political leaders. The Church's theology and pastoral care must determine the causes of this phenomenon, not only in order to stem the haemorrhage of the faithful

from the parishes to the sects, but also in order to lay the foundations of a suitable pastoral response to the attraction that these movements and sects exert. Once again, this points to the need for a profound evangelization of the African soul.

B. INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

1. *Traditional African religions*

92. The Church lives daily alongside the followers of traditional African religions. With their reference to ancestors and to a form of mediation between man and Immanence, these religions are the cultural and spiritual soil from which most Christian converts spring and with which they continue to have daily contact. 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. It would also help to clarify the vital distinction between culture and cult and to discard those magical elements which cause division and ruin for families and societies. In this regard, the Second Vatican Council taught that the Church “urges her sons and daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, together with

their life and culture.”¹⁴⁶ It would help to manifest the treasures of the Church’s sacramental life and spirituality in all their depth and to pass them on more effectively in catechesis, if the Church were to carry out a theological study of those elements of the traditional African cultures in conformity with Christ’s teaching.

93. Witchcraft, which is based on the traditional religions, is currently experiencing a certain revival. Old fears are re-surfacing and creating paralyzing bonds of subjection. Anxiety over health, well-being, children, the climate, and protection from evil spirits at times lead people to have recourse to practices of traditional African religions that are incompatible with Christian teaching. The problem of “dual affiliation” – to Christianity and to the traditional African religions – remains a challenge. Through profound catechesis and inculturation, the Church in Africa needs to help people to discover the fullness of Gospel values. It is important to determine the profound meaning of these practices of witchcraft by identifying the many theological, social and pastoral implications of this scourge.

2. *Islam*

94. The Synod Fathers highlighted the complexity of the Muslim presence on the African

¹⁴⁶ Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*, 2; cf. *Propositiones* 3 and 13.

continent. In some countries, good relations exist between Christians and Muslims; in others, the local Christians are merely second-class citizens, and Catholics from abroad, religious and lay, have difficulty obtaining visas and residence permits; in some, there is insufficient distinction between the religious and political spheres, while in others, finally, there is a climate of hostility. I call upon the Church, in every situation, to persist in esteem for Muslims, who “worship God who is one, living and subsistent; merciful and almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to humanity.”¹⁴⁷ If all of us who believe in God desire to promote reconciliation, justice and peace, we must work together to banish every form of discrimination, intolerance and religious fundamentalism. In her social apostolate, the Church does not make religious distinctions. She comes to the help of those in need, be they Christian, Muslim or animist. In this way she bears witness to the love of God, creator of all, and she invites the followers of other religions to demonstrate respect and to practise reciprocity in a spirit of esteem. I ask the whole Church, through patient dialogue with Muslims, to seek juridical and practical recognition of religious freedom, so that every citizen in Africa may enjoy not only the right to choose his religion freely¹⁴⁸ and to engage in worship, but also the right

¹⁴⁷ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nos- tra Aetate*, 3.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *Final Message*, 41.

to freedom of conscience.¹⁴⁹ Religious freedom is the road to peace.¹⁵⁰

C. BECOMING “THE SALT OF THE EARTH”
AND “THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD”

95. For her mission of evangelization, the Church in Africa draws upon several sources: sacred Scripture, Tradition and the sacramental life. As a great many Synod Fathers remarked, the Church’s ministry builds effectively upon the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Moreover, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* is a guide to the Church’s mission as “Mother and Teacher” in the world and in society, and is therefore a pastoral tool of the first rank.¹⁵¹ Christians who draw nourishment from the authentic source, Christ, are transformed by him into “the light of the world” (*Mt* 5:14), and they transmit the one who is himself “the Light of the world” (*Jn* 8:12). Their knowledge must be shaped by charity. Knowledge, in fact, “if it aspires to be wisdom capable of directing man in the light of his first beginnings and his final ends ... must be ‘seasoned’ with the ‘salt’ of charity.”¹⁵²

96. In order to accomplish the task that we are called to carry out, let us make our own the

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *Propositio* 12.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the 2011 World Day of Peace*, *AAS* 103 (2011), 46-58.

¹⁵¹ Cf. *Propositio* 18.

¹⁵² BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 30: *AAS* 101 (2009), 665.

exhortation of Saint Paul: “Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the Gospel of peace, besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication” (*Eph* 6:14-18).

PART TWO

“TO EACH IS GIVEN
THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SPIRIT
FOR THE COMMON GOOD”

(1 Cor 12:7)

97. The guidelines for mission that I have just indicated will only become a reality if the Church acts, on the one hand, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and on the other, as a single body, to use the image of Saint Paul, who presents these two conditions in an integrated way. In Africa, marked as it is by contrasts, the Church must clearly point out the path towards Christ. She must show how to live, in total fidelity to Christ Jesus, the unity in diversity taught by the Apostle: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (*1 Cor* 12:4-7). By exhorting each member of the Church family to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (*Mt* 5:13-14), I wish to stress that in “being so”, they should act, through the Spirit, for the common good. 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.

98. We are all very familiar with the episode of the paralytic who was brought to Jesus to be cured (cf. *Mk* 2:1-12). For us today, this man represents all our brothers and sisters in Africa and elsewhere who are paralyzed in different ways and, sadly, often in great distress. In the light of the challenges that I have described briefly, drawing on the comments of the Synod Fathers, let us reflect on the attitude of those who carry the paralytic. He himself cannot come close to Jesus without the assistance of those four people of faith who braved *the physical obstacle* of the crowd as a sign of their solidarity and their complete trust in Jesus. Christ “saw their faith”. He then removes *the spiritual obstacle* when he says to the paralysed man: “Your sins are forgiven”. He removes what prevents the man from rising. This example invites us to grow in faith and, in turn, to show *solidarity* and *creativity* in relieving those who bear heavy burdens, thus opening them to the fullness of life in Christ (cf. *Mt* 11:28). Before the obstacles, both physical and spiritual, that stand before us, let us mobilize the spiritual energies and the material resources of the whole body which is the Church, convinced that Christ will act through the Holy Spirit in each of her members.

CHAPTER I
THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH

99. Dear sons and daughters of the Church, especially you, the beloved faithful of Africa, the love of God has blessed you in so many ways and has made you capable of acting as the salt of the earth. All of you, as members of the Church, should be aware that peace and justice come first from the reconciliation of each human being with himself and with God. Christ himself is the one true “Prince of Peace”. His birth is the pledge of the messianic peace proclaimed by the prophets (cf. *Is* 9:5-6; 57:19; *Mic* 5:4; *Eph* 2:14-17). This peace does not come from ourselves but from God. It is the messianic gift *par excellence*. This peace leads us to the justice of the kingdom, which is to be sought in season and out of season, in all that we do (cf. *Mt* 6:33), so that in everything glory may be given to God (cf. *Mt* 5:16). We know that the just person is faithful to God’s law because he has been converted (cf. *Lk* 15:7; 18:14). This new faithfulness has been brought by Christ so as to make us “blameless and innocent” (cf. *Phil* 2:15).

I. BISHOPS

100. Dear brother bishops, the holiness to which the bishop is called requires the exercise of the virtues – in the first place, of the theological virtues – and the exercise of the evangelical counsels.¹⁵³ Your own holiness must be outstanding, to the benefit of those entrusted to your pastoral care, those whom you must serve. Your life of prayer will nourish your apostolate from within. The bishop must be someone in love with Christ. The moral authority and the prestige that uphold the exercise of your juridical power can only come from the holiness of your life.

101. Saint Cyprian of Carthage, in the middle of the third century, stated: “The Church rests on the bishops, and all her conduct follows the direction of those same rulers”.¹⁵⁴ Communion, unity and cooperation with the presbyterate will be a safeguard against the seeds of division and will assist you in listening together to the Holy Spirit. He will lead you on the right path (cf. *Ps* 22:3). Love and respect your priests! They are esteemed co-workers in your episcopal ministry. Imitate Christ! He created around himself a circle of friendship, fraternal affection and communion which he drew from the depths of the Trinitarian mystery. “I invite you to take continuous care

¹⁵³ CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum Successores* (22 February 2004), 33-48; *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 22, Nos. 1650-1676.

¹⁵⁴ *Ep.* 33, 1: *PL* 4, 297.

to help your priests to live in intimate communion with Christ. Their spiritual life is the foundation of their apostolic life. Exhort them gently to daily prayer, to the worthy celebration of the sacraments, especially those of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, as Saint Francis de Sales did for his priests ... Your priests need your affection, your encouragement and your concern.”¹⁵⁵

102. Be one with the Successor of Peter, together with your priests and all the faithful. Do not waste your human and pastoral energies in the vain search for answers to questions which are not of your direct competence, or in the twists and turns of a nationalism that can easily blind. It is easier to follow this idol, or to absolutize African culture, than to follow the demands of Christ. Such idols are illusions. Even more, they are a temptation, that believing that human efforts alone can bring the kingdom of eternal happiness to earth.

103. Your first duty is to bring the good news of salvation to all, and to offer the faithful a catechesis which leads them to a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ. See to it that laypeople acquire a genuine awareness of their ecclesial mission and encourage them to engage in it with responsibility, always seeking the common good. The permanent formation programmes offered to lay people, and

¹⁵⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the Bishops of France*, Lourdes (14 September 2008): *Insegnamenti* IV/2 (2008), 321.

above all to political or economic leaders, must insist on conversion as a necessary condition for the transformation of the world. It is fitting that they should begin with prayer and continue with a catechesis that will lead to concrete action. The creation of structures, if truly needed, will come later; since they can never replace the power of prayer!

104. Dear brother bishops, following in the footsteps of Christ the Good Shepherd, be good pastors and servants of the flock entrusted to your care, exemplary in life and conduct. The good administration of your dioceses requires your presence. To make your message credible, see to it that your dioceses become models in the conduct of personnel, in transparency and good financial management. Do not hesitate to seek help from experts in auditing, so as to give example to the faithful and to society at large. Promote the good functioning of the ecclesial bodies provided for by Church law on the diocesan and parochial level. To you in the first place belongs the task of seeking unity, justice and peace since you have the responsibility for the local Churches.

105. 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.”¹⁵⁶ The national and regional Bishops’ Conferences are charged with the mission of

¹⁵⁶ *Propositio* 3.

consolidating that ecclesial communion and promoting this pastoral solidarity.

106. In order to ensure greater visibility, coherence and effectiveness to the Church's pastoral activity in society, the Synod felt the need for greater solidarity in action at all levels. It would be good for regional and national Bishops' Conferences, as well as the Assembly of the Catholic Hierarchy of Egypt (ACHE), to renew their commitment to collegial solidarity.¹⁵⁷ Practically speaking, this entails participation in the activities of these structures, with regard to both personnel and finances. In this way the Church will bear witness to the unity for which Christ prayed (cf. *Jn* 17:20-21).

107. I also consider it important for the bishops to help support, effectively and affectively, the Symposium of Bishops' Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) as a continental structure of solidarity and ecclesial communion.¹⁵⁸ Likewise, good relations should be maintained with the Confederation of Conferences of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar (COMSAM), with the Associations of Catholic Universities and other continental ecclesial structures.

II. PRIESTS

108. As close and indispensable co-workers of the bishop, priests¹⁵⁹ are charged with carrying

¹⁵⁷ Cf. *Propositio* 4.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Cf. *Propositio* 39.

out the work of evangelization. The Second Assembly of the Synod for Africa took place during the year that I dedicated to the priesthood, appealing in a special way for growth in holiness. Dear priests, remember that your witness to living together in peace, over ethnic and racial lines, can touch hearts.¹⁶⁰ The call to holiness bids us become pastors according to the heart of God,¹⁶¹ feeding our flock with justice (cf. *Ex* 34:16). To yield to the temptation of becoming political leaders¹⁶² or social agents would be to betray your priestly mission and to do a disservice to society, which expects of you prophetic words and deeds. As Saint Cyprian put it in his own day: “Those who bear the honour of the divine priesthood... should lend their ministry only to the service of the altar and give their time to prayer alone”.¹⁶³

109. By devoting yourselves to those whom the Lord entrusts to you for their formation in Christian virtues and their growth in holiness, you not only win them to the cause of Christ but also make them protagonists of a renewed African society. Given the complex situations that you encounter, I ask you to deepen your life of prayer and your ongoing intellectual and spiritual formation. Become ever more familiar with sacred Scripture, the word of God which you daily meditate

¹⁶⁰ Cf. *Final Message*, 20.

¹⁶¹ Cf. *Propositio* 39.

¹⁶² Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the Roman Curia* (21 December 2009): *AAS* 102 (2010), 35.

¹⁶³ *Ep.* 66,1: *PL* 4, 398.

upon and explain to the faithful. Grow in your knowledge of the Catechism, the documents of the magisterium and the Church's social doctrine. You will then be capable of forming the members of the Christian community for whom you are immediately responsible, so that they can become authentic disciples and witnesses of Christ.

110. Live obedience to your diocesan bishop in simplicity, humility and filial love. "Out of respect for the One who has loved us, it is proper that we obey without hypocrisy, for it is not the bishop whom we see that we are deceiving, but the One who is unseen. In this case, it is not a matter of the flesh, but of God who knows what is hidden."¹⁶⁴ In the context of the ongoing formation of clergy, I consider it important to reread and meditate on such documents as the conciliar Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, the 1992 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, the 1994 *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* and the 2002 Instruction *The Priest, Pastor and Guide of the Parish Community*.

111. Build up the Christian communities by your example, living in truth and joy your priestly commitments, celibacy in chastity and detachment from material possessions. When lived in maturity and peace, these signs, so consonant with the life-

¹⁶⁴ SAINT IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Ad Magnesios*, III, 2; ed. F.X. FUNK, 233.

style of Jesus, express “total and exclusive gift of self to Christ, to the Church and to the kingdom of God”.¹⁶⁵ Devote yourselves intensely to putting into practice the diocesan pastoral plan for reconciliation, justice and peace, especially through the celebration of the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, catechesis, the formation of lay people and ongoing dialogue with those holding positions of responsibility in society. Every priest should feel happy to serve the Church.

112. Following Christ on the path of the priesthood entails making decisions. It is not always easy to live up to these. The evangelical commitments codified through the centuries by the teaching of the magisterium appear radical to the eyes of the world. It is sometimes difficult to follow them, yet not impossible. Christ tells us that we cannot serve two masters (cf. *Mt* 6:24). He is clearly speaking of money, the worldly treasure that can captivate our hearts (cf. *Lk* 12:34), but he is also speaking of the countless other goods we possess, such as our life, our family, our education, our personal relationships. These are all important and fine goods which are constitutive of our persons. But Christ asks those whom he calls to abandon themselves completely to divine Providence. He demands a radical decision

¹⁶⁵ BENEDICT XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007), 24: *AAS* 99 (2007), 125.

(cf. *Mt* 7:13-14) which we sometimes find difficult to understand and live out. Yet if God is our real treasure – that pearl of great price which must be acquired at any cost, even that of great sacrifices (cf. *Mt* 13:45-46) – then we want our hearts and our bodies, our minds and our thoughts to be for him alone. This act of faith enables us to see everything that appears important to us in a different light, and to experience our relationship with our bodies, and our relationships in family or among friends, in the light of God’s call and of what it demands in the service of the Church. This calls for deep reflection. That reflection should begin in the seminary and continue throughout our priestly lives. Christ tells us, by way of encouragement, for he knows the strengths and weaknesses of our hearts: “Strive first for the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (*Mt* 6:33).

III. MISSIONARIES

113. Non-African missionaries, responding generously to the Lord’s call with ardent apostolic zeal, came to share the joy of revelation. Following in their footsteps, Africans are today missionaries on other continents. How can we fail here to pay them special tribute? The missionaries who came to Africa – priests, men and women religious and lay people – built churches, schools and dispensaries, and did much to shape the face of today’s African culture, but above all they built up

the Body of Christ and enriched the Lord's dwelling place. They knew well how to share the salt of the word and spread the light of the sacraments. Most of all, they gave to Africa their most precious treasure: Jesus Christ. Thanks to them numerous traditional cultures were freed from ancestral fears and from unclean spirits (cf. *Mt* 10:1). From the good seed that they sowed (cf. *Mt* 13:24) arose many African saints, who still serve as models and ought to inspire us all the more. It would be profitable to renew and promote devotion to these saints. Their commitment to the cause of the Gospel was at times shown in a heroic manner, even at the cost of their lives. Once again the words of Tertullian proved true: "the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians".¹⁶⁶ I give thanks to God for all these holy men and women, signs of the vitality of the Church in Africa.

114. I encourage the Pastors of the local Churches to recognize among servants of the Gospel in Africa those who could be canonized according to the norms of the Church, not only in order to increase the number of African saints, but also to obtain new intercessors in heaven to accompany the Church on her pilgrim journey and to plead before God for the African continent. I entrust to Our Lady of Africa and to the saints of this beloved continent the Church that dwells there.

¹⁶⁶ *Apologeticum*, 50,13: PL 1, 603.

IV. PERMANENT DEACONS

115. The grandeur of the call received by permanent deacons deserves to be emphasized. In fidelity to their age-old mission, I invite them to work with humility and in close cooperation with the bishops.¹⁶⁷ I ask them affectionately to continue offering what Christ teaches us in the Gospel: rigour in work well done,¹⁶⁸ moral strength in respect for values, honesty, truthfulness, the joy of adding one's stone to the building of Church and society, the protection of nature, a sense of the common good. Assist African society at every level to encourage responsibility on the part of men who are husbands and fathers, respect for women who are equal to men in dignity, and concern for children left to fend for themselves without education.

116. Do not fail to pay particular attention to those who are ill, mentally or physically,¹⁶⁹ those who are frail and the poor of your communities. Let your charity be imaginative! In the pastoral activity of parishes, remember that a healthy spirituality allows the Spirit of Christ to free the human person to act effectively in society. Bishops

¹⁶⁷ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Fundamental Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons* (22 February 1998), 8: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 17, No. 167; CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* (22 February 1998), 6, 8 and 48: *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 17, Nos. 291, 294-297, 376-378.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. *Lineamenta*, 89.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. *Propositio* 50.

will take care to ensure your ongoing formation so that it can contribute to the exercise of your ministry.¹⁷⁰ Like Saint Stephen, Saint Lawrence and Saint Vincent, deacons and martyrs, seek to recognize and encounter Christ in the Eucharist and in the poor. This service of the altar and of charity will make you look forward to encountering the Lord present on the altar and in the poor. You will then be capable of giving your life for him even to death.

V. CONSECRATED PERSONS

117. Through the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, the life of consecrated persons becomes a prophetic witness. Hence they can be examples in the area of reconciliation, justice and peace, even in circumstances marked by great tension.¹⁷¹ Community life shows us that it is possible to live as brothers and sisters, and to be united even when coming from different ethnic or racial backgrounds (cf. *Ps* 133:1). It can and must enable people to see and believe that today in Africa, those men and women who follow Christ Jesus find in him the secret of living happily together: mutual love and fraternal communion, strengthened daily by the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours.

118. Dear consecrated persons, may you continue to live your charism with truly apostolic zeal

¹⁷⁰ Cf. *Propositio* 41.

¹⁷¹ Cf. *Propositio* 42.

in the different fields indicated by your founders or foundresses! Thus you will be all the more vigilant in keeping your lamps alight! Your founders and foundresses wanted to follow Christ truly and respond to his call. The different good works that came about as a result are gems that adorn the Church.¹⁷² You must therefore carry them on by following as faithfully as possible the charism of your founders, their ideas and their vision. Here I would like to emphasize the important role of consecrated persons in the life of the Church and in her missionary endeavour. They are a necessary and precious aid to the Church's pastoral activity but also a manifestation of the deepest nature of our Christian vocation.¹⁷³ For this reason I invite you, dear consecrated persons, to continue in close communion with the local Church and with its head, the bishop. I also invite you to strengthen your communion with the Bishop of Rome.

119. Africa is the cradle of the Christian contemplative life. Present from earliest times in North Africa, especially in Egypt and Ethiopia, it took root in sub-Saharan Africa during the last century. May the Lord bless the men and women who have decided to follow him unconditionally! Their hidden life is like leaven in the dough. Their constant prayer will sustain the apostolic efforts

¹⁷² Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 46.

¹⁷³ Cf. ID., Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 18.

of the bishops, priests, other consecrated persons, catechists and of the entire Church.

120. The meetings of the different National Conferences of Major Superiors and those of COMSAM help pool your reflections and resources, not only in order to pursue the goals of the various Institutes, while preserving their autonomy, character and individual spirit, but also to help deal with common concerns in a climate of fraternity and solidarity. It is fitting to foster an ecclesial spirit based on a sound coordination and proper cooperation with the Bishops' Conferences.

VI. SEMINARIANS

121. The Synod Fathers gave particular attention to seminarians. Without neglecting theological and spiritual formation, which are obviously primary, they emphasized the importance of the psychological and human growth of each candidate. Future priests must develop a correct understanding of their own culture while not being locked within their own ethnic and cultural limits.¹⁷⁴ They must become ever more deeply rooted in Gospel values so as to strengthen their commitment in faithfulness and devotion to Christ. The fruitfulness of their future mission will greatly depend on their profound union with Christ, on the quality of their life of prayer and their interior

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *Propositio* 40.

life, and on the human, spiritual and moral values assimilated during their time of formation. May all seminarians become men of God who seek and practise “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness” (1 *Tim* 6:11).

122. “Seminarians must learn to live in community in such a way that the common life may later lead to an authentic experience of the priesthood as close priestly fraternity.”¹⁷⁵ The seminary staff and formators will work together, following the bishops’ indications, to guarantee an integral formation of the seminarians entrusted to them. In selecting candidates, careful discernment and quality guidance must be ensured, so that those admitted to the priesthood will be true disciples of Christ and authentic servants of the Church. Care should be taken to initiate them in the unlimited richness of the Church’s biblical, theological, spiritual, liturgical, moral and juridical patrimony.

123. At the conclusion of the Year for Priests, in June 2010, I wrote a letter to seminarians,¹⁷⁶ in which I dealt with the identity, spirituality and apostolate of the priest. I heartily recommend that each seminarian read and meditate on this brief document directed to him personally; formators will make the text readily available. The seminary represents a time of preparation for the priesthood, a time of study. It is a time of discernment,

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Cf. *Letter to Seminarians* (18 October 2010): *L’Osservatore Romano* (18-19 October 2010), p. 12.

formation and human and spiritual development. May seminarians use wisely this time which is provided for them to build up the spiritual and human resources from which they will draw throughout their priestly life.

124. Dear seminarians, be apostles of the young people of your own generation by inviting them to follow Christ in the priestly life. Do not be afraid! The prayer of many people accompanies and sustains you (cf. *Mt* 9:37-38).

VII. CATECHISTS

125. Catechists are invaluable pastoral agents in the mission of evangelization. Their role was very important during the first evangelization, the preparation of catechumens and the direction and support of communities. “In a natural way they brought about a successful inculturation that has produced marvellous fruits (cf. *Mk* 4:20). Catechists have allowed their ‘light to shine before men’ (*Mt* 5:16), because seeing the good that they do, whole populations were able to give glory to our Father in heaven. Indeed, Africans have evangelized Africans.”¹⁷⁷ This role, so important in the past, remains essential for the present and the future of the Church. I thank them for their love of the Church.

¹⁷⁷ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to Members of the Special Council for Africa of the Synod of Bishops* (Yaoundé, 19 March 2009): *AAS* 101 (2009), 311-312.

126. I urge bishops and priests to be concerned for the human, intellectual, doctrinal, moral, spiritual and pastoral formation of catechists. They should pay great attention to the living conditions of catechists,¹⁷⁸ in order to ensure their dignity. Nor should they overlook their legitimate material needs, since the faithful worker in the Lord's vineyard has a right to a just recompense (cf. *Mt* 20:1-16), while awaiting their due from the Lord, for he alone is just and knows our hearts.

127. Dear catechists, remember that for many communities you are the first embodiment of the zealous disciple and a model of Christian life. I encourage you to proclaim, by your example, that family life merits great esteem, that a Christian upbringing prepares young people to live in society as persons who are honest and trustworthy in their dealings with others. Be welcoming to all without discrimination: rich and poor, native and foreign, Catholic and non-Catholic (cf. *Jas* 2:1). Do not show partiality (cf. *Acts* 10:34; *Rom* 2:11; *Gal* 2:6; *Eph* 6:9). By your own assimilation of sacred Scripture and the teachings of the magisterium you will be able to offer solid catechesis, guide prayer groups and propose *lectio divina* to the communities in your care. Your activity will then become consistent, persevering and a source of inspiration. As I gratefully evoke the glorious

¹⁷⁸ Cf. *Propositio* 44; JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (14 September 1995), 91, *AAS* 88 (1996), 57.

memories of your predecessors, I salute all of you and I encourage you to toil today with the same selflessness, the same apostolic courage and the same faith. By striving to be faithful to your mission, you will contribute not only to your own holiness, but also in an effective way, to building up the Body of Christ, the Church.

VIII. LAY PEOPLE

128. Through her lay members, the Church is present and active in the world. Lay people have an important role to play in the Church and in society. To enable them properly to take up this role, it is fitting that centres of biblical, spiritual, liturgical and pastoral formation be organized in the dioceses. It is my heartfelt desire that lay people with responsibility in the political, economic and social fields be equipped with a solid knowledge of the Church's social doctrine, which can provide them with principles for acting in conformity with the Gospel. Lay men and women, in fact, are "ambassadors of Christ" (2 *Cor* 5:20) in the public sphere, in the heart of the world!¹⁷⁹ Their Christian witness will be credible only if they are competent and honest professional people.

129. Lay men and women are called, above all, to holiness, a holiness which is to be lived in the

¹⁷⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 15 and 17: *AAS* 81 (1989), 413-416 and 418-421.

world. Dear members of the faithful: cultivate your interior life and your relationship with God, so that the Holy Spirit may enlighten you in all circumstances. In order to ensure that the human person and the common good remain effectively at the centre of all human, political, economic or social activity, deepen your union with Christ, so as to know and love him by devoting time to God in prayer and in the reception of the sacraments. Allow yourselves to be enlightened and instructed by God and by his word.

130. I would like to dwell again on the distinctive feature of a Christian's professional life. In a word, it means bearing witness to Christ in the world by showing, through your example, that work can be a very positive setting for personal development and not primarily a means of making profit. Your work enables you to participate in the work of creation and to serve your brothers and sisters. Acting in this way, you will be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world", as the Lord asks of us. In daily life, put into practice the preferential option for the poor, whatever your position in society, in accordance with the spirit of the Beatitudes (cf. *Mt* 5:3-12), so as to see in them the face of Jesus who calls you to serve him (cf. *Mt* 25:31-46).

131. It can be helpful for you to form associations in order to continue shaping your Christian conscience and supporting one another in the struggle for justice and peace. The *Small Christian*

Communities (SCCs) and the “new communities”¹⁸⁰ are fundamental structures for fanning the flame of your Baptism. Bring your areas of competence to the life and activity of the Catholic universities, which continue to grow following the recommendations of the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*.¹⁸¹ I also encourage you to have an active and courageous presence in the areas of political life, culture, the arts, the media and various associations. Do not be hesitant or ashamed about this presence, but be proud of it and conscious of the valuable contribution it can offer to the common good!

¹⁸⁰ *Propositio* 37.

¹⁸¹ No. 103: *AAS* 88 (1996), 62-63.

CHAPTER II

MAJOR AREAS OF THE APOSTOLATE

132. The Lord has entrusted us with a specific mission, and he has not left us without the means of accomplishing it. Not only has he granted each of us personal gifts for the building up of his Body which is the Church, but he has also granted the whole ecclesial community particular gifts which enable it to carry out its mission. His supreme gift is the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit we form one Body and “only in the power of the Holy Spirit can we discover what is right and then do it”.¹⁸² Certain means are needed if we are to act, yet these remain insufficient unless God himself disposes us to cooperate in his work of reconciliation through “our ability to think, to speak, to listen and to act”.¹⁸³ Thanks to the Holy Spirit, we become truly “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (*Mt* 5:13-14).

¹⁸² BENEDICT XVI, *Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. Meditation during Terce* (5 October 2009): *AAS* 101 (2009), 920.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

I. THE CHURCH AS THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

133. The Church is “in Christ, a sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race”.¹⁸⁴ As the community of Christ’s disciples, we are able to make visible and share the love of God. Love “is the light – and in the end, the only light – that can always illuminate a world grown dim and grant us the courage needed to keep living and working”.¹⁸⁵ This is clearly seen in the universal Church, in dioceses and parishes, in the SCCs,¹⁸⁶ in movements and associations, and even in the Christian family itself, which is “called to be a ‘domestic church’, a place of faith, of prayer and of loving concern for the true and enduring good of each of its members”,¹⁸⁷ a community which lives the sign of peace.¹⁸⁸ Together with the parish, the SCCs and the movements and associations can be helpful places for accepting and living the gift of reconciliation offered by Christ our peace. Each member of the community must become a “guardian and host” to the other: this is

¹⁸⁴ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

¹⁸⁵ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005), 39: *AAS* 98 (2006), 250.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. *Propositio* 35.

¹⁸⁷ BENEDICT XVI, *Homily in Nazareth* (14 May 2009): *AAS* 101 (2009), 480.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. ID., Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007), 49: *AAS* 99 (2007), 143.

the meaning of the sign of peace in the celebration of the Eucharist.¹⁸⁹

II. THE WORLD OF EDUCATION

134. Catholic schools are a precious resource for learning from childhood how to create bonds of peace and harmony in society, since they train children in the African values that are taken up by those of the Gospel. I encourage bishops and institutes of consecrated persons to enable children of the proper age to receive schooling: this is a matter of justice for each child and indeed the future of Africa depends on it. Christians, and young people in particular, should study the educational sciences with a view to passing down knowledge full of truth: not mere know-how but genuine knowledge of life, inspired by a Christian consciousness shaped by the Church's social doctrine. It will also be fitting to ensure that personnel in the Church's educational institutions, and indeed all Church personnel, receive just remuneration, in order to strengthen the Church's credibility.

135. Given the great ferment of peoples, cultures and religions which marks our age, Catholic universities and academic institutions play an essential role in the patient, rigorous and humble search for the light which comes from Truth. Only a truth capable of transcending human standards of measure, conditioned by their own

¹⁸⁹ Cf. *Propositio* 36.

limitations, brings peace to individuals and reconciliation to societies. For this reason, it would help to establish new Catholic universities wherever these do not yet exist. Dear brothers and sisters in Catholic universities and academic institutions, it falls to you, on the one hand, to shape the minds and hearts of the younger generation in the light of the Gospel and, on the other, to help African societies better to understand the challenges confronting them today by providing Africa, through your research and analyses, with the light she needs.

136. The mission which the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* entrusted to Catholic institutions of higher education is as pertinent as ever. In it my blessed predecessor wrote: “The Catholic Universities and Higher Institutes in Africa have a prominent role to play in the proclamation of the salvific Word of God. They are a sign of the growth of the Church insofar as their research integrates the truths and experiences of the faith and helps to internalize them. They serve the Church by providing trained personnel, by studying important theological and social questions for the benefit of the Church, by developing an African theology, by promoting the work of inculturation, by publishing books and publicizing Catholic truth, by undertaking assignments given by the bishops and by contributing to the scientific study of cultures. Catholic cultural centres offer to the Church the possibility of presence and action in

the field of cultural exchange. They constitute in effect public forums which allow the Church to make widely known, in creative dialogue, Christian convictions about man, woman, family, work, economy, society, politics, international life, the environment. Thus they are places of listening, respect and tolerance.”¹⁹⁰ Bishops will take care that these institutions of higher education maintain their Catholic identity by always moving in directions faithful to the teaching of the Church’s magisterium.

137. In order to make a solid and proper contribution to African society, it is indispensable that students be taught the Church’s social doctrine. This will help the Church in Africa serenely to prepare a pastoral plan which speaks to the heart of Africans and enables them to be reconciled to themselves by following Christ. Once again, it is up to bishops to support a pastoral outreach to the life of the intellect and reason so as to foster a habit of rational dialogue and critical analysis within society and in the Church. As I said in Yaoundé: “Perhaps this century will permit, by God’s grace, the rebirth on your continent, albeit surely in a new and different form, of the prestigious School of Alexandria. Why should we not hope that it could furnish today’s Africans and the universal Church with great theologians and spiritual masters who could contribute to the sanctification

¹⁹⁰ No. 103: *AAS* 88 (1996), 62-63.

of the inhabitants of this continent and of the whole Church?”¹⁹¹

138. It is good that bishops support chaplaincies within the Church’s universities and schools, and establish them in their public counterparts. The chapel will be, as it were, the heart of those institutions. It will enable students to encounter God and to stand in his sight. It will also allow the chaplain, who should be carefully selected for his priestly virtues, to exercise his pastoral ministry of teaching and sanctification.

III. THE WORLD OF HEALTH CARE

139. The Church has always been concerned with health. She follows the example of Christ himself who proclaimed the word and healed the sick, and then gave his disciples the same authority “to heal every disease and every infirmity” (*Mt* 10:1; cf. 14:35; *Mk* 1:32, 34; 6:13, 55). Through her health care institutions the Church continues to show this same concern for the sick and for all who suffer. As the Synod Fathers stressed, the Church is resolutely engaged in the fight against infirmities, disease and the great pandemics.¹⁹²

140. The Church’s health care institutions and all their personnel should strive to see in each sick

¹⁹¹ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to Members of the Special Council for Africa of the Synod of Bishops* (Yaoundé, 19 March 2009): *AAS* 101 (2009), 312.

¹⁹² Cf. *Final Message*, 31.

person a suffering member of Christ's Body. Difficulties of every kind rise up along the way: the growing numbers of the sick, inadequate material and financial resources, the withdrawal of support by organizations which had helped you for years and are now abandoning you; at times all this can give you the impression that your work produces no tangible results. Dear healthcare workers, bring Jesus' compassionate love to those who suffer! Be patient, stand firm and do not lose heart! As far as pandemics are concerned, while financial and material resources remain indispensable, seek also constantly to form and inform people, especially the young.¹⁹³

141. Health care institutions need to be managed in compliance with the Church's ethical norms, providing services which conform to her teaching and are exclusively pro-life. They must not become a source of enrichment for a few. The management of grant monies must aim at transparency and primarily serve the good of the sick. Finally, each health care institution ought to have a chapel, the presence of which will remind all who work there (management, staff, physicians and nurses), as well as the sick themselves, that God alone is the Lord of life and death. It would also be fitting to increase, to the extent possible, the number of smaller dispensaries which provide local care and emergency aid.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

IV. THE WORLD OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATIONS

142. The Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* saw the modern media not only as means of communication, but themselves a world to be evangelized.¹⁹⁴ The media should stand at the service of an authentic communication, which is a priority in Africa, since they are a significant force for the development of the continent¹⁹⁵ and for evangelization. “The media can make an important contribution towards the growth in communion of the human family and the *ethos* of society when they are used to promote universal participation in the common search for what is just.”¹⁹⁶

143. Everyone knows that the new information technologies are capable of being powerful instruments for unity and peace, but also for destruction and division. From a moral standpoint they can offer either a service or a disservice, propagate truth as well as falsehood, propose what is base as well as what is beautiful. The flood of news or non-news, to say nothing of images, can be informative but also powerfully manipulative. Information can readily become disinformation, and formation deformation. The media can be a

¹⁹⁴ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (14 September 1995), 124: *AAS* 88 (1996), 72-73.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. *Propositio* 56.

¹⁹⁶ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 73: *AAS* 101 (2009), 705.

force for authentic humanization, but just as easily prove dehumanizing.

144. The media can avoid this danger if “they are geared towards a vision of the person and the common good that reflects truly universal values. Just because social communications increase the possibilities of interconnection and the dissemination of ideas, it does not follow that they promote freedom or internationalize development and democracy for all. To achieve goals of this kind, they need to focus on promoting the dignity of persons and peoples; they need to be clearly inspired by charity and placed at the service of truth, of the good, and of natural and supernatural fraternity.”¹⁹⁷

145. The Church needs to be increasingly present in the media so as to make them not only a tool for the spread of the Gospel but also for educating the African peoples to reconciliation in truth, and the promotion of justice and peace. A solid formation in ethics and truthfulness will help journalists to avoid the attraction of the sensational, as well as the temptation to manipulate information and to make easy money. Christian journalists should not be afraid to show their faith! They should be proud of it! The presence and activity of competent lay faithful in the world of public and private communications should also be encouraged. Like leaven in the dough, they will

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 73: *AAS* 101 (2009), 704-705.

continue to testify to the positive and constructive contribution which the teaching of Christ and his Church makes to the world.

146. In this way, the decision of the First Special Assembly for Africa to consider communications as a major axis of evangelization has proved fruitful for the development of Catholic media. It would perhaps also be suitable to coordinate existing structures, as is already being done in certain areas. Such an improvement in the use of media will contribute to a greater promotion of the values upheld at the Synod: peace, justice and reconciliation in Africa,¹⁹⁸ and will enable the continent to share in the present development of the world.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. *Propositio* 56.

CHAPTER III
“STAND UP, TAKE YOUR MAT
AND WALK!”

(*Jn* 5:8)

I. JESUS’ TEACHING AT THE POOL OF BETHZATHA

147. Dear brother bishops, dear sons and daughters of Africa, after having reviewed the principal actions and some of the means which the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops proposed for carrying out the Church’s mission, I would like to return to certain points to which I have already alluded.

148. The fifth chapter of Saint John’s Gospel presents a striking scene: the pool of Bethzatha, with its five porticoes in which “lay many invalids – blind, lame, and paralyzed” (v. 3). This is the setting for the healing about to take place. “One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years” (v. 5), but had no one to put him into the pool. Then Jesus walks into his life. Everything changes as soon as Jesus says to him: “Stand up, take your mat and walk!” (v. 8). “At once”, the evangelist tells us, “the man was healed” (v. 9). He no longer needed the water of the pool.

149. By accepting Jesus, Africa can receive incomparably effective and deep healing. Echoing the Apostle Peter in the *Acts of the Apostles* (3:6), I repeat: what Africa needs most is neither gold nor silver; she wants to stand up, like the man at the pool of Bethzatha; she wants to have confidence in herself and in her dignity as a people loved by her God. It is this encounter with Jesus which the Church must offer to bruised and wounded hearts yearning for reconciliation and peace, and thirsting for justice. We must provide and proclaim the word of Christ which heals, sets free and reconciles.

II. THE WORD OF GOD AND THE SACRAMENTS

A. THE SACRED SCRIPTURES

150. According to Saint Jerome, “ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ”.¹⁹⁹ Reading and meditating on the word of God not only gives us “the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus” (*Phil* 3:8), but also roots us more deeply in Christ and guides our service of reconciliation, justice and peace. The celebration of the Eucharist, whose first part is the Liturgy of the Word, is its source and summit. For this reason, I recommend that the biblical apostolate be promoted in each Christian community, in the family and in the ecclesial movements.

¹⁹⁹ *Commentarium in Isaiam prophetam, Prologus*: PL 24, 17.

151. Each member of Christ's faithful should grow accustomed to reading the Bible daily! An attentive reading of the recent Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* can provide some useful pastoral indications. Care should be taken to initiate the faithful into the ancient and fruitful tradition of *lectio divina*. The word of God can lead to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and bring about conversions which produce reconciliation, since it is able to sift "the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (*Heb* 4:12). The Synod Fathers encouraged Christian parish communities, SCCs, families and associations and ecclesial movements to set aside times for sharing the word of God.²⁰⁰ In this way, they will increasingly become places where God's word, which builds up the community of Christ's disciples, is read, meditated on and celebrated. This word constantly enlivens fraternal communion (cf. *1 Pet* 1:22-25).

B. THE EUCHARIST

152. The most effective means for building a reconciled, just and peaceful society is a life of profound communion with God and with others. The table of the Lord gathers together men and women of different origins, cultures, races, languages and ethnic groups. Thanks to the Body and Blood of Christ, they become truly one. In the eucharistic Christ, they become blood

²⁰⁰ Cf. *Propositio* 46.

relations and thus true brothers and sisters, thanks to the word and to the Body and Blood of the same Jesus Christ. This bond of fraternity is stronger than that of human families, than that of our tribes. “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (*Rom* 8:29). The example of Jesus enables them to love one another and to give their lives for one another, since the love by which one is loved is meant to be shared in deed and in truth.²⁰¹ Consequently, the community celebration of Sunday, *the Lord’s Day*, and holydays of obligation is indispensable.

153. I do not intend to present here a theological treatise on the Eucharist. In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* I had traced some of its main lines. Here I exhort the whole Church in Africa to show particular care for the celebration of the Eucharist, memorial of the sacrifice of Christ Jesus, sign of unity and bond of charity, paschal banquet and pledge of eternal life. The Eucharist should be celebrated with dignity and beauty, in compliance with the established norms. Eucharistic adoration, individually and in community, will lead to a deeper appreciation of this great mystery. Along these

²⁰¹ BENEDICT XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007), 82: *AAS* 99 (2007), 168-169; ID., Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005), 14: *AAS* 98 (2006), 228-229.

lines, a continental Eucharistic Congress could be celebrated. This would bolster the effort of Christians to testify to the fundamental values of communion in every African society.²⁰²

154. To ensure respect for the eucharistic mystery, the Synod Fathers recalled that churches and chapels are sacred places, to be used solely for liturgical celebrations, avoiding to the extent possible that they become simply places for socializing or cultural spaces. There is a need to stress their primary function, which is that of being a privileged place of encounter between God and his people, between God and his faithful creature. There is also a need to ensure that the architecture of these sacred edifices is worthy of the mystery they celebrate and in conformity with ecclesiastical legislation and local style. They should be built under the responsibility of the bishops, after the opinion of persons competent in liturgy and architecture has been heard. May it be said upon entering them: “Surely the Lord is in this place... This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (*Gen* 28:16-17)! They will also fulfil their purpose if they help the community, reborn in the Eucharist and the other sacraments, to prolong the celebration in the life of society by perpetuating the example of Christ himself

²⁰² Cf. *Propositio* 8.

(cf. *Jn* 13:15).²⁰³ This “eucharistic consistency”²⁰⁴ challenges every Christian conscience (cf. *1 Cor* 11:17-22).

C. RECONCILIATION

155. To help African societies heal the wounds of division and hatred, the Synod Fathers urged the Church to remember that she bears within herself the same wounds and pain. Hence, she too needs the Lord’s healing, so that she can credibly bear witness that the sacrament of Reconciliation binds up and heals wounded hearts. This sacrament mends the broken bonds between individuals and God, and restores bonds within society. It also trains our hearts and our spirits to live in “unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind” (*1 Pet* 3:8).

156. Here I would recall the importance of individual confession, which no other act of reconciliation or any paraliturgy can replace. I encourage all the Church’s faithful, clergy, consecrated persons and laity, to restore to its true place the sacrament of Reconciliation in its twofold dimension, personal and communitarian.²⁰⁵ Communities lacking priests because of great distances or for any other reason can experience the ecclesial character of Penance and Reconciliation through non-sacramental forms. In this way, Christians in

²⁰³ Cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007), 51: *AAS* 99 (2007), 144.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 83: *AAS* 99 (2007), 169.

²⁰⁵ Cf. *Propositio* 5.

irregular situations can also share in the Church's penitential journey. As the Synod Fathers pointed out, the non-sacramental form of Penance can be considered a means of preparing the faithful for a fruitful reception of the sacrament,²⁰⁶ but it can never become a regular norm, much less a substitute for the sacrament itself. I warmly encourage priests to experience this sacrament in their own lives and to make themselves readily available for its celebration.

157. In order to encourage reconciliation in communities, I heartily recommend, as did the Synod Fathers, that each country celebrate yearly "a day or week of reconciliation, particularly during Advent or Lent".²⁰⁷ SECAM will be able to help bring this about and, in accord with the Holy See, promote a continent-wide *Year of Reconciliation* to beg of God special forgiveness for all the evils and injuries mutually inflicted in Africa, and for the reconciliation of persons and groups who have been hurt in the Church and in the whole of society.²⁰⁸ This would be an extraordinary Jubilee Year "during which the Church in Africa and in the neighbouring islands gives thanks with the universal Church and explores the gifts of the Holy Spirit",²⁰⁹ especially the gift of reconciliation, justice and peace.

²⁰⁶ Cf. *Propositio* 6; JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Poenitentia* (2 December 1984), 23: *AAS* 77 (1985), 233-235.

²⁰⁷ *Propositio* 8.

²⁰⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

158. For these celebrations, it would be helpful to follow the advice of the Synod Fathers: “May the memory of the great witnesses who gave their lives in service of the Gospel and the common good, or for the defence of truth and human rights, be kept alive and faithfully recalled”.²¹⁰ For the saints are the true stars of our life, those “who have lived good lives. They are lights of hope. Certainly, Jesus Christ is the true light, the sun that has risen above all the shadows of history. But to reach him we also need lights close by – people who shine with his light and so guide us along our way.”²¹¹

III. THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

159. Before concluding this document, I would like to return once more to the task facing the Church in Africa: commitment to evangelization, to the *missio ad gentes*, and to the new evangelization, so that the features of the African continent will increasingly be modelled on the ever timely teaching of Christ, the true “light of the world” and the authentic “salt of the earth”.

A. BEARERS OF CHRIST, “THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD”

160. The urgent work of evangelization is carried out in different ways in accordance with the

²¹⁰ *Propositio* 9.

²¹¹ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* (30 November 2007), 49: *AAS* 99 (2007), 1025.

diverse situations of each country. “In its precise sense, evangelization is the *missio ad gentes* directed to those who do not know Christ. In a wider sense, it is used to describe ordinary pastoral work, while the phrase ‘new evangelization’ designates pastoral outreach to those who no longer practise the Christian faith.”²¹² Only an evangelization inspired by the power of the Holy Spirit can become “the new law of the Gospel” and bear spiritual fruit.²¹³ The heart of all evangelizing activity is the proclamation of the person of Jesus, the incarnate Word of God (cf. *Jn* 1:14) who died and rose again and is ever present in the community of the faithful, his Church (cf. *Mt* 28:20). This is a pressing task not only for Africa, but for the whole world, since the mission which Christ the Redeemer entrusted to his Church is not yet fully accomplished.

161. “The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (*Mk* 1:1) is the sure path to an encounter with the person of the Lord Jesus. Searching the Scriptures enables us increasingly to discover the true face of Jesus, the revelation of God the Father (cf. *Jn* 12:45), and his saving work. “Rediscovering the centrality of the divine word in the Christian life leads us to appreciate anew the deepest meaning of the forceful appeal of Pope John Paul II:

²¹² CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization* (3 December 2007), 12: *AAS* 100 (2008), 501.

²¹³ Cf. SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 106, a. 1.

to pursue the *missio ad gentes* and vigorously to embark upon the new evangelization.”²¹⁴

162. Led by the Holy Spirit, the Church in Africa must proclaim the mystery of salvation – by living it – to those who have not yet learned of it. The Holy Spirit whom Christians received in Baptism is the fire of love impelling us to the work of evangelization. After Pentecost, the disciples, “filled with the Holy Spirit” (*Acts* 2:4), went forth from the Upper Room, where they had taken refuge out of fear, and proclaimed the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Pentecost event enables us better to understand the mission of Christians as “the light of the world” and “the salt of the earth” on the African continent. It is the property of light to be diffused and to shine on our many brothers and sisters who are still in darkness. The *missio ad gentes* calls for commitment on the part of all Africa’s Christians. Impelled by the Spirit, they bring Jesus Christ, “the light of the world”, to every place on the continent and to all the areas of personal, family and social life. The Synod Fathers emphasized “the urgent need for evangelization, which is the mission and the true identity of the Church”.²¹⁵

B. WITNESSES OF THE RISEN CHRIST

163. Today too, the Lord Jesus exhorts the Christians of Africa to proclaim in his name “re-

²¹⁴ BENEDICT XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (30 September 2010), 122: *AAS* 102 (2010), 785.

²¹⁵ *Propositio* 34.

penitance and forgiveness of sins to all nations” (Lk 24:47). For this reason, they are called to be witnesses of the Risen Lord (cf. Lk 24:48). The Synod Fathers insisted that evangelization “essentially consists in bearing witness to Christ in the power of the Spirit by one’s life, then by one’s words, in a spirit of openness and respectful dialogue with others, while holding fast to the values of the Gospel”.²¹⁶ In the case of the Church in Africa, this witness needs to be at the service of reconciliation, justice and peace.

164. The proclamation of the Gospel must recover the ardour of the beginnings of the evangelization of the African continent, attributed to the evangelist Mark and carried on by “countless saints, martyrs, confessors and virgins”.²¹⁷ There is a need gratefully to remember and imitate the enthusiasm of so many missionaries who, over the course of several centuries, sacrificed their lives to bring the Good News to their brothers and sisters in Africa. In recent years the Church in different countries has commemorated the hundredth anniversary of evangelization. She has rightly renewed her commitment to bring the Gospel to those who do not yet know the name of Jesus Christ.

165. If this effort is to be more effective, the *missio ad gentes* must keep pace with the new

²¹⁶ *Ibid*; cf. PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 21: *AAS* 68 (1976), 19-20.

²¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (14 September 1995), 31: *AAS* 88 (1996), 21.

evangelization. In Africa too, situations demanding a new presentation of the Gospel, “new in its ardour, methods and expression”,²¹⁸ are not rare. In particular, the new evangelization needs to integrate the intellectual dimension of the faith into the living experience of the encounter with Jesus Christ present and at work in the ecclesial community. 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. Catechesis must therefore integrate its theoretical dimension, which deals with concepts to be learned by heart, and its practical dimension, which is experienced at the liturgical, spiritual, ecclesial, cultural and charitable levels, in order that the seed of God’s word, once fallen on fertile ground, can sink deep roots and grow to maturity.

166. For this to happen, it is essential to employ new methods available to us today. With regard to the means of social communication, of which I have already spoken, I would recall an observation which I recently made in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*: “Saint Thomas, citing Saint Augustine, insists that ‘the letter, even that of the Gospel, would kill, were there not the grace of healing faith’.”²¹⁹ With this in mind, it should also be constantly kept in mind

²¹⁸ ID., *Address to the Members of the Latin American Episcopal Council* (9 March 1983): *AAS* 75 (1983), 778.

²¹⁹ Cf. No. 29: *AAS* 102 (2010), 708.

that no medium can nor should replace personal contact, verbal proclamation and the witness of an authentic Christian life. Such personal contact and verbal proclamation need to express a living faith which engages and transforms one's life, as well as the love of God which reaches and touches everyone just as he or she is.

C. MISSIONARIES IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF CHRIST

167. The pilgrim Church in Africa is also called to contribute to the new evangelization in secularized countries which once provided numerous missionaries but are today sadly lacking in vocations to the priesthood and to the consecrated life. In the meantime, great numbers of African men and women have accepted the invitation of the Lord of the harvest (cf. *Mt* 9:37-38) to work in his vineyard (cf. *Mt* 20:1-16). 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.

168. The proclamation of the Good News gives birth within the Church to new expressions fitted

to the needs of our times, cultures and expectations. In Africa too, the Holy Spirit is constantly raising up men and women who, gathered in various associations, movements and communities, devote their lives to the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the light of Saint Paul's admonition: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets; but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil" (*1 Th* 5:19-22), pastors have the duty to ensure that these new expressions of the perennial fruitfulness of the Gospel are integrated into the pastoral activity of parishes and dioceses.

169. Dear brothers and sisters, the theme of the Second Special Assembly for Africa reminds us that the new evangelization is especially concerned with the Church's service to reconciliation, justice and peace. Thus, there is a need to welcome the grace of the Holy Spirit who bids us: "be reconciled to God" (*2 Cor* 5:20). All Christians are admonished to be reconciled to God. In this way you will become agents of reconciliation within the ecclesial and social communities in which you live and work. The new evangelization presumes that Christians are reconciled with God and with one another. It demands that we be reconciled with our neighbours, and that we overcome every kind of barrier, including those arising from language, culture and race. All of us are children of one God and Father, who "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (*Mt* 5:45).

170. God will bless a reconciled heart by granting it his peace. Christians will thus become peacemakers (cf. *Mt* 5:9) to the extent that, grounded in divine grace, they cooperate with their Maker in creating and fostering the gift of peace. As reconciled men and women, the faithful will also promote justice everywhere, especially in African societies divided and threatened by violence and war, yet hungering and thirsting for true justice. The Lord invites us: “Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (*Mt* 6:33).

171. The new evangelization is an urgent task for Christians in Africa because they too need to reawaken their enthusiasm for being members of the Church. Guided by the Spirit of the risen Lord, they are called to live the Good News as individuals, in their families and in society, and to proclaim it with fresh zeal to persons near and far, using the new methods that divine Providence has placed at our disposal for its spread. In praising God the Father for the wonders which he continues to work in his Church and in each of her members, the faithful are called to fan into a flame their Christian vocation in fidelity to the living ecclesial Tradition. Open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit who continues to awaken different charisms in the Church, Christians must pursue or undertake with determination the path of holiness, and thus increasingly become apostles of reconciliation, justice and peace.

CONCLUSION

“TAKE HEART; RISE, HE IS CALLING”

(*Mk* 10:49)

172. Dear brothers and sisters, the final word of the Synod was a summons to hope addressed to Africa. This summons will be vain unless it is rooted in the love of the Blessed Trinity. From God, the *Father* of all, we receive the *mission* of passing on to Africa the love with which Christ, the firstborn *Son* has loved us, so that our *activity*, impelled by his *Holy Spirit*, may be guided by hope and become a source of hope. While earnestly desiring to help implement the directives of the Synod on such burning issues as reconciliation, justice and peace, I express my trust that “theologians will continue to probe the depths of the trinitarian mystery and its meaning for everyday African life”.²²⁰ Since the vocation of all men and women is one, we must not lose our zest for the reconciliation of humanity with God through the mystery of our salvation in Christ. Our redemption is the reason for the confidence and the firmness of our hope, “by virtue of which we can face

²²⁰ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the Members of the Special Council of the Synod for Africa of the Synod of Bishops* (Yaoundé, 19 March 2009): *AAS* 101 (2009), 312.

our present: the present, even if it is arduous, can be loved and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey”.²²¹

173. Once more I say: “Get up, Church in Africa... because you are being called by the heavenly Father, whom your ancestors invoked as Creator even before knowing his merciful closeness revealed in his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Set out on the path of a new evangelization with the courage that comes to you from the Holy Spirit.”²²²

174. Evangelization today takes the name of reconciliation, “an indispensable condition for instilling in Africa justice among men and women, and building a fair and lasting peace that respects each individual and all peoples; a peace that... is open to the contribution of all people of good will irrespective of their religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds.”²²³ May the entire Catholic Church accompany with affection her brothers and sisters of the African continent! May the saints of Africa sustain them by their prayer of intercession!²²⁴

²²¹ Id., Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* (30 November 2007), 1: *AAS* 99 (2007), 985.

²²² Id., *Homily at the Final Mass of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops* (25 October 2009): *AAS* 101 (2009), 918.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

175. May “Saint Joseph, the good master of his house, who personally knows what it means to consider, attentively and hopefully, the future paths of the family, [and who] lovingly heard us and ushered us into the Synod itself”,²²⁵ protect and accompany the Church in her mission in service of Africa, the land where he found refuge and protection for the Holy Family (cf. *Mt* 2:13-15)! May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Word of God and Our Lady of Africa, continue to accompany the whole Church by her intercession and her invitation to do whatever her Son tells us (cf. *Jn* 2:5)! May the prayers of Mary, Queen of Peace, whose heart is always inclined to God’s will, sustain every effort at conversion; may she consolidate every initiative of reconciliation and strengthen every endeavour for peace in a world which hungers and thirsts for justice (cf. *Mt* 5:6).²²⁶

176. Dear brothers and sisters, through the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, the Lord in his goodness and mercy urgently reminds you that “you are the salt of the earth ... the light of the world” (*Mt* 5:13-14). 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

²²⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the Roman Curia* (21 December 2009): *AAS* 102 (2010), 34.

²²⁶ Cf. *Propositio* 57.

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.

177. May the Catholic Church in Africa always be one of the spiritual lungs of humanity, and become daily an ever greater blessing for the noble African continent and for the entire world.

Given at Ouidah, in Benin, on 19 November, in the year 2011, the seventh of my Pontificate.

Benedictus PP XVI

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(*Rev* 21:5) [14]

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