

Key Ideas and Principal Themes of "Africae Munus" Exhortation

Given below is a summary, prepared by Archbishop Nicola Eterovic, secretary general of the Synod of Bishops, of the main ideas contained in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Africae munus".



The document has two parts.

Part one (nos. 14-96) discerns the fundamental structures of the ecclesial mission on the continent, a mission which aspires to reconciliation, justice and peace, and has its origin in the person of Jesus Christ. Listening to Him, Christians are invited to let themselves be reconciled with God, becoming just in order to build a just social order in keeping with the logic of the Beatitudes, and committing themselves to fraternal service for love of truth, which is a source of peace. Attention then turns to the paths towards reconciliation, justice and peace. These include authentic conversion, the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance, the spirituality of communion, the inculturation of the Gospel, the protection of life, migrants, displaced persons, refugees, the good governance of States, and ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue especially with traditional religions and Islam.

In part two (nos. 97-177) all members of the Church are invited to contribute to communion and peace in the Church and in society. It also identifies areas for the apostolate: the Church as the presence of Christ, the world of education, health care and the communications media. The Exhortation opens a horizon of hope to Africa which, by welcoming Jesus Christ, must free itself from the forces which paralyze it.

'Africae munus' is the continuation of 'Ecclesia in Africa', which was published after the First Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops and gave great impetus to the growth of the Church in Africa developing, among other things, the idea of the Church as Family of God which has been beneficial to the universal Church. 'Africae munus' aims to reinforce this ecclesial dynamism, to outline a programme for pastoral activity for the coming decades of evangelisation in Africa, underlining the need for reconciliation, justice and peace.

The Church, Sacrament of union with God and man, must be a place of reconciliation, a gift of God, in order to be an effective tool of justice and peace for the whole of society. Reconciliation comes from the mystery of the risen Christ Who is present in His church through the Word of God and the Sacraments, especially those of Penance and the Eucharist. Through the grace of the Spirit, the Eucharist creates a new brotherhood which overcomes languages, cultures, ethnicities, divisions, tribalism, racism and ethnocentrism. In her work of evangelisation and education in the Christian faith, the Church must concentrate on lived catechesis, which leads to profound conversion and to real commitment to live the Gospel at a personal, family and social level. The Social Doctrine of the Church is of great help in sustaining human development.

'Africae munus' offers the Church in Africa practical guidance for pastoral activity over coming decades.

- Evangelisation ad gentes, the announcement of the Gospel to those who still do not know Jesus Christ, is still of vital importance in Africa. It is a pastoral priority which involves all African Christians.

- Ordinary evangelisation must be increasingly promoted in the various particular Churches, through commitment to fostering reconciliation, justice and peace.

- There is also an urgent need to work for the new evangelisation in Africa, especially among people who have distanced themselves from the Church or who do not behave in a Christian fashion. African Christians, and in particular the clergy and consecrated persons, are likewise called to support new evangelisation in secularised nations. This is an exchange of gifts, because African missionaries are already at work in countries which once produced missionaries who went forth to announce the Good News in Africa.

Among the practical suggestions contained in Africae munus, we may note the following:

- Saints, people reconciled with God and neighbour, are exemplary heralds of justice and apostles of peace. The Church - all of whose members are called to sanctity - must discover fresh ardour, the ardour of the many saints and martyrs, confessors and virgins of the African continent, devotion to whom should be renewed and promoted (cf. AM 113).

- In order to find further examples of sanctity, also obtaining new intercessors in heaven, pastors of the particular Churches are encouraged 'to recognize among servants of the Gospel in Africa those who could be canonized according to the norms of the Church' (AM 114).

- The bonds of communion between the Holy Father and the bishops of Africa must be strengthened, as must the bonds among Africa bishops themselves, at the national, regional and continental level.

- It is considered 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' (AM 107).

- For a deeper appreciation of the mystery of the Eucharist and to increase Eucharistic devotion, emphasis is given to the Synod Fathers' proposal to celebrate a continental Eucharistic Congress (cf. AM 153).

- African countries are encouraged to 'celebrate yearly 'a day or week of reconciliation, particularly during Advent or Lent" (AM 157).

- In agreement with the Holy See, SECAM may contribute to promoting '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' (AM 157).

Grateful for the gift of faith in the One Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with renewed enthusiasm the Church in Africa reaffirms her commitment to evangelisation and human development, so that the entire continent may become a vast field of reconciliation, justice and peace. In this way, the Church contributes to forging the new Africa, which is increasingly called to become the 'spiritual lung' of humankind'.