

The 'Great Jubilee of the Year 2000'

By Fr. Bill Turnbull W.F.

This is the first in a series of articles concerning the millennium. There are two major reasons for this series: the fact that this issue of our magazine coincides with the last 'G7 (8) Summit' of the 20th. Century - and the great concern which has been shown by many people for the debt situation of developing countries; and an attempt to see the 'Year 2000' in a Christian perspective, as a 'Holy' or 'Jubilee' year - an occasion for renewal, reconciliation and a starting point to work towards the future, rather than the apocalyptic end of what we know.

THE HISTORY OF THE 'JUBILEE YEAR'

In the Catholic tradition a 'Jubilee' or 'Holy Year' is a time for forgiveness, reconciliation, conversion, hope, justice, service and peace. Such years are opened and closed with solemn ceremonies which mark the time as holy. The aim of these occasions is to help us remember the presence of Christ in our lives and to encourage charity and faith within the Church. Our 'Jubilee' has its origins in the Jewish tradition and the word itself comes from the Hebrew name - 'Yobel' - for the goat's horn which is blown at the year's opening. In the Old Testament the meaning of a 'Jubilee' year may be summed up in the words from Leviticus (25:10, 13 & 17).(see issue no. 343, Dec. '98 - Jan. '99). The commemoration of Christ's birth in the Year 2000 is an ideal occasion for a 'Jubilee'.

'Holy' years began in the 14th. century and they can be either 'ordinary' or 'extraordinary' jubilees. So far there have been twenty five 'ordinary' 'Holy' years which usually fall after the set period of time. An 'extraordinary' 'Jubilee' is usually proclaimed to mark a special occasion and does not necessarily have to follow a full calendar year. They began in the

16th. century and two 'extraordinary' jubilees took place in the 20th. century - in 1933 and 1983. The Year 2000 will be an 'ordinary' 'Holy Year'. (see page 7)

PREPARATION FOR THE 'GREAT JUBILEE' YEAR

The 'Great Year 2000 Jubilee' was established with the Bull 'Incarnationis mysterium' which was proclaimed in St. Peter's on Sunday, 29th. November, 1998. It will officially begin on Christmas night, 1999, and close on 6th. January, 2001. Preparation for the 'Great Jubilee' has been going on within the Church for several years. This has taken many themes but has especially been noticeable in the final three years build up. Two aspects of this which we would like to look at are those of the 'International Debt' situation and 'Interreligious Dialogue'. In the final year of preparation Pope John Paul II has reminded us of the role we all have to play in world affairs. We may think that an individual cannot make much of a difference but as a Church we certainly can: '... if we recall that Jesus came to 'preach the good news to the poor' (Mt 11:5; Lk 7:22), how can we fail to lay greater emphasis on the Church's preferential option for the poor and the outcast? Indeed, it has to be said that a commitment to justice and peace in a world like ours, marked by so many conflicts and intolerable social and economic inequalities, is a necessary condition for the preparation and celebration of the Jubilee. Thus, in the spirit of the Book of Leviticus (25:8-12), Christians will have to raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world, proposing the Jubilee as an appropriate time to give thought, among other things, to reducing substantially, if not cancelling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations.

The Jubilee can also offer an opportunity for reflecting on other challenges of our time, such as the difficulties of dialogue between different cultures and the problems connected with respect for women's rights and the promotion of the family and marriage.' ^[1]

The beginning of the third 'Christian Millennium' is certainly a challenge, maybe even more so than the one we are about to leave. The points which the Pope lays before us certainly show some aspects which are at the fore of the Church's role as a 'voice for the voiceless' with a bias 'for the poor and the outcast'. While preparations for the 'Great Jubilee' have been going on within the Church the true meaning of the 'Year 2000' would appear to have been lost in the 'outside world'. The Christian calendar is widely accepted throughout the world but despite this it should be remembered that the celebration of the millennium only has a deep meaning in Christianity. Having said that, it is encouraging to see how the new millennium has become a focus for people of all religions, and non, to show their concern for the poor. This is reflected in the work of the 'Jubilee 2000' coalition concerning debt (see issue no. 343, Dec. '98 - Jan. '99).

The example given by 'Jubilee 2000' echoes the concerns of Pope John Paul and gives us a practical example of what he calls us to do in the form of 'interreligious dialogue': '... as far as the field of religious awareness is concerned, the eve of the Year 2000 will provide a great opportunity ... for interreligious dialogue, in accordance with the specific

guidelines set down by the Second Vatican Council in its Declaration 'Nostra Aetate' on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions. ... In this dialogue the Jews and the Muslims ought to have a pre-eminent place. God grant that as a confirmation of these intentions it may also be possible to hold joint meetings in places of significance for the great monotheistic religions.' ^[2]

1999 - THE START OF SOMETHING NEW

The first of January each year is designated 'World Day of Peace' and this year was no exception. 1998 had been a year of great economic turmoil, especially for countries in Asia. In the past various economic situations have been a catalyst and have even been the direct causes of wars. We have seen this in the twentieth century and it looks as if the new millennium will begin in the same way. This year the Pope reminded us of the situation in which many people find themselves. There is no escape from 'globalisation', in its many facets, and it affects us all for good as well as bad. The balance between the benefits gained and the suf-

What does the Year 2000 Jubilee mean to the ordinary people of the world?



ferings caused by global economics is difficult to find - and many ideologies have attempted to do so this century. John Paul II says:

'let me state the conviction which I very much want to share with you: when the promotion of the dignity of the person is the guiding principle, and when the search for the common good is the overriding commitment, then solid and lasting foundations for building peace are laid. But when human rights are ignored or scorned, and when the pursuit of individual interests unjustly prevails over the common good, then the seeds of instability, rebellion and violence are inevitably sown.'^[3]

When the 'dignity of the person' is made a basic principle of our dealings with one another then it is possible to move ahead towards 'Global Progress in Solidarity'. Despite all the ills of the millennium we leave behind, we can move into the future with hope in the global concern and unity which has already been formed.

'The effects of the recent economic and financial crises have had heavy consequences for countless people, reduced to conditions of extreme poverty. Many of them had only just reached a position which allowed them to look to the future with optimism. Through no fault of their own, they have seen these hopes cruelly dashed, with tragic results for themselves and their children. And how can we ignore the effects of fluctuations in the financial markets? We urgently need a new vision of global progress in solidarity, which will include an overall and sustainable development of society, so as to enable all people to realise their potential. ... In this context, I make a pressing appeal to all those with responsibility for financial relations on the worldwide level. I ask them to make a sincere effort to find a solution to the frightening problem of the international debt of the poorest nations. International

financial institutions have initiated concrete steps in this regard which merit appreciation. I appeal to all those involved in this problem, especially the more affluent nations, to provide the support necessary to ensure the full success of this initiative. An immediate and vigorous effort is needed, as we look to the year 2000, to ensure that the greatest possible number of nations will be able to extricate themselves from a now intolerable situation. Dialogue among the institutions involved, if prompted by a sincere willingness to reach agreement, will lead - I am certain - to a satisfactory and definitive solution. In this way, lasting development will become a possibility for those Nations facing the greatest difficulties, and the millennium now before us will become for them too a time of renewed hope.'^[4]

THE AFRICAN SYNOD - 'ECCLESIA IN AFRICA'

Preparation for the 'Great Jubilee' has been taking place in Africa and a great impetus for this was the 'African Synod' in 1994. The major theme which ran through the Synod, outlined later in 'Ecclesia in Africa', was 'The Church in Africa and her evangelising mission towards the Year 2000: 'You shall be my witnesses' (Acts 1:8)'.^[5] Such a theme lead to 'two fundamental questions: How must the Church carry out her evangelising mission as the Year 2000 approaches? How can African Christians become ever more faithful witnesses to the Lord Jesus?'^[6]

The work done before the Synod and the follow-up afterwards are seen as '... 'a new Advent', a time of expectation and preparation'^[7] and a way in which the Church can help Africa to face the problems which it has. '... issues in Africa such as increasing poverty, urbanization, the international debt, the arms trade, the problem of refugees and displaced persons, demographic concerns and threats to the family, the liberation of women, the spread

SOME KEY DATES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 'JUBILEE YEAR'

- 1300 - the first ordinary Jubilee proclaimed by Pope Boniface VIII with the Bull, 'Antiquorum Habet Fida Relatio'. Marked by thousands making pilgrimages to Rome, which began at Christmas, 1299, and it was proclaimed a 'year of forgiveness of all sins'. It was proposed that such years would be held every hundred years in the future.
- 1350 - the Jubilee was brought forward from 1400 due to many requests to the Papal See. Pope Clement VI consented to the time between Jubilees being every fifty years. Pope Urban VI later reduced the time to thirty three years in memory of the earthly life of Jesus.
- 1390 - On Christmas Eve Pope Boniface IX opened the Holy Door. He called a second Holy Year at Christmas, 1400, because of the number of pilgrims.
- 1400 - Pope Boniface IX proclaimed the Jubilee.
- 1425 - Pope Martin V proclaimed the Holy Year (not 1433 as previously set). Marked by a commemorative medal and the opening of a Holy Door in the Cathedral of St. John Lateran, Rome.
- 1450 - Pope Nicholas V called the Holy Year.
- 1470 - The time of Jubilee is set for every twenty-five years in a Bull issued by Pope Paul II.
- 1475 - Pope Sixtus IV proclaimed the Holy Year. To mark the occasion Sixtus ordered the Sistine Chapel and the Ponte Sisto or 'Sixtus Bridge', over the Tiber, to be built.
- 1500 - Pope Alexander VI opened the Holy Door of Saint Peter's and the Doors in the three other major basilicas were opened at the same time.
- 1524 - Pope Clement VII opened the ninth Jubilee on 24th. December.
- 1550 - Pope Paul II proclaimed the Jubilee but it was opened by Pope Julius III.
- 1575 - Pope Gregory XIII opened the Jubilee, 300,000 people came to Rome.
- 1600 - Pope Clement VIII proclaimed the Holy Year.
- 1650 - Pope Urban VIII proclaimed the Holy Year.
- 1675 - Pope Clement X proclaimed the Holy Year.
- 1700 - Pope Innocent X opened the Jubilee. He established the Hospice St. Michele a Ripa.
- 1725 - Holy Year called by Pope Benedict XIII.
- 1750 - The Jubilee proclaimed by Pope Benedict XIV and during the year Stations of the Cross were set up in the Colosseum.
- 1775 - Pope Clement XIV announced the Jubilee but died before it's start - it was opened by Pope Pius VI.
- 1800 - Pius VII did not proclaim the Jubilee this year due to Napoleon's rule.
- 1825 - Holy Year led by Pope Leo XII and 500,000 went to Rome.
- 1850 - Pope Pius IX was in exile, because of the Roman Republic, and so the Jubilee was not held.
- 1875 - Pope Pius IX proclaimed the Holy Year but there was no ceremony of the opening of the Door - Rome was occupied by King Vittorio Emmanuele.
- 1900 - 22nd Jubilee opened by Pope Leo XIII. Start of the 20th. century of the Christian era.
- 1925 - Pope Pius XI opened the Holy Year, emphasis on missionary work.
- 1933 - 'Extraordinary' Jubilee proclaimed by Pope Pius XI to mark 'the 1900th anniversary of Redemption'.
- 1950 - Holy Year called by Pope Pius XII. On 1st. November the 'Assumption into Heaven of Mary, the Mother of Jesus' was made a dogma of the Catholic faith.
- 1975 - Pope Paul VI called the ordinary Jubilee with the major themes of Renewal and Reconciliation.
- 1983 - 'Extraordinary' Jubilee proclaimed by Pope John Paul II to mark '1950 years since the Redemption carried out by Christ through his Death and Resurrection in the year 33'.

Source: Based on information from 'What is a Holy Year?' and 'The History of the Jubilee', on the Vatican Web Site



of AIDS, the survival of the practice of slavery in some places, ethnocentricity and tribal opposition figure among the fundamental challenges addressed by the Synod.’^[8]

FACING UP TO THE PROBLEMS

Despite having such major problems the peoples of Africa have always overcome challenges. To be able to laugh and joke when you are not sure where the next meal is coming from may be considered either as a gift or just as an acceptance of fate. Whichever we believe it to be the unity and hope which the Church can give to people’s lives is an additional support for the ‘new Advent’. Let us look at some of the problems and what ‘Ecclesia in Africa’ has to say about them and how solutions may be found.

INCREASING POVERTY - It is difficult to make general statements about such a vast continent as Africa but it can be said that poverty is found everywhere. ‘In the present world order, the African nations are among the most disadvantaged. Rich countries must become clearly aware of their duty to support the efforts of the countries struggling to rise from their poverty and misery. In fact, it is in the interest of the rich countries to choose the path of solidarity, for only in this way can lasting peace and harmony for humanity be ensured. Moreover, the Church in the developed countries cannot ignore the added responsibility arising from the Christian commitment to justice and charity. ... It is not hard to see the many practical implications of this. In the first place it involves working for improved socio-political relations among nations, ensuring greater justice and dignity for those countries which, after gaining independence, have been members of the international community for less time.’^[9]

‘THE BURDEN OF THE INTERNATIONAL DEBT’ - This has been a concern of the Church for many years and, as we have seen, the Pope has spoken out about it on other occasions. ‘Taking up

the words of the Synod Fathers, I particularly feel it is my duty to urge "the Heads of State and their governments in Africa not to crush their peoples with internal and external debts". I also make a pressing appeal to "the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and all foreign creditors to alleviate the crushing debts of the African nations". Finally, I earnestly ask "the Episcopal Conferences of the industrialized countries to present this issue consistently to their governments and to the organizations concerned". The situation of many African countries is so serious as to leave no room for attitudes of indifference and complacency.’^[10] (see ‘Forgive Us Our Debts’ on page 12)

‘RESTORING HOPE TO YOUTH’ - In many respects the problems of today’s young people are the same the world over. ‘The economic situation of poverty has a particularly negative impact on the young. They embark on adult life with very little enthusiasm for a present riddled with frustrations and they look with still less hope to a future which to them seems sad and sombre. That is why they tend to flee the neglected rural areas and gather in cities which in fact do not have much more to offer them. Many of them go to foreign countries where, as if in exile, they live a precarious existence as economic refugees. With the Synod Fathers I feel the duty to plead their cause: it is urgently necessary to find a solution for their impatience to take part in the life of the nation and of the Church.’^[11]

THE SCOURGE OF AIDS - Often viewed as a modern plague, AIDS has certainly reeked havoc throughout Africa especially because of the lack of resources. This is a universal problem which should be the concern of us all. ‘Against the background of widespread poverty and inadequate medical services the Synod considered the tragic scourge of AIDS ... It noted the role played in the spread of this disease by irresponsible sexual behaviour and drafted this strong recommendation: "The

companionship, joy, happiness and peace which Christian marriage and fidelity provide, and the safeguard which chastity gives, must be continuously presented to the faithful, particularly the young". ... The battle against AIDS ought to be everyone's battle. Echoing the voice of the Synod Fathers, I too ask pastoral workers to bring to their brothers and sisters affected by AIDS all possible material, moral and spiritual comfort. I urgently ask the world's scientists and political leaders, moved by the love and respect due to every human person, to use every means available in order to put an end to this scourge.’^[12]

‘BEAT YOUR SWORDS INTO PLOUGHSHARES’ (Is 2:4): NO MORE WARS! - The image which the outside world often has of Africa is a Continent ravaged by war. ‘The Synod incisively described the tragedy of wars which are tearing Africa apart: "For some decades now Africa has been the theatre of fratricidal wars which are decimating peoples and destroying their natural and cultural resources". This very sad

situation, in addition to causes external to Africa, also has internal causes such as "tribalism, nepotism, racism, religious intolerance and the thirst for power taken to the extreme by totalitarian regimes which trample with impunity the rights and dignity of the person. Peoples crushed and reduced to silence suffer as innocent and resigned victims all these situations of injustice". ... I cannot fail to join my voice to that of the members of the Synodal Assembly in order to deplore the situations of unspeakable suffering caused by so many conflicts ... and to ask all those who can do so to make every effort to put an end to such tragedies. ... Together with the Synod Fathers, I likewise urge a serious commitment to foster on the Continent conditions of greater social justice and good government, in order thereby to prepare the ground for peace. "If you want peace, work for justice". It is much better - and also easier - to prevent wars than to try to stop them after they have broken out.^[13] ... The Church in Africa - especially through some of its leaders - has



been in the front line of the search for negotiated solutions to the armed conflicts in many parts of the Continent. This mission of pacification must continue ... the Synod appealed to all countries that sell arms to Africa to stop doing so, and it asked African governments "to move away from huge military expenditures and put the emphasis on the education, health and well-being of their people". ^[14]

'REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS' - For many decades this has been a great problem for the whole of Africa. 'One of the most bitter fruits of wars and economic hardships is the sad phenomenon of refugees and displaced persons, a phenomenon which, as the Synod mentioned, has reached tragic dimensions. The ideal solution is the re-establishment of a just peace, reconciliation and economic development. It is therefore urgent that national, regional and international organizations should find equitable and long-lasting solutions to the problems of refugees and displaced persons.' ^[15]

'DIGNITY OF THE AFRICAN WOMAN' - No one would dispute the concern for the position of women in Africa. It is not possible to make blanket statements about such things, but as the Pope says a 'characteristic sign of our times is the growing awareness of women's dignity and of their specific role in the Church and in society at large. I have repeatedly affirmed the fundamental equality and enriching complementarity that exist between man and woman. The Synod applied these principles to the condition of women in Africa. Their rights and duties in building up the family and in taking full part in the development of the Church and society were strongly affirmed. With specific regard to the Church, women should be properly trained so that they can participate at appropriate levels in her apostolic activity.' ^[16]

'OVERCOMING DIVISIONS' - Without a doubt this is a good foundation for solving any prob-

lems anywhere, and Africa is no exception. 'It has been rightly noted that, within the borders left behind by the colonial powers, the co-existence of ethnic groups with different traditions, languages, and even religions often meets obstacles arising from serious mutual hostility. ... This is why the Church in Africa feels challenged by the specific responsibility of healing these divisions. For the same reason the Special Assembly emphasised the importance of ecumenical dialogue with other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and of dialogue with African traditional religion and Islam.' ^[17]

DIALOGUE WITH ISLAM - 'Islam' is often seen as a common enemy for all Christians, this is not so as those at the Synod recognised ' "Commitment to dialogue must also embrace all Muslims of good will. Christians cannot forget that many Muslims try to imitate the faith of Abraham and to live the demands of the Decalogue". In this regard the Message of the Synod emphasises that the Living God ... is the Father of the one great human family to which we all belong. As such, he wants us to bear witness to him through our respect for the values and religious traditions of each person, working together for human progress and development at all levels. Far from wishing to be the one in whose name a person would kill other people, he requires believers to join together in the service of life in justice and peace. Particular care will therefore be taken so that Islamic-Christian dialogue respects on both sides the principle of religious freedom with all that this involves, also including external and public manifestations of faith. Christians and Muslims are called to commit themselves to promoting a dialogue free from the risks of false irenicism or militant fundamentalism, and to raising their voices against unfair policies and practices, as well as against the lack of reciprocity in matters of religious freedom.' ^[18]

BECOMING THE 'VOICE OF THE VOICELESS' - The Church has a duty to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. 'Strengthened by faith and hope in the saving power of Jesus, the Synod Fathers concluded their work by renewing their commitment to accept the challenge of being instruments of salvation in every area of the life of the peoples of Africa. "The Church", they declared, "must continue to exercise her prophetic role and be the voice of the voiceless", so that everywhere the human dignity of every individual will be acknowledged, and that people will always be at the centre of all government programmes. The Synod "challenges the consciences of Heads of State and those responsible for the public domain to guarantee ever more the liberation and development of their peoples". Only at this price is peace established between nations.' ^[19]

TOWARDS THE FUTURE

With the above in mind it is easy to see that the 'new Advent' of the 'Jubilee' is in full flood. The African Church can move into the new millennium with hope. The Continent's problems can be faced and overcome with the help and support of the whole Church. In his visits to Africa the present Pope, as with his predecessors, has given a lead which was reiterated during the 'African Synod'. The Church is truly Universal and Africa has embraced it, but for it to help Africa move forward in harmony and for the betterment of the whole Continent the 'Synod Fathers rightly affirmed that "a serious concern for a true and balanced inculturation is necessary in order to avoid cultural confusion and alienation in our fast evolving society".' ^[20]

Sources: An Apostolic Letter 'Tertio Millennio Adveniente', 10th, November, 1994. [1] = 51; [2] = 53. Pope John Paul II's message for 'The World Day of Peace', 1st. January, 1999. [3] = 1; [4] = 9. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation 'Ecclesia in Africa', Yaoundé, Cameroon, 14th. September, 1995. [5] = 8; [7] = 18; [6] = 46; [20] = 48; [17] = 49; [8] = 51; [18] = 66; [19] = 70; [9] = 114; [10] = 120; [11] = 115; [12] = 116; [13] = 117; [14] = 118; [15] = 119; [16] = 121.

Nigerian protesters at the 'G8 Summit' (Birmingham, May, 1998) before the political changes began in their country - one way to be a 'Voice of the Voiceless'



‘FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS’

an Open Letter to Our Brother Bishops in Europe and North America
from the Bishops of Africa - Rome, April 1994

Dear Brothers in Christ,

Africa is home to hundreds of millions of the poorest people on earth. They are shackled with a burden of unpayable debt, which is both a symptom and a cause of their poverty. It is a symptom because they would not have borrowed if they were not poor; it is a cause because the crushing burden of debt repayments makes them poorer still.

The Bishops of Africa taking part in the African Synod pledge ourselves to uncompromising solidarity with the poor and make their cry known: Forgive us our debts. We address our appeal to the Bishops and faithful of our sister churches in Europe and America, and in particular to justice and peace commissions and groups. Your churches have supported us faithfully and generously in terms of personnel and finance and we are conscious of an unpayable debt of gratitude. We know that we can continue to depend on your generous support as we appeal to you on behalf of the debts that cripple our people's lives and blight their hope for the future. This debt has become unpayable because of a combination of factors. Some of these factors are internal to Africa and can only be remedied by changes within Africa. Other factors are external to Africa and African governments have no control over them. It is now over a decade since former President Nyerere of Tanzania asked a poignant question: "Must we starve our children to pay our debts?" The Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace offered a very eloquent answer to this question in its 1986 statement entitled 'An Ethical Approach to the International Debt Question'. This document calls for sharing the consequences of the debt crisis between debtors and creditors. It says: 'The burden should not fall disproportionately on poor countries ... it is morally wrong to deprive a nation of the means to meet the basic needs of its people in order to repay debt.' Another document of the same commission states, 'The needs of the poor take precedence over the wants of the rich.'

The right of the Church to intervene in political and economic affairs is limited in any part of the Church. Yet the social teaching of the Church is part of her mandate to go and teach all nations. These are times when justice compels us to speak publicly on these matters. If we remain silent and inactive, whether in Africa or the countries of the North, we may appear as cowards or accomplices rather than as champions of justice. We have the right and duty to enlighten the consciences of the decision-makers. The question of African debt offers an opportunity for the Bishops of Africa to work in partnership with their fellow Bishops in Europe and America to seek a just and speedy way of resolving it.

For our part in Africa, we pledge ourselves to address the internal factors that contribute to the debt crisis. The Church in Africa has always been a fearless champion of human rights and democracy; we reaffirm our resolve to continue to use non-violent ways to overcome corruption, oppression, and economic mismanagement among our government officials, military, and ruling elite. We ask our sister churches in Europe and America to help to bring about a swift and just resolution of our problem of unpayable debts. This is inextricably linked with unjust conditions of world trade where the price of our commodities has collapsed to an all-time low. It is also

related to the urgent need for reform of the structural adjustment programs which cause great suffering among the poor.

We are confident that our appeal will be heeded and provide an opportunity for the Church to make its own the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anguish of suffering people in Africa.

We the undersigned:

Bp. Dennis H. de Jong, Ndola, Zambia
Archbp. Michael K. Francis, Monrovia, Liberia
Archbp. Joseph Henry Ganda, Freetown-Bo, Sierra Leone
Archbp. Lawrence Henry, Cape Town, S. Africa
Archbp. Polycarp Pengo, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
Archbp. Gabriel Zubeir Wako, Khartoum, Sudan
Archbp. Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya, Kisangani, Zaire
Archbp. Charles Vandame, N'Djaména, Chad
Archbp. André-Femand Anguilé, Libreville, Gabon
Archbp. Emmanuel Wamala, Kampala, Uganda
Archbp. Jean-Marie Cissé, Sikasso, Mali
Archbp. Isidore de Souza, Cotonu, Benin
Archbp. Adam Kozłowiecki, Potenza Picena, Zambia
Bp. Amadeus Mzarikie, Moshi, Tanzania
Bp. Boniface Setlalkgosi, Gaborone, Botswana
Bp. Tarsizio Gabriel Ziyaye, Lilongwe, Malawi
Bp. Gregory Eebolawola Kpiebaya, Wa, Ghana
Bp. Bernard Ratsimamotoana, Morondava, Madagascar

Bp. Paulino do Livramento Evora, Praja, Cape Verde
Bp. Julien K. Mawule Kouto, Atakpamé, Togo
Bp. Théodore-Adrien Sarr, Kaolack, Senegal
Bp. Jean-Baptiste Somé Diébougou, Burkina Faso
Bp. Joseph Edra Ukpo, Ogoja, Nigeria
Bp. Telesphore George Mpundu, Mbala-Mpika, Zambia
Bp. Alberto Setele, Inhambane, Mozambique
Bp. Paul L. Kalanda, Fort-Portal, Uganda
Bp. John O'Riordan, Kenema, Sierra Leone & Gambia
Bp. Bernard Bududira, Bururi, Burundi
Bp. Evaristus Thatho Bitsoane, Qachas'Nek, Lesotho
Bp. Louis Ncamiso Ndeovu, Manzizi, Swaziland
Bp. Francis Xavier Mugadzi, Gweru, Zimbabwe
Bp. Philippe Kourouma, N'Zérékoré, Guinea
Bp. Edouard Mathos, Guifi, Cent. Africa Rep.
Bp. Cornelius Fontem Esua, Kumbo, Cameroon
Bp. Medardo Joseph Mazombwe, Chipata, Zambia
Bp. Antoine Marie Maanicus, Bangassou, Congo
Bp. Francisco João Silota, Chimoio, Mozambique

Part of the 'Debt Chain' outside the 'G8 Summit' (Birmingham, May, 1998)



Source: 'The African Synod - Documents, Reflections, Perspectives', Compiled and Edited by Africa Faith and Justice Network, 1996, pages 114-16.



The African Synod Five Years On

By Fr. Wolfgang Shonecke W.F.

During Easter time of 1994 African Synod opened in Rome. For the first Synod in history bishops from all parts of the continent assembled to look at their Church after 2000 years of evangelization and to map out pastoral priorities for the new millennium. Has this great event left any impact after five years? The Synod focussed on three points: an African vision of the Church as a family, the crying need for an inculturated Christianity and role of the Church in a context violent power struggles and increasing poverty.

The bishops dreamt of a Church living the closeness and solidarity of an extended African family where all Christians join hands to evangelise themselves and the world around them. Has this dream moved any nearer to reality? In some places, it has. The Synod has rekindled efforts and start and strengthen small Christian communities. The Zambia bishops created the 'Zambian Catholic Forum'. Once a year bishops, priests, religious and lay people meet to look together at some burning issues facing their Church. A number of diocesan synods have brought the 'tribes' of the Church together in common reflection and action and more are planned. The appointment and training of new pastoral co-ordinators in AMECEA countries helps to foster the greater 'organic pastoral solidarity' demanded by the Pope and to bring the vision of the Synod into the life of their churches.

But structures and mentalities of clerical control die hard. One of the most formidable challenges is to overhaul the present form of seminary training. Future priests are still trained in isolation of the laity who rarely have any responsibility in their selection and formation. A pre-Synod clerical theology still dominates

seminary teaching which is geared to produce theologians rather than leaders of Christian communities equipped for evangelization. The next plenary meeting of the AMECEA bishops wants to look at this fundamental problem, hopefully with the needed honesty and determination.

The other great preoccupation of the Synod had been 'inculturation', the attempt to bridge the gap between faith and real life. The volumes written on the topic so far have had little impact on the concrete life of local churches. The Synod wanted to move the process of inculturation from theory into practise, from liturgy into life. A remarkable effort was made by the Tanzanian Church. In a two-year programme all parishes and Church groups were invited to take a systematic look guided by the Gospel, not at their cultural past but at the culture lived today. Too early to say whether this will eventually translate into changed pastoral policies. A radical approach towards inculturation can also provoke strong reactions. Some daring liturgical celebrations prompted the Malawian bishops to put a temporary stop to inculturation experiments. Inculturation proves a complex process as cultures in Africa are changing rapidly. Many dehumanising cultural practices like widow inheritance or female circumcision are discussed publicly and critically. Urbanisation and the massive influence of the visual media on the youth even raises the question what will remain of the cultural heritage of Africa.

The opening of the African Synod in 1994 coincided with the beginning of the genocide in Rwanda. The unimaginable cruelty and extent of these massacres in the most Catholic country on the continent forced the Synod fathers in 1994 to look critically at the effects of one hundred years of evangelization and put Justice and

Peace high on the agenda. Has that tragic event brought about a conversion and a new thinking in Church and society? There have been heroic efforts toward reconciliation and rebuilding of Christian communities at grass root level. But bishops, priests and religious in Rwanda are as divided along ethnic lines as ever and have little credibility in a country where reconciliation is decried as refusal of justice and ethnic violence and revenge on all sides remains the order of the day.

The appeal of the African Synod to work for responsible leadership and the rule of law, to respect human rights and to 'ensure an honest and equitable sharing of benefits and burdens' has largely fallen on deaf ears. The Rwandese conflict has since spilled over into the Congo where the armies of Uganda and Rwanda face Kabila and his allies, both supported by foreign economic interests. This new 'scramble for Africa' is about the question who will 'eat' the enormous riches of this vast country. Poor countries like Eritrea and Ethiopia spend colossal sums to arm themselves for another war. The Sudan bleeds since 30 years from a war no one can win and the Catholic Church in Sudan faces open persecution symbolised in the show trial of two priests. Peace seems as elusive as ever.

Everywhere corruption has grown from bad to bottomless and politicians have developed complete immunity against Church pronouncements and press reports. Neither has the Church faced openly the creeping corruption in its own ranks or made significant moves toward greater 'accountability and transparency'. This seriously jeopardises the Church's credibility in society. But not all is gloom. Nigeria is awakening from a long nightmare of military dictatorship. South Africa's Truth Commission, in spite of its limitations and attempts to block it, has made a contribution towards rebuilding South Africa society. These are beacons of hope. Churches have played a significant role there as they

have in the re-writing of constitutions in other countries. More important, Catholics are becoming more aware of their responsibility in society. A growing movement of Active Non-Violence gives people a new vision and fresh courage. Foundations for a better future are being laid.

And let us not forget that in Africa today, as throughout Church history everywhere, God raises Christian leaders of heroic stature in the midst of chaos and confusion. When the waves of violence will have calmed down and the petty power politicians forgotten, the people of Africa will remember men like Mgr. Ruhuna, the late Archbishop of Gitega, murdered for his fearless stand against ethnic bloodshed and Mgr. Mzehirwa, the Archbishop of Bukavu, killed because he denounced the aggression against his country by its neighbours and is venerated already now by his people as a saint. It is they and others like them who are an inspiration for many to keep alive the vision of the Synod of a Church and a humanity living like one family.

The Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, are at the centre of the Church's life
Source: 'New People', Nairobi, Kenya

