

SECOND SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR AFRICA

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)

Introduction

This afternoon, I have been asked to present the *Lineamenta* for the Second Special Assembly for Africa which is to be celebrated here in Rome from the 4th to the 25th of October of this year. What the Synodal Fathers will be celebrating in October will be only part of a process that started already on 13th November 2004, when Pope John-Paul II of blessed memory in response to the desire of many bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful announced his intention to convoke a Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. On 22nd June 2006, Pope Benedict XVI confirmed this intention and in collaboration with the Special Council for Africa of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, specified the theme of the Synodal meeting as: “**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’** (Matt 5,13.14)”. This theme is a follow-up to that of the First Special Assembly for Africa which was held from 10th April to 8th May 1994. The that Synod was: “The Church in Africa and Her Evangelising Mission towards the Year 2000 ‘You shall be my witnesses (Acts 1,8)’”.

As we prepare to celebrate the Second Synod, we realise that fifteen years have passed since the celebration of the first. The first has become an adult and calls for an in-depth analysis and evaluation of some of the issues raised in the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*. This process of analysis, evaluation and discernment was initiated with the publication of the *Lineamenta* which is the subject matter of this talk. One may wonder if it is not too late to be speaking of the *Lineamenta* when already on the 19th to this month the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI presented the *Instrumentum Laboris* at Yaoundé in Cameroon. Even if we have read or studied the *Lineamenta* some time back, it is good to take it up again at this point in time – a few months to the celebration of the Synod – and together review its contents. It may also be that some of us did not have the opportunity to critically look at it so this could be a golden opportunity to prepare ourselves to enter into the dynamics of the *Instrumentum Laboris*.

I propose to divide this presentation in two parts. The first part will consist of a summary presentation of the content of the *Lineamenta*. The second part will be some points that I think require further reflection in order to enrich the on-going reflection leading to the Assembly itself.

I propose to adopt an expository approach to the *Lineamenta* in as far as I do not think my principal task is to make a critique of the *Lineamenta* but to highlight the various issues that the document deals with in its entirety. The *Lineamenta* is divided in five Chapters but for the sake of synthesis I propose to approach it in the following manner:

1. Africa from the Apostolic Exhortation ‘*Ecclesia in Africa*’ to today – Lights and Shadows.
2. From Christ, the Word of Life, through the Church to the World (A brief appreciation of Chapters Two to Five of the *Lineamenta*)

1. A Summary of the content of the *Lineamenta*.

1.1 Africa from the Apostolic Exhortation ‘*Ecclesia in Africa*’ to today – Lights and Shadows.

The First Synod for Africa was hailed by the Synod Fathers as “the Synod of Resurrection and Hope”.¹ At that time the hope of many was that the Apostolic Exhortation that was to emanate from the Synod would become a *Vademecum* for Africa. In order to judge how true this affirmation is, it is appropriate to appraise what has been achieved within these fifteen years and the challenges left to be faced since the celebration of the First Synod. It is impossible to evaluate everything so the *Lineamenta* opts to focus on an analysis of activities in the area of reconciliation, justice and peace. This is not a random choice but is motivated by the sight of so much hatred, injustice and war on the continent” (10). Such an option calls for a social analysis of the situation on the continent, thus resulting in the treatment of the Socio-Political, Socio-Economic and Socio-Cultural aspects of the African situation.

1.1 The Socio-Political aspect

The multi-ethnic composition of African States and the artificial borders inherited from colonial times continue to be a source of conflict and tension in many countries. This seems to be an unending source which leaders who fear to lose power use in order to divide and rule. A question the *Lineamenta* raises is: “How can pluralism be transformed into a positive, constructive factor and not one which leads to division and destruction?”² Africa is also a continent of persistent social tensions that impede progress and give rise to political disturbances and armed conflicts. In some circles peace is confused with a kind of unanimity or tranquillity imposed by force. Situations such as this produce discord, war and its consequences. A socio-political situation that impedes any form of development is a major challenge to evangelisation.

1.2 The Socio-Economic aspect

A lot is narrated about the sad history of exploitation before the wave of independence in many African countries. But we have to acknowledge that even today different forms of exploitation and socio-economic retrogression continue to exist in many countries on the continent. Among these we can mention the debt burden, unjust trade practices, dumping of toxic materials, illiteracy and deteriorating educational systems. There are also other problems like poor health systems, non-existent social welfare and an imbalance between population growth and limited resources to sustain this growth.

A critical look at the situation on the continent reveals that resources that should serve entire populations are unfortunately amassed by a privileged few. These very people contribute to economic injustices on the ground. Those who want to escape from this are forced into undesirable situations, as migration to the industrialised world no more offers the realisation of the hope of many. The end result is juvenile delinquency, drugs, corruption and unemployment.

Closely related to these economic problems is the arms trade which perpetuates the culture of destruction on the continent. “Those responsible for this destruction are not only the warring parties but also arms traders, whether they be international powers, who are interested in such conflicts as a means to get rich or to fuel an unstable situation for geopolitical goals having nothing to do with people's best interests, or local ideologues, who use people, especially children, as pawns in their thirst for power”³. Consequently,

¹ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, Message, 2: L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English, 11.05.1994, p. 6.

² *Lineamenta*, N° 11.

³ *Lineamenta*, N° 17.

life, which is precious in the eyes of Africans, is destroyed with a disturbing levity and ease.

1.3 The Socio-Cultural aspect

Three major elements necessary for production are labour, land and capital. Two of these, namely labour and land abound in Africa. The only element which is lacking in many cases is capital but that alone does not answer the question of the root cause of poverty in Africa. Apparently, there is a cultural aspect that needs to be investigated if we are to find the root cause of poverty in Africa. In an era of globalisation, it is important to safeguard African cultures while integrating the best of what comes from outside the continent. Such a mixture is what can produce a healthy progress. The words of Pope Benedict XVI to the Clergy of Rome in 2005 show the influence and responsibility that the Western world has in bringing equilibrium between culture and development: "Europe exported not only faith in Christ, but also all of the vices of the Old Continent. It exported the sense of corruption, it exported the violence that is currently devastating Africa. And we must acknowledge our responsibility so that the exportation of the faith... is stronger than the exportation of the vices of Europe... We Christians must do much more in these regards so that faith is made present, and with faith, the strength to resist these vices and to rebuild a Christian Africa, destined to be a happy Africa, a great Continent of new humanism".⁴

Not everything can be laid at the doors of the Western world. We Africans must also take up our responsibility and work for a better Africa. We should look for ways to reconcile tradition with progress. Basic to this is the interaction between communal development and personal autonomy. While upholding a strong sense of the family in Africa because of its values, we also have to learn to promote personal autonomy if we want to really develop a culture of literacy and advancement. Closely linked to the socio-cultural aspect is the phenomenon of migration from many African countries. The phenomenon of refugees, immigrants and rural exodus go hand-in-hand with a tendency to reject ancestral culture and values. There cannot be economic or technical development without cultural roots. More could be said here about discrimination against women but since that is the subject matter of the second intervention today, I will not develop here what the *Lineamenta* has to say about it.

1.4 Consequences of the priorities

All is not as negative as it is often presented. From the social analysis of the three priority aspects and the goals set by the First Synod for Africa, we discern not only shadows but also lights on the African continent. Briefly I would like to list four shadows and three lights as a way of summarising the challenges and achievements on the continent. In what regards shadows or negative developments in Africa, we can mention the following:

1. The heavy and often unbearable burden of international debt with its negative effects evident in a widespread deterioration in the standard of living, the lack of access to potable water and the lack of basic goods and services.
2. Lack of basic health care which is contributing to the rise in infant mortality rate and the spread of the terrible surge of AIDS.
3. Insufficient means for educating the youth.
4. The horror of fratricidal wars with the consequent shameful, pitiable spectacle of refugees and displaced persons. Here we can think of countries like Sudan the Democratic Republic of Congo.

When it comes to the lights or positive developments we can acknowledge the following positive developments on the continent:

⁴ Benedict XVI, *Discourse to the Clergy of Rome* (13.05.2005): *L'Osservatore Romano: Weekly Edition in English*, 18.05.2005, p. 4.

1. A remarkable development in the social sphere, especially in the following areas:
 - a) the advent of peace in some African countries like Angola, Liberia and Mozambique,
 - b) the burning desire for peace throughout the continent.
 - c) a deep consciousness of the need to promote African women and the dignity of every human person.
 - d) the involvement of the laity in the promotion of human rights. For example the formation of Justice and Peace Commissions in various Dioceses and Episcopal conferences.
 - e) the growing number of African politicians who are committed to seeking African solutions to African problems. For example the mediatory efforts of many countries in conflicts like the one in Zimbabwe and Cote d'Ivoire.
2. The growing role of the Church in promoting the continent's development, especially in education and health.
3. The privileged place where the subject of reconciliation and forgiveness can again begin to be treated.

This analysis of the situation evidences how the efforts of the Church in the period after the First Synod have been fruitful. It is good to build on what has been achieved. In order to do that we need to ask pertinent questions that help discover the root causes of what we may call obstacles to the full attainment of the goals of *Ecclesia in Africa*. From the results of the social analysis presented earlier, it is evident that the Church needs to adopt effective strategies for the promotion of the kingdom of God on the continent. This can be done by investigating what is relevant to Africa today or developing better ways in which the evangelising mission of the church can promote the correct direction for Africa. Looking at the difficulties or challenges on the ground, it is clear that the promotion of the human person is central to any realisation of the mission of the Church on the continent.

2. From Christ, the Word of Life, through the Church to the World

(A brief appreciation of Chapters Two to Five of the Lineamenta)

Looking critically at the shadows or challenges outlined above, it is obvious that the Gospel message cannot address all areas of concern at the same time, especially in the promotion of the human person. There is need for a choice that is guided by priorities. The identification of what calls for immediate attention led to the proposal to focus on the areas of reconciliation, justice and peace; thus the theme of "The Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace". Chapters Two to Five of the *Lineamenta* treat various aspects of this theme. We can summarise their content under four aspects, namely:

1. Jesus Christ, the Word and Bread of Life, Our Reconciler, Our Justice and Our Peace.
2. The Church, Sacrament of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Africa.
3. The Witness of a Church Reflecting the Light of Christ on the World.
4. The spiritual resources for the promotion of reconciliation, justice and peace in Africa

2.1 Jesus Christ, the Word and Bread of Life, Our Reconciler, Our Justice and Our Peace

The social analysis of the situation on the African continent points to both a crisis and a challenge. The crisis is one of conversion, holiness and integrity. The challenge is the necessity to liberate Africa from her heavy yoke through the evangelising mission of the Church.

The Word of God in becoming a human person assumes and elevates the sacred meaning of the word in African tradition to give it a saving character and strip it of death, so that no one will perish. The cultural and religious elements of the African tradition should not retard the full emancipation of the African. They ought to enable us to understand better the meaning of the newness begun in the One who is the Word par excellence, and from whom all life comes. This calls for familiarity with the Word, so that it will have a concrete effect in daily life. This knowledge should not be purely intellectual, academic knowledge or “hearing only”, but knowledge that springs from a personal encounter with Christ who speaks in Sacred Scripture. In order to realise this, our Christian communities need to become places of deep-listening to the Word of God and prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture so that the Word can have an impact in our lives. They should help African Christians correct and adjust our traditions and customs in the light of the Gospel message.

Jesus Christ, the Word of God is also the Bread of Life that we celebrate and receive in the Eucharist. The Eucharist makes abundantly clear that life is a relation of communion with God, with our brothers and sisters and with the whole of creation. The Eucharist is a missionary celebration that calls and challenges all who partake of it to go forth and live what they have experienced. By so doing, we become the signs and instruments of God’s love, which transforms the world.

The First Synod stressed the idea of the Church-Family of God. Our belonging to Jesus Christ makes us members of the same family, sharers of the same Word of Life and partakers of the same Bread of Life. Sharing the Blood of Christ makes us sharers in the same life, because the same Blood of Christ circulates in our veins and makes us children of God, members of the Family of God. Consequently, hatred, injustice and fratricidal wars should not exist among Christians. The presence of these things is cause for concern and highlights the need to deepen and incarnate the mystery of Church – Family in everyday life. Reconciliation, justice and peace will become realities of everyday life when Christians are able to live true brotherhood and sisterhood as Christ has taught us. This has to be a primary concern of Christian formation on the continent since only a consciousness of belonging to one family can gradually break the barriers of ethnicity and tribalism and enable us to see ourselves as one people belonging to one nation with a common destiny.

2.2 The Church, Sacrament of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Africa

The dissemination and concretisation of the teachings of Christ in human society is the task of the Church. She is also the custodian of the sacraments which give life to Christians. In the face of the social analysis of the African scene, it is clear that the Church is called to highlight in Africa today the ministry for reconciliation, justice and peace. This can be done by developing an appropriate missiology that outlines the missionary perspective of the Church in Africa. It can also be attained by a greater focus on the social teaching of the Church and her evangelising mission. The Church must stress that evangelisation is the total development of the human person in all dimensions of his/her vocation as a child of God. The tendency to separate human development from faith or belief in God only denies the intense unity of the human person as a social and a religious being.

Looking at the problems of Africa, especially poverty, corruption, injustice and violence, the Church is called to forge an evangelising approach that aims at the construction of a community which heals, reconciles, forgives and encourages. In laying emphasis on the social teaching of the Church, the fundamental principles of the solidarity of all creation and the universal destination of goods should be underlined. It is in this perspective that the responsibility for the common good by both the State and the individual can be highlighted. When the Church gets involved in promoting the human person, she must be

on guard against some temptations that can derail her from her true and authentic evangelising mission.

a) the first temptation has to do with the struggle against hunger. The *Lineamenta* cautions that “while focussing attention on desperate situations with a hope for a better future where want, conflict, dissent and violence will be banished, we must not forget to listen to what is proclaimed as the fundamental form of true liberation: Jesus' call to conversion (cf. Matt 4,17)”.⁵ We should “not fall into the temptation of a kind of messianism which magically casts aside want, as if the economy, its hard work and the inventiveness required were only unfortunate accidents of our human condition”.⁶ The hope of the *Lineamenta* is that “the Second Special Assembly be an intense moment of reflection in finding the ways and means to re-establish our economies, and create a real, solid culture of work done well”.⁷

b) The second temptation has to do with politics. Jesus' own response to the tempter in Luke 4,5-9 revealed that he kept politics from being made a ‘god’.⁸ Christians who have an active role in politics should not be the source of division, inter-ethnic wars, corruption and other evils which trouble the continent. The Christian attitude should be one of concern for the underprivileged and a strong resistance to any message and authority that is contrary to life. In the face of this temptation, the Christian is reminded that his resistance may lead to martyrdom just like others before us in the recent past who lost their lives simply because they cried out for peace, for more justice and human dignity on behalf of their oppressed fellow citizens. The *Lineamenta* calls for a reflection on ways that can promote the awareness that the nature of the mission of the Church requires her unity with and fidelity to the teaching of the Master.

c) The third temptation to guard against is closely linked to the causes of economic and political illusions. It is the temptation to use divine power for ends that contradict God's will and activity. It is the desire to construct a divinity according to the desires of the human person but which will not be what God is. In other words, we should not yield to the temptation to solve the problem of the continent by avoiding the concrete reality. We have to face the contemporary problems of reconciliation, justice and peace. This requires of us to reflect and find, in the light of the Spirit, the ways and means that can produce an effective Christian witness in the world of politics and economy in Africa. The good functioning of these two areas depends on the ability of Africans to be reconciled and re-establish peace and justice.

2.3 The Witness of a Church Reflecting the Light of Christ on the World.

The previous Chapter, that is Chapter Three of the *Lineamenta*, outlined the mission of the Church, stating it clearly as the proclamation of the good news of salvation that frees humanity in every way. This mission of the Church is the task of all the faithful, “whatever their place and circumstances of life”.⁹ The present Chapter, that is, Chapter Four of the *Lineamenta* outlines the role of different sectors of the ecclesial community – the bishop and bishop's conferences, the Justice and Peace Episcopal Commissions, priests, consecrated persons, formation institutions and the laity.

2.3.1 The role of Bishops and Bishops' Conferences

⁵ *Lineamenta*, N° 49.

⁶ *Lineamenta*, N° 49.

⁷ *Lineamenta*, N° 49.

⁸ *Lineamenta*, N° 50.

⁹ *Lineamenta*, N° 53.

“Since the bishop is the first pastor of the Local Church, the responsibility of evangelisation falls primarily on him. Part of his evangelising mission is to be in service to reconciliation, justice and peace. To do this effectively, he must be “an arbitrator with an impartiality beyond question” and “a reconciler without any preconceptions”.¹⁰

As a conference, it is important that the bishops manifest a united front, especially in matters of social and political concern. Such unity will give credibility to the action of the Church. This is possible if each bishop cultivates an authentic ecclesial sense and an unwavering fidelity to the Gospel in his search for solutions to common problems. The bishops cannot do everything on their own so it is important that the Episcopal Justice and Peace Commissions are made to function. As a commission focused on social issues, it is an essential instrument in any pastoral programme on behalf of reconciliation, justice and peace.

2.3.2 *The Priests*

Priests, are reminded that their specific mission in the Church is not political, economic or social in nature, but religious, nevertheless they are to contribute to setting up a more just secular order. Together with all pastoral workers they are to “contribute towards progress in reconciliation, peace and justice in Africa through their preaching, catechesis,... and especially, a pastoral care of the family which is well-suited to today’s challenges”.¹¹

2.3.3 *Consecrated Persons*

Consecrated persons are reminded that “commitment to reconciliation, justice and peace is intrinsic to their vocation”.¹² They are called to work for the advent of reconciliation, justice and peace in Africa by living their charisms and fully embracing the evangelical counsels in their own communities and the world”.¹³ They ought to be in some way, the living memory of the conviction that every Christian does not have a definitive home on earth. They are to witness to being simply citizens who seek the definitive realisation of the Kingdom of God, for which they constantly pray saying: “Your Kingdom come”.¹⁴

2.3.4 *The Laity*

Substantial amount of space, and rightly so, is dedicated to a reflection on the commitment of all the faithful in service to reconciliation, justice and peace. The *Lineamenta* stresses that the mission of the laity pertains to the very nature of the Church and her mission in the world. The secular character of the laity determines the specificity of their mission. As a people having the earthly life as their specific mission, their role is to bring about the Kingdom of God in the administration and organisation of earthly realities according to the divine plan. Guided by the spirit of the Gospel, they must be in the world like leaven in the dough, salt and light. Through them, the Gospel and the saving reality of Christianity not only become present in the world but the world becomes present in the Church.

On the basis of their lay character, they are called to sanctify the world and imbue it with the spirit of the Gospel. For this task or mission in the world, they require a good intellectual, doctrinal and spiritual preparation. Their formation must make them capable of facing their daily tasks in cultural, social, economic and political settings by developing their sense of duty in service to the common good.¹⁵ This means providing them with useful tools in analysing the socio-political realities of the places where they work. The

¹⁰ *Lineamenta*, N° 54.

¹¹ *Lineamenta*, N° 58.

¹² *Lineamenta*, N° 59.

¹³ *Lineamenta*, N° 59.

¹⁴ *Lineamenta*, N° 59.

¹⁵ Cf. *Lineamenta*, N° 60.

particular Churches in Africa must reflect on the efforts that can be made to ensure that “the laity are more aware of their responsibility in economic and political life. They should set up the instruments of formation which the laity need so that their temporal commitments will be inspired by the Gospel and the Church's social doctrine”.¹⁶ This formation should treat the following fundamental elements:

- mutual respect and acceptance
- reconciliation, forgiveness and healing
- the incarnation of the realities of faith in the cultures of the African peoples,
- the link between poverty and violence,
- the need for a good administration of African resources
- ending the Arms Trade and the savage exploitation of African resources
- the recognition of minorities
- the subjective and psychological sources of wars.

The better prepared they are, the more effectively they will promote the values of the Kingdom of God.

2.4 The spiritual resources for the promotion of reconciliation, justice and peace in Africa

The previous chapter stressed the need for formation – formation of priests, consecrated persons and the laity. The last chapter of the *Lineamenta* reflects on the resources for attaining such formation. If the Church is to attain her evangelising mission of reconciling all people in Christ, she must emphasise a full spirituality of Christian involvement in politics, the world of work and professional life. Jesus called his disciples to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. This calls for the appropriate formation and insertion in concrete everyday life.

The liturgical life of the Church must be the focus of Christian spirituality. “The Eucharistic presence teaches and actualises the fact that the departure point of salvation is the gratuitous acceptance, in a full act of love, of every man (every woman) and every reality, as a gift of God”.¹⁷ This gift makes of the Christian someone who lives on the love received from the One and Triune God. From this experience of the divine, the Christian attains the conviction that all are brothers and sisters, without distinction of race or sex, social class or culture and that Christian witness is also the anticipation and realisation, in time and space of God’s gift, transforming the world. Therefore, the service which the Church must exercise in the world is first of all a service of welcoming and listening to the needs of all, especially the voiceless. The Church expresses her poverty in her ability to listen to all human needs and bring them to the Father, the source of all good. Eucharistic spirituality gives rise to a humanity where all are seen as brothers and sisters.

From the liturgical life of the Church must flow a spirituality of commitment to the world. In this, the fruits of the sacraments celebrated in an ecclesial community become meaningful for the society in which the person lives. This spirituality reflects in the care that one has for the work he/she does, with a commitment to do it well. This is what the sanctification of work really means. This should help the individual learn to work in a team and in collaboration with others, creating a family atmosphere. Such a spirituality will also nurture a sense of freedom and every Christian will become a reconciler and an agent of justice and peace.

Conclusion

In a few words, I would like to conclude by sharing my aspirations of what could still be said about the theme of the Special Assembly for Africa. Rather than talk of shortcomings

¹⁶ *Lineamenta*, N° 66.

¹⁷ *Lineamenta*, N° 84.

of the *Lineamenta*, I would like to select the following points as an invitation to reflect further on what could enrich the content of the on-going reflection leading to the Assembly itself.

1. *Inter-religious dialogue*

The *Lineamenta* presents Inter-religious dialogue as one of the tools for working towards reconciliation, peace and justice in Africa (Chapter One). The recognition that this dialogue should include African Traditional Religion and Islam is a step in the right direction. This dialogue is important because the interaction between adherents of these religions and Christians at the grass root level is very important for peaceful co-existence. The Church has the task of forming her members and of promoting this dialogue. This could be done through the re-enforcement of the following means already present in the Church in Africa:

- a) help Christians to understand African traditions and ideas of life, the person and family in the light of the Word.
- b) the Word of God should give the sacred meaning of the word in African tradition a saving character and strip it of death, so that no one will perish.
- c) Encourage and intensify the Biblical Pastoral Ministry on the continent to help Christians gain a deeper understanding of the Word of God and further develop Christian communities into places of deep-listening to the Word of God and the powerful reading of Sacred Scripture, for a better incarnation of the Word in everyday life.
- d) Some practices, such as rituals against spells, can evidently produce contrary effects today and accentuate hatred and divisions in society (questions related to sorcery, witchcraft need to be addressed and evangelised).
- e) Some sects or religious movements promote unending prayers and singing to prevent young people to be engaged in the transformation of the society. Christians should be helped to confront the realities surrounding them instead of living in illusions.

2. *Reading and sharing of the Holy Writings*

A common ground for working towards, reconciliation, peace and justice is the reading and sharing of the Holy Writings of different religious groups on the continent. Even though African Traditional Religions do not have Holy Writings, we need to be open to her oral traditions which contain her beliefs. The Church should sustain and encourage the effort of bringing the Word of God to all Christians and through the Biblical Pastoral Ministry help its better understanding and application to everyday life situations. Reading and sharing the Holy Writings of different people of the Book will help all people of faith realise that there is a lot that we can do in common.

3. *Reconciliation, justice and peace ad intra*

In speaking of her service to reconciliation, justice and peace, the *Lineamenta* focuses a great deal on civil society. While the transformation of civil society is paramount to the realisation of the mission of the Church, one would also expect some self-examination on the part of the Church. The *Lineamenta* is silent on internal ecclesiastical problems or problems between communities or within the same community. The *Instrumentum laboris* maintains the same ad extra character, concentrating on how the gospel message can transform the broader culture. It urges the church in Africa not to retire into herself but to play a prophetic role in the social and political life of the continent¹⁸.

¹⁸ Cf. *Instrumentum laboris*, n° 4.

While it is good to be concerned about the beam or plank in the eyes of civil society, we should not forget to look at the speck or splinter in our own. In short, we should also ask ourselves how these issues of reconciliation, justice and peace are lived within our own Church. We should look for ways in which the Church can be a sign of reconciliation, justice and peace in her own domain.

4. *The prophetic role of priests and consecrated persons*

The reflection on the role of priests and consecrated persons in Chapter Three of the *Lineamenta* is rather limited. It can be accepted that the specific mission of priests in the Church is not political, economic, or social in nature, but religious. The same cannot however be simply said of all consecrated persons. There are many consecrated persons on the continent who by the very fact of their consecration are in the forefront of the promotion of reconciliation, justice and peace – some at the cost of their lives. The consecrated person is called to play a prophetic role in contemporary society. The work of the consecrated persons cannot therefore be limited to “embracing the evangelical counsels in their own communities and the world”.¹⁹ More needs to be said about their prophetic and concrete roles in human society as messengers of reconciliation, justice and peace.

Religious communities in Africa are often composed of consecrated persons originating from different ethnic and cultural background and countries. It is significant to note that they live together in the same community and together witness to the same Christian values as consecrated men and women. This is a prophetic affirmation that when we place the Gospel at the centre of our lives, the barriers of ethnicity, culture and nations fall apart, making room for the enhancement of the Family of God.

5. *Reconciliation and healing*

The topic of reconciliation and healing, as treated in n° 71-74 needs further development, study and reflection. This is because of the approaches of the new religious movements and Independent African Churches in the area of reconciliation and healing and its influence on Catholics. Their approach has attracted many African Christians from the traditional Christian churches. The impression is that these movements or churches respond better to the felt needs of the African society in matters of reconciliation and healing. It is true that the care of the sick is one of the fundamental concerns of the Church but we have to admit that the pastoral or spiritual aspect of this care calls for further reflection. The Church in Africa needs to reflect further on her understanding of healing and the means she proposes to her pastoral agents for helping the faithful. The church in Africa is in need of not only physical healing but also spiritual and psychological healing from wounds of hurt and different forms of violence.

6. A shift from domination to true partnership

The *Lineamenta* did not elaborate on the phenomenon of the way Africa is perceived by the rest of the world and by Africans themselves. Very often many people have negative ideas about the continent and some even think nothing good can come out of Africa. If Africa is to come out of the doldrums, then the Church must give her hope. We all need to change our mentality about and our attitude towards Africa. Non-Africans should look beyond her poverty, disease and underdevelopment. They should begin to appreciate her efforts towards liberation and her demand for fair treatment on the international scene. Africans do not want to be considered beggars but given what our efforts or labour demands in justice. A change in attitude would mean appreciating the grace of the African

¹⁹ *Lineamenta*, N° 59.

and not only her burden, her elegance and not just her underdevelopment, her assets not just her liability, her gift not just her task, her challenge and opportunity not just her problems and difficulties. The church in Africa is in a good position to create an enabling environment for such a change of mentality by both the Africans themselves and non-Africans.

Conclusion

When all is said and done, we still have to recognise that this Second Assembly for Africa is a very good chance for our Church. It should help us look for ways of responding to the challenges of witnessing to the Good News in a continent very much in need of reconciliation, justice and peace. Let us give the Assembly a chance to be properly celebrated and later to bear fruit in our lives as Christians and as people of Africa.