

Book review:

Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace: The Second African Synod, **edited by Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator**

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Reviewer: **Joseph Ogonnaya**

The convocation of a Second Synod for Africa (2009) in less than two decades of the first African Synod (1994) shows the commitment of the Catholic Church towards reconciliation, justice, and peace in Africa (*Africae Munus*, #2). The contributors of the five parts of this book reflect on the various ecclesiological dimensions of the theme of the Second African Synod: 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).

In part I on theology of the Church, interreligious dialogue and the challenge of reconciliation, justice and peace, the book calls for a review of the ecclesiology of the church in Africa through a reconsideration of the church's hierarchical structure (Teresa Okure). It encourages engagement in genuine interreligious dialogue that "discover[s] and uncover as much as possible God's presence in each" (p. 33) especially with African traditional religion (Laurenti Magesa) through appropriate use of inclusive local languages (Festo Mkenda). In the light of the importance placed on the Word of God in African culture, the book urges the use of the Word of God as a tool to foster genuine reconciliation (Paul Bere). In this way, small Christian communities can contribute to social transformation (Joseph G. Healey).

Part II on the mission of the Church in the public square feature articles on development of Africa. Here Elias Omondi Opongo acknowledging the challenges facing Africa is systemic, recommend the intervention of the Church through "conflict resolution and reconciliation, and transformation of the structures of injustice" (p. 81). However, the public role of the Church must be balanced by its servant engagement in the public sphere (Yvon Christian Elenga). While doing this, the church must learn how to phrase her religious presuppositions in secular reasoning and language in ways that will capture the increasingly secular worldview (Anthony Egan). The church will achieve a lot in its public role through a

systematic, sustained and collaborative approach that will involve ecclesial organizations and government collaboration as opposed to a haphazard confrontational approach (Odomaro Mubangizi).

Part III on ecclesial leadership and gender justice in Church and society concentrates on the condition of women in the African Church. Within the context of women subjugation, the book suggests practical measures for women liberation in the Church. This includes a paradigm shift in the patterns of thought about women prevalent in the African culture and the church (Anne Arabome). And women religious telling their stories of violence and suffering in the Church (Ngozi Frances Uti). It is important as well to appreciate the involvement of the laity in ecclesial leadership and adequate knowledge of the public role of the church (David Kaulem).

Part IV on integrity of the earth feature articles on ecology, natural resources and poverty. On ecology, the book calls on Christians to take leadership role in sensitizing Africans about the environment and doing all they can to protect it against such marauders like the multinational corporations (Peter Knox). Specifying the extraction of resources, it laments the perpetuation of anthropological poverty of Africans who are denied just benefit from their abundant natural resources (Peter Kanyandago). On poverty, the book laments the contradiction of evangelization, dependence and poverty, which militates against the church in Africa being the 'spiritual lung' for humanity (Nathanael Yaovi Soede).

Part V is devoted to theological and ethical issues as well as HIV/AIDS. On HIV/AIDS the book recommends a shift in debate from defense of condom use to a responsible life-style based on abstinence and fidelity (Michael Czerny). The reasons for this shift in debate include first, the relativity of condoms; second, the incompatibility of condom use with the principle of life; third, the fact that the issue of HIV/AIDS is fuelled by poverty, and good treatment is a key factor in fostering prevention (Paterne-Auxence Mombe). In the light of foreign religious/ethical ideologies influencing Africa and exacerbating violence, Paulinus I. Odozor urges the Church to assist Africa in achieving self-reliance and have religiously and morally educated mature laity able to "identify and challenge religious or ethical virus that threaten the health of African societies and peoples" (p. 224). Furthermore, achieving reconciliation in Africa in the light of the scourge of corruption will have to address the twin issues of transparency and accountability in the light of the traditional African religio-cultural contexts (Gabriel Mmasi).

The epilogue balances the pastoral and political mission of the church in the light of the Second African Synod (Peter Henriot). Drawing from Pope Benedict XVI's dialectic of the two foundational poles of the church's mission and from examples drawn from the Zambian bishop's engagement in these missions, Henriot urges the existence of an African church that holds in tension both dialectics in a creatively harmonious tension.

In the light of the increasing violence and conflicts between Christianity and Islam in much of Africa, the omission in the book of a reflection on interreligious dialogue with Islam as a measure of conflict resolution and promotion of reconciliation, justice, and peace is surprising, especially as *Africae Munus* #94 urges mutual co-existence and "patient dialogue" with Islam. Although the book would have served the Second African Synod better were it based on the apostolic exhortation *Africae munus*, rather than on the preparatory documents and *the final 57 propositions*, it remains a highly recommended blueprint exploring the diverse dimensions of the theme of the Second African Synod: reconciliation, justice and peace.