



Catholic Peacebuilding Network Update on Africa-October 19, 2009

Web cast: The Church in Africa: A Force for Peace, Oct. 21. 2009

Catholic Relief Services and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops will present an online Catholics Confront Global Poverty discussion with John Katunga, Jean-Baptiste Talla, Steve Hilbert and moderated by Paul Miller. The web cast will be October 21, 2009, 12:00-1:00 PM Eastern Standard Time. To register, go

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Letter update: African Synod in Rome

Pope Benedict appointed Rev. Paulinus Odozor, C.S.Sp. as an *Adiutor Secretarii Specialis* for the Second Special Assembly for Africa. Below is Fr. Odozor's second report on the African synod in Rome.

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Again, greetings from the synod in Rome.... It is late on Sunday October 18, 2009 and before I go to bed I want to try and fulfill my promise. Therefore, here comes. In this letter I will try and bring you up to speed on some of the ways the synod has functioned since Cardinal Turkson's *Relatio Post Disceptationem* (report after the debates) last Tuesday. I will discuss a number of issues that appear significant at this point in the synod.

1. Following Cardinal Turkson's presentation (cf my last letter) the synod went into small group discussions. These groups were to discuss Turkson's report together with all other reports presented to the synod. They were expected to draw up a list of propositions, vote on them, and then send them back to the general relator (Turkson). Turkson's group, which now includes the experts, the various secretaries of the different groups and the two Special Assistant Secretaries of the Synod (two bishops from Chad and Angola) is to harmonize the different propositions and prepare them in the different languages for debate and adaption or rejection next week.
2. I want to say a little more about the small groups. Every one attending the synod is put into one or the other of the small groups which are divided according to languages: English, French, and Portuguese. I think there are fifteen or so of these groups. The group I belong to has among others as members, cardinals Njue (Nairobi), Arinze (Vatican City), Martino (Vatican City), formerly head of the Vatican delegation to the UNO, but now in charge of Justice and Peace, etc here at the Vatican, Diaz (Vatican City) in charge of the Vatican Secretariat for the propagation of the faith; the Archbishops of Accra, Owerri, Lesotho, Eretria, Freetown and Bo, the Bishops from Kisumu, Kenya, Makena, Sierra Leone, Banjul, Gambia, Superior Generals of two female religious communities and those of two male communities, Fr Juvenalis Baitu, deputy vice chancellor of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi; Sr Teresa Okure of the

Catholic Institute of West Africa and I are the two experts attached to the group. Archbishop Palmer-Buckle of Accra is chair of this group. The Secretary is Archbishop Anthony Obinna of Owerri, Nigeria.

3. The small groups are an essential part of the synod. It is here that the ideas which have been circulating in the various reports or at the plenary sessions either get traction through debates and adoption or simply die and are forgotten. Our group has been functioning in an amazingly open way. The debates have been sometimes heated. But throughout, everyone has had as much say as everyone else. This has been very important because it has meant that no point of view has been excluded and no person can complain that he or she was not heard. The end result of these discussions was to draw up propositions to be sent up to the General Relator and his team of experts and group secretaries to harmonize and bring up to the General Assembly for debate on Tuesday. Bishops or other synod fathers are the only ones who can sponsor a proposition. This means that even though the idea might belong to one of the non-synod fathers in the group that idea can only be voted on as proposition if a synod father takes it over and makes it his own. It is not hard to find a synod father who would take over an idea and bring it to vote if that idea is well put and has been thoroughly debated and is theologically sound and commonsensical.
4. As you well know, the theme of this synod is “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). One of the proofs of the soundness of any proposition is also the extent to which it contributes to the overall theme of the synod. People have been concerned that the synod does not simply restate ideas which had been covered in the first synod on Africa in 1994. The post synod exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, which was issued by Pope John Paul II after the 1994 synod still, has currency. Even so, this present synod calls for new and creative thinking especially on many issues facing Africa and the Church in Africa today. People have been conscious of these as they offer their propositions. As I write, every small group has handed in its report. The group secretaries have been working round the clock to get these reports ready for the next session on Tuesday. The synod is on recess tomorrow Monday to allow the groups to get the reports ready. I and a number of other experts have been called in at 9: am Monday to finalize work on this text.
5. Two other things happened before the synod vacated on Friday. One was the presentation of the *Nuntius*, which is the final message which the synod would issue to the whole world at the end of the meeting. As soon as the synod opened, a special committee was set up to begin to work on this message. This committee is chaired by the Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria, Archbishop John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan. On Friday October 18, the synod listened to the Archbishop read a draft of the nuntius. It was simply brilliant and comprehensive. The Archbishop was rewarded handsomely with sustained applause by the synod participants. There were some suggestions for amendment here and there. The report will be brought up to vote sometime this week. The second thing which happened in the main assembly of the synod on Friday was the first round of voting for a standing committee of the synod which will assist the pope in drafting the synodal exhortation which would be the final authoritative word on the synod. Later this evening we were taken on an exclusive tour of the Sistine chapel. A tour of the Vatican Museum is slated for sometime this week.
6. What has this synod been talking about? As I stated in my last report, there have been reports about historical, socio-economic, political, religious, cultural and other factors destabilizing Africa. There have been concerns about finding solutions to many of these problems by attending to these factors of instability in these areas as much as the Church can. There have been concerns about how to identify or create structures and mechanisms

within and outside the church as well as between the church/churches and other entities both inside and outside Africa to solve these issues. There has been clear recognition that Africa's greatest assets are its peoples and that the Church must increase and improve its efforts at harnessing this most important resource. As I have already stated above the propositions are still being compiled. That means that no one knows yet which ones will be accepted and which ones would be rejected. But I can safely say that from a quick look at the documents I am privy to it would appear that propositions on women are quite many. Women have been speaking out very clearly and very loudly at this synod. As you may have heard already through new reports one of the women speakers at the synod invited the synod fathers to do a two minute exercise before they went to bed and to imagine what a church without women would look like. The synod fathers have clearly taken this matter to heart. The woman who made this point was not even speaking on ordination. She was simply arguing that there were things in the Church and society in Africa and elsewhere which structurally incapacitate women and make them unable to render full service in the Church and in society as Christians and able citizens. Many synod fathers have amplified this theme. The result has been interesting to watch. There have been discussions on the treatment of the girl-child, on the question of some marriage customs in Africa which place undue stress on women, on inheritance rights, on widowed women and the treatment they receive in some African societies. With regard to the church there has been a lot of soul-searching on how to bring women on board in those areas of leadership and governance which are legal in canon law, there have been discussions on theological and other educational opportunities for women, etc. The concerns extend to all categories of women, lay, religious, clerical, single, etc. The question of trafficking of women has also been raised.

7. Another issue which has gotten a lot of attention is politics, governance and public service. It is recognized in this synod that as Chinua Achebe wrote in the *Trouble with Nigeria*, The trouble with Africa is leadership. The synod has spent a lot of energy wondering about what the Church can do to help this situation. The recognition is clear that Catholic and other Christian public servants are often no better stewards of public trust and treasure than others. Where have we gone wrong, and what can we do as a church?
8. A third issue from the synod is that not only has the synod fathers tried to identify the various elements which are causing tensions and stress in Africa they have, as I said before, put a lot of considerable stress on strengthening existing Church structures at both the national and intra-national (Africa) level to ready the Church for its role as reconciler of peoples.
9. Finally, this synod is very aware that as Paul VI put it long ago preaching alone does not move people anymore. The world is rather moved by those who live what they preach. The question then is how the Church can be an effective and credible agent of reconciliation justice and peace if it is lacking in these qualities and virtues. Thus there has been a lot of talk about conversion and renewal in the African church. It has been very strongly felt that there must be good relationships between and among all entities in the African church: priests, bishops, laity, men, women, and youth, old.
10. Let me reiterate that this synod is not only one of the most well-organized and well-planned meetings I have attended in my life (and believe me I have attended many conventions and meetings, etc) it is one of the most open and inclusive settings or meetings I have ever been at. Before I leave Rome for home next week, I will try a theological assessment of the synod. By that time, I would have before me the approved propositions and nuntius and other

documents as well which would have been definitive and official by then. Lastly, I want to inform you that I did get my papal handshake. I have plenty of pictures to prove it.

God bless you all.

Sincerely,

Paulinus

<http://theology.nd.edu/people/all/odozor-paulinus/index.shtml>