

**THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE AMECEA COUNTRIES  
ON THE EVE OF THE AFRICAN SYNOD**

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Then, caught up in a fresh blowing of the "winds of change," Africa in the 1990's has been experiencing a "Second Independence." This has meant, again in a variety of contexts and contents, a move toward political democracy, the rise of or return to a system of multi-party competition, the respect for a free press, and the hope of protection and promotion of basic human rights. The experience within our AMECEA countries has been varied: fair and free multi-party elections and peaceful transition to new leadership here in Zambia; acceptance of multi-partyism - in principle if not yet in fact -- in Kenya and Tanzania; new constitutionalism in Uganda; rising pressures for democracy in Malawi.

### **The Role of the Church**

What seems to me to be very important to focus on in both the First and the Second Independence is the role of the church. Correct me if I am mistaken, but is it not true to say that the church -- especially the official church of bishops and clergy -- was by and large absent from leadership roles in the struggle for the First Independence? There are surely exceptions to this generalisation, but on the whole the church did not appear as a major player in the Independence struggle of the 1960's. This might be explained for a number of reasons, but at least two reasons were (1) the officials of the church were largely expatriates, themselves frequently associated by origin, and occasionally by attitude, with the colonial powers; and (2) this was a pre-Vatican II church without the theological premise and pastoral practice of *Gaudium et Spes*, with an ecclesiological model which could subsist without active engagement in the social context of its day. Again, exceptions, but is this not a fairly accurate historical picture?

Today, however, during this moment of the Second Independence, the church in Africa is quite active in the struggle, with leadership, laity, letters, etc. Look at the West African scene, where in countries such as Benin, Togo, Congo, Zaire, the national conferences -- those assemblies of national sovereignty -- are chaired by prominent members of the church hierarchy. The courage these very days during which we meet of Archbishop Monsengwo, chair of the Zaire National Assembly, is well-known. Here in our AMECEA countries, the challenging pastoral letters of the bishops of Kenya, Uganda and Zambia have played and continue to play key roles in the movement toward democracy. The bishops of the Sudan and Malawi have suffered persecution because of their courageous letters speaking out on behalf of their oppressed peoples. Both inspired by their bishops and acting on their own, Catholic laity in Africa have contributed strong citizen leadership in the democratic struggle.

Surely there are exceptions, as in the time of the First Independence, and that for a variety of reasons. But with most bishops' being African and an increasing percentage of African clergy, and with a Vatican II ecclesiology and a social teaching of the church which emphasises that promotion of justice in a "constitutive dimension" of evangelisation, the church has indeed been very active in the Second Independence. This is a prominent fact upon which to focus attention as we move toward the African Synod. Not only is the social context significantly changed and changing, but the church itself -- in theology, structure and pastoral practice -- is changed and changing.

## TWO MAJOR MOVEMENTS

Two major facts mark the era of the Second Independence here in Africa. These facts, which must be situated in the political and economic change which is sweeping the globe during this last decade of the Twentieth Century, are (1) political democratisation and (2) economic liberalisation.

Speaking in general terms, *political democratisation* is the movement away from military rule and/or one party rule toward multi-party democratic systems, free elections, constitutional defense of human rights, free press, etc.

On the other hand, *economic liberalisation* is the movement away from a centrally-planned, state-controlled economy (in short, socialism) toward a free-market, privatised economy (in short, capitalism).

It is important for us here to examine these movements analytically, in order to understand their histories and structures, their causes and consequences. This explanation of the social context of our countries on the eve of the African Synod will help us, I believe, to explore more confidently and develop more adequately the church's role in the decade of the 1990's and thus address the challenge of the Synod, "Evangelisation Toward the Year 2000."

### Political Democratisation

#### *Why the one-party approach?*

In looking at the movement of political democratisation, the first question to ask is why the one-party approach to government arose shortly after Independence. Many reasons are suggested for the development of one-partyism in Africa. *Culturally*, there was a feeling among many leaders that the one-party approach was more appropriate to the African style of governing. Is it not the tradition here to have only one head in a village, one chief in any given area? The opposition is carefully controlled and decisions are made by an approach of consensus and not of organised dissent. *Economically*, one-party politics was seen to be less expensive and more efficient in the young developing countries of Africa. The task of economic development was so vast that some leaders felt the expenses and time of multi-party politics were luxuries which could not be afforded. And *politically*, the one-party approach was seen as a unifying factor, keeping down tribalism and regional divisions, realities of life which threatened to break up the fragile national unity of the new states.

Moreover, in the early days of Independence, there was an understandable attraction among many leaders for the system of socialism and for non-alignment, as opposed to the ideology and practice of the former colonial masters. This meant that independence leaders in many African countries felt closer to the countries of Eastern Europe which were one-party states. Numerous young Africans were sent to the Soviet Union, East Germany, Bulgaria, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, to learn statecraft, politics, government. What occurred, then, was the importing of a foreign ideology of the totalitarian state, indeed foreign to the African tradition of civil society. A one-party system which might have been culturally African at the outset

not heard, their concerns not paid attention to, their problems not solved. This frustration has been intensified by the worsening economic situation in the African countries, with people being crushed under rising prices, shortages of essential goods, high unemployment and the near collapse of the social infrastructures and services of health, education, transport, communication, etc. Even if the leadership of the one-party systems were not responsible for all these miseries and woes, their lack of accountability to the people has made inevitable a serious challenge to their monopoly of power.

These *internal* pressures for change have been reinforced by *external* factors such as the collapse of the Eastern European models of one-party states. The "Revolution of 1989" in Europe brought disarray, decline and discredit to the very regimes to which at least some of the proponents of one-party rule had looked for inspiration and guidance. It became painfully evident that the governing ideology of these nations had brought extreme repression and economic chaos. As a result, simplistic support for the one-party system was no longer tolerable and popular.

Moreover, pressure from international donors was also influencing change toward greater democratisation. Protection of human rights and promotion of democratic practices were becoming *conditions* on which the governments and institutions of Europe and North America were basing their grants, loans, technical assistance, etc. Indeed, as experienced recently in Kenya and Malawi, reluctance to these democratic changes has lead directly to a suspension of foreign assistance.

### ***Future of Democracy***

And so throughout most of Africa, and in particular in our AMECEA countries, multi-partyism is either in place or events are moving in that direction. But multi-partyism of itself does not mean democracy. Additional structures, institutions and attitudes are necessary. If we are honest, we must recognise that this new democracy in Africa is very fragile. Its structures are new and untested, it faces destabilisation from the economic crisis, and it lacks a supportive popular "culture" -- the norms, values and practices which make democracy work. In most areas, the majority of the population is experiencing democratic freedoms and institutions for the very first time. Hence there is need to foster what we here in Zambia refer to as the "new political culture" -- an acceptance of pluralism, diversity and dialogue; a commitment to accountability and service on the part of leadership, and responsibility and sacrifice on the part of the citizenry; a social covenant of honesty, equal treatment and hard work. Such a political culture does not spring up overnight, and the behaviours and attitudes of the former non-democratic one-party system can be expected to surface at many critical moments.

It is most important to remember that democracy demands solid respect for and strong protection of human rights. As John Paul II states in *One Hundred Years (Centesimus Annus)*, "...it is necessary for peoples in the process of reforming their systems to give democracy an authentic and solid foundation through the explicit recognition of those rights." (#47) These are the human rights which each of us have, not through the kindness of leaders nor the grants of constitutions but by reason of our innate dignity as women and men created in the image of God. These rights, frequently explicitated in the national constitutions of our African states, are

### ***Internal Causes of Decline***

At the time of their First Independence, the African states faced the challenge of dealing with a colonial legacy. This legacy frequently oriented the economy along mono-culture lines (export of a single basic commodity such as copper, cocoa, coffee), neglected peasant agriculture, designed transport and communications infrastructure for colonial advantage, and denied educational and employment advancement opportunities to Africans.

As the colonial rule was withdrawn, responsibility for governing the economy fell into unexperienced hands. Unskilled management has made mistakes; corrupt management has compounded them. Civil wars, frequently along tribal lines, has drained resources. Military spending has diverted scarce funds from more productive areas. Expenditures on grandiose projects by self-aggrandising rulers have wasted millions and millions of foreign exchange needed to improve the lives of the people.

An additional internal factor has been the choice by many African governments of public economic policies that were neither adequately conceived nor efficiently managed. Investment and operating costs are markedly higher in Africa than in other developing countries. Efforts to "socialise" the economy -- however laudable in pursuit of greater equity -- have in most instances had just the opposite effect of creating a greater gap between the rich and the poor. As noted earlier, the politicisation of the administrative apparatus has been accompanied by the buildup of huge bureaucracies, the spread of corruption, the cultivation of inefficiency and the failure to deliver the goods and services.

### ***External Causes of Decline***

But beyond these internal causes of economic decline, there are external causes which lay particularly heavy on the back of the African economy, and these will continue to cause serious economic problems throughout the 1990's. Three dominant and interlinked factors affecting development are (1) foreign trade, (2) foreign debt, and (3) foreign capital flows (i.e., grants, loans, investments).

As regards *trade*, the price of the basic commodities which African countries have to export has tended to fall and the price of the goods which these countries have to import -- from manufactured goods to oil -- has tended to rise. A growing "balance of trade deficit" has resulted, with countries spending more on imports than they are earning on exports. You can give numerous examples for this from experiences in your own countries.

The result of such a trade deficit is well known to all of us: a rising external *debt*. This problem affects most of the developing nations. Indeed, it affects many of the richest developed nations as well. To keep up expenditures on imports of both needed items (such as oil, medicine and machinery parts) as well as unneeded luxury items (Mercedeses seemed not to have been rationed very strictly!), governments borrowed from eager Northern lenders. In 1960, the external debt of the African countries was US\$6 billion; in 1980, US\$56 billion; in 1990, US\$173 billion. Debt repayments -- mainly, of course, on interest, not on principal -- was and is eating up the lion's share of scarce export earnings.

## ***Meaning of SAP***

In an effort to meet their massive economic problems, African countries have entered into the "structural adjustment programmes" (SAP) mandated by the IMF and World Bank as conditions for any further assistance. These programmes are central to the economic liberalisation sweeping across Africa and affecting us here in the AMECEA countries. In some form or another, all the AMECEA countries are engaged in SAP. For all practical purposes, policies of "economic development" since the 1980's have in fact meant programmes of "structural adjustment."

But what does SAP mean? Without presenting here a one-year course in macro-economics, let me simply say that the programmes apply across the board the classical instruments of control of the money supply, credit squeeze, adjustments in exchange and interest rates, trade liberalisation, privatisation, curtailment of social services, and reduction of public employment. Concretely, it means that the currency is devalued, interest rates are increased, price controls are lifted, wages are restrained, government jobs are cut, subsidies on basics such as food and fertilisers are removed, para-statal are sold-off to the private sector, fees for health and education services are introduced. It is, in essence, the "retreat of the state," for this is the heart of economic liberalisation. Its purpose is basically to restore fiscal stability within the economy, enabling the generation of foreign exchange to service the external debt.

Few, if any, would argue that our African economies do not need to be restructured. Grossly inefficient and unproductive, politically manipulated to the benefit of only an elite few, and unable to respond to the rapidly changing international environment, the economies cry out for restructuring. To cite some examples, subsidies on basic foodstuffs such as mealie-meal, though designed to help the poor, have frequently been managed unfairly, with greater benefit to the rich than to the poor. Para-statals, at least as they have operated in most instances, have choked initiatives and stifled production, contributing to the growing gap between the rich and the poor. Thus, the IMF and World Bank's insistence on restructuring has elements of truth and sanity about it.

## ***Critique of SAP***

But there are serious cautions which need to be expressed. Does the failure of socialism mean the triumph of Thatcherism and Reaganism? This is precisely the question asked by John Paul II in his letter, *One Hundred Years*. (# 42) And it is a question which faces us today here in Africa and which we must, as Christian leaders, answer forthrightly. Specifically, several very important challenges have been made to the philosophy and practice of SAP. These need to be understood lest the economic liberalisation movement be uncritically embraced. At least four points must be noted.

1. *Economically*, SAP is a fiscal programme and not a development programme. This, in brief, is one of the sharpest critiques. It means that SAP focuses on the *short-term* objectives of reestablishing financial balances in order to service foreign debt, and gives second place to the *long-term* objectives of the social and economic transformations necessary to remove structural roadblocks to

The changes in South Africa are already being felt in other countries. Whatever the outcome of the CODESA negotiations on the future of a non-racial, democratic South Africa, at least considerable benefits will come from the halting of the policy of "destabilisation" of its neighbours. Studies reported by the World Bank estimate that the destabilisation policy of the Pretoria government was costing nations in Southern Africa from 25% to 40% of their annual GNP. But what the overall impact of changes in South Africa will be remains to be seen. Some observers feel that the new South Africa will be a catalyst for development throughout Africa in terms of trade and investment. But others point out that the internal social restructuring of South Africa will require massive internal investments, restricting its role in regional development in the near future.

The collapse of Eastern European communist governments and the breakup of the Soviet Union has affected African countries in a variety of ways. For some, ideological models have crumbled. For others, military support has ended. For all, the position of being strategic pawns in the Cold War confrontation between East and West has been lost.

What does seem clear is that African countries should not expect any renewed or increased interest to be shown them by the West because of the end of the Cold War. At least for the foreseeable future, foreign aid, business interests, technological support, tourism, etc., will primarily be focused on Eastern Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union. The United States, Japan and the European Community will give priority to trade relationships among themselves and with the newly "democratised" and "capitalist" states of the East. African countries, to be blunt, are very far down on the list of priorities. Is some of this shift of interest already being felt, or will it be felt in the near future, in the orientation of major church-related funding groups such as those associated with the European Lenten campaigns? Surely any shift there will have significant effects on church activities here in Africa.

### Three Views of the Future

So what is the future of Africa's Second Independence? As the African Synod looks forward to the church's evangelising mission in the Year 2000, what is likely to be the social context of the next decade? I for one surely cannot predict, but I can see at least three views of the direction which Africa might take.

1. *Optimistic:* According to this view, the situation will be greatly improved in the next ten years. Africa will shortly have "turned the corner" on its problems, and by and large we will be experiencing a new and vibrant prosperity. The successful course of political reforms will enable the necessary economic reforms to move forward. The continent's rich resources, natural and human, will be more effectively tapped. The African will move out of poverty and misery into a brighter future.

2. *Pessimistic:* This view states that there is no way that conditions will improve over the next ten years. Countries outside of Africa will increasingly turn their backs on our plight. The harsh economic measures imposed by the structural adjustment programmes will continue to strangle true development and impose even greater suffering on the majority of the population. As a consequence, the new democratic reforms will falter and the political situation will stumble back into

zeal, vitality and industriousness of youth is relatively untapped in pastoral strategies. (April, 1992) The 1989 AMECEA Study Session addressed the issue of youth.

3. Questions around the *role of women* in society and church, as we must work to assure that women's dignity is respected, their gifts are recognised, and their persons are included in decision-making positions. The pastoral task here is for the church in structure and practice to manifest the respect for women which our Gospel and our social teaching emphasises.

4. And finally, *ministry* questions, as we face the fact that the numbers of ordained priests is declining in proportion to the growth in the numbers of baptised Catholics. (A Nigerian priest, Nicholas Ibeanuchi Mbogu, reports in AFER that at the start of 1980 there were estimated to be one priest for every 2500 Catholics in Africa. While it is projected that by the year 2000 there will be three times as many priests, for every priest there will be 15,000 - 18,000 Catholics. [December, 1991]) This means that we must struggle with the serious threat to the future of authentic Roman Catholic life posed by the fact that more and more Catholics -- especially new Catholics -- simply lack an experience of regular Eucharistic celebration in their communities. How honest and courageous can we be to deal with the ministerial questions raised by this disturbing fact?

These are just a few of the pastoral questions which the Synod must deal with if it is to be an effective instrument in the promotion of integral evangelisation toward the Year 2000 on the African continent. Here in the AMECEA countries, we all have become more deeply aware of the seriousness of these and similar questions as we have explored the *Lineamenta* in gatherings of our small Christian communities, in special workshops and seminars, in meetings of theologians and other experts. Indeed, these pastoral questions have already come up during the business session of AMECEA and will come up again in the remaining days of the workshop in which we are currently engaged.

### Concluding Challenges

What I want to do here by way of conclusion to my presentation is, *first*, simply to urge once again that these pastoral questions be seen within the total social context we have just analysed; and then, *second*, to urge with greater detail a series of challenges which I suggest confront the church as it responds to that social context. These are challenges of structure, of formation, of practice. Let me list eight of these challenges for our subsequent discussion and action.

1. The challenge to be an *authentically African church*. This is the challenge of inculturation, central to the future of Christianity here. Surely this topic is the number one agenda item for the Synod, and we will take up in detail during this week. But what I want to emphasis here is that when we look at the social context of lived faith in our countries, we must see the *link between inculturation and liberation*. Indeed, without making that link, we run the risk of what Cameroonian theologian Jean-Marc Ela calls a "dangerous mystification," a fascination with internal issues which distract us from external suffering. According to Ela, "...a liturgy using indigenous music might cause Africans to forget that they are human beings under domination." (*My Faith as an African*, p. 147) Indeed, just as the Latin



should all be training lay leaders with the perspective of the church's social teaching. This social teaching -- often referred to as "our church's best kept secret" -- is, in the words of John Paul II, "a valid instrument of evangelisation." (*One Hundred Years*, #54) I believe that we must especially reach out to Catholics in leadership positions in government, business, labour, education, etc. Here in our AMECEA countries, the pastoral strategy of small Christian communities provides an excellent basis for the formation of communities of concerned response to the social context. For example, the justice and peace training programmes which are operating in several countries are central.

5. The challenge to *train church ministers responsive to the needs of the social context*. This is surely one of the greatest challenges, to develop programmes for the training of lay ministers (catechists, leaders of small Christian communities and organisations), priests and religious which enable them to be with the people in struggling with the political and economic problems of our day. How central in our seminary programmes and our formation programmes for religious is education in the church's social teaching, in the skills of social analysis, in the strategies of cooperation and team work? Without this central focus, our efforts at promoting integral evangelisation in the years ahead are surely doomed. The African Synod's emphasis on "priestly, religious and lay formation" for evangelisation should, in our social context, take on concrete shape in a spirituality which links faith and justice. Indeed, we must deepen the spiritual formation of our church ministers. We need a spirituality strong enough to sustain us in the face of death -- war, famine, AIDS, oppression -- and to offer life in the building of communities of justice and peace, caring and love.

6. The challenge to *promote integral development* among the people. Paul VI gave a justly famous definition of development: something which is "for each and all the transition from less human conditions to those which are more human." (*Development of Peoples*, #20) The church responds to the problems of our social context through the charity of relief (give a person a fish), the work of development (teach a person to fish), and the pursuit of justice (struggle for a person's right to fish). All three of these response are necessary for an integral approach. Again to emphasise "our best kept secret," the church's social teaching offers excellent lessons on the meaning of integral development, a development which stresses self-reliance, respects cultural values, is shared in by all, especially the poor, is in harmony with the environment, etc. As our AMECEA countries struggle to develop in our Second Independence, we look to the African Synod's stress on integral development.

7. Finally, the challenge to *build hope for the future*. As we all know, these are times when we can easily despair in the face of the social context of our countries. On the eve of the African Synod, we are moving out of the "lost decade of the 1980's" into the "lost decade of the 1990's" As mentioned earlier, there are little or no grounds for a naively optimistic view of our future, and all too many grounds for a grimly pessimistic view. Even our cautiously realistic view must be simply that: cautious. Many African leaders seem devoid of vision; many friends of Africa in other countries seem weary of concern. In the face of natural and human made disasters which daily confront millions on our continent, the temptation is great to succumb to resignation, fatalism, despair. An ethic of individualism,

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