

**A CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD OF AFRICA:  
THE ZAMBIAN EXPERIENCE**

by

Peter J. Henriot, S.J.

JCTR

Paper Presented at Conference:

**THE CALL TO JUSTICE:  
THE LEGACY OF GAUDIUM ET SPES  
40 YEARS LATER**

**16 – 18 March, 2005  
Vatican City**

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# A CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD OF AFRICA: THE ZAMBIAN EXPERIENCE

How often have you and I used the opening words of *Gaudium et Spes*, "The joys and hopes, the fears and anxieties..." to call attention for ourselves and for others to the overriding priority of the Church's mission today, the service of all humanity to enjoy life to the fullest! Surely, there is no "church in the modern world" if there is not that Christian community composed of women and men, united in Christ, led by the Holy Spirit, in a journey to the Kingdom intimately linked with humankind and its history.<sup>1</sup>

I want in this paper to present the experience of one part of our universal Christian community, reflecting my own encounter of what this means in putting our church's social teaching (CST) into real daily life. This is more of a personal reflection on experience than an academic analysis of texts. I bring to this reflection sixteen years of working, pastorally and politically, in one African country, Zambia.

Zambia became independent of British colonial rule in 1964, one year before that greatest document of the Second Vatican Council, *Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, was published. The Catholic church in Zambia has over the past forty years played a very significant role in the development of the country. This has occurred both through direct service institutions (e.g., schools and hospitals) and through explicit social teaching on key issues facing the country at large. Today the church enjoys a prominent and respected place, in cooperation with other church bodies, in influencing the social, economic and political life of the people, as well as the religious life of individuals and the community.

It is certainly true that key to the influence of the Catholic church has been the guidance provided by the church's social teaching, in offering both *clarification* of issues and *motivation* for responding to those issues. This social teaching is found both in official documents (many of them ecumenically produced)<sup>2</sup> and in actions undertaken by churches and small Christian communities (SCCs) and by significant organizations such as the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection. The CST has also served as the basis for formation of clergy, religious and laity with the tools of social spirituality and social analysis.

One can quite honestly say that the *Church in the Modern World* has found an *incarnation* – could we even say an *inculturation* – in the Church in Modern World of Africa as experienced in Zambia. Because of this experience, I want to explore here (1) the *context* of Zambia, (2) the *methodology* of the church's teaching, (3) the major points in its *content*, and (4) a few significant *lessons* that can be drawn from its experience.<sup>3</sup>

## 1. CONTEXT

It is very important to realize that Zambia is a *very rich country*, one of the richest in Africa, and that Zambians are *very poor people*, some of the poorest in the world. Zambia is rich in land, water, agriculture, minerals, tourist sites and most especially, a people at peace – forty years of seventy-two tribes living without conflict. We are indeed the envy of our neighbours! But Zambians are very poor, ranking 163 out of 173 on the UNDP *Human Development Index*, with the World Bank estimating more than 80% living on less than one dollar a day. Life expectancy is around 37 years, as malaria, malnutrition and AIDS inflict high mortality on the population.

In many ways, Zambia is a classic case study of what afflicts so much of Africa today: a legacy of colonial exploitation, a history of bad governance, and an experience of the inequitable structures of globalisation. The current worldwide campaign, *Make Poverty History*, identifies well the global problems faced by Zambia: unjust debt burden, unfair trade relationships and inadequate aid arrangements.<sup>4</sup>

Zambia is a multi-party democracy, struggling to achieve good governance after twenty-seven years of one party rule and ten years of highly corrupt rule. We are in the midst now of constitutional review and up-coming presidential elections – highly contentious issues, but issues being dealt with *politically*, not *militarily*, thank God!

Within Zambia, we have a very vital civil society, often led by a very vital church. The Catholic church plays a major role, as it is a church working to implement the guidelines designed by the 1994 African Synod and articulated in the 1995 apostolic exhortation of John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*. These guidelines describe the task of *evangelisation* as five-fold: (1) *proclamation*, (2) *inculturation*, (3) *dialogue*, (4) *justice and peace*, and (5) *communication*.<sup>5</sup> The life of the church is grounded in the *small Christian communities* that form each parish in the country.

Early in *Gaudium et Spes*, there is a beautiful and powerful description of “The Role of the Church in the Modern World.”<sup>6</sup> The description highlights the mutual relationship between church and world and the contribution that each can make to the other. I believe a look at how that relationship functions in the church in Zambia in a few major points can throw important light on this topic. In a brief paper, I can cite only a few of the more important instances, but enough to show how a specific *methodology* influences the *content* of the Zambian church’s social teaching. I also cite how this CST is put into practice.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

How the church goes about its formulation and proclamation of the CST that guides its being a “church in the modern world” is extremely important. The methodology needs analysis

### *Ecumenical Cooperation*

The Zambian expressions of CST have been examples of serious ecumenical cooperation in articulation and action. There are three major church bodies (frequently referred to as “mother bodies”) in Zambia: the Zambian Episcopal Conference (ZEC – national secretariat for ten dioceses), the Council of Churches of Zambia (CCZ, comprised of mainline Protestant churches), and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ, comprised of mainline evangelicals, not including the newer “tele-evangelicals” coming in from North America). This cooperation surprised and encouraged me when I came to live in Zambia in 1989.

These church bodies cooperate in some service missions such as health care, particularly in the rural areas of the country. Most significantly, many major pastoral letters have come out over the signatures of the leaders of these three major church bodies. This ecumenical cooperation influences both the *presentation* – enriching the message -- and the *reception* – strengthening the response. Surely this fact is a recognition of the wisdom of *Gaudium et Spes* when it stated that the church “must rely on those who live the world, are versed in different institutions and specialties, and grasp their innermost significance in the eyes of both believers and un-believers.”<sup>7</sup> Effective ecumenical cooperation makes good sense in today’s church and world, especially in Zambia.

One important joint pastoral letter came in 1979 from the leaders of the Christian Churches, entitled "Marxism, Humanism and Christianity," addressing the crisis provoked by the Ruling Party's desire to introduce "scientific socialism" as a compulsory course of study in all schools, from primary to university level. That effort was subsequently successfully defeated as the churches' unified voice and cooperative action forced a backtracking by the Ruling Party.

Another very important ecumenical document was the joint statement in 1987, "Christian Liberation, Justice and Development: The Churches' Concern for Human Development in Zambia." This statement covered a wide range of political, economic, social, cultural and religious issues. Whether or not it received the response that such a substantial document deserved is a serious question that needs to be raised in the evaluation of such efforts by the churches, either singularly or together.

Other important ecumenical documents will be highlighted below under the discussion of economic and political content. But it is helpful to note here that even if some very strong CST documents were signed only in the name of ZEC, they were often immediately endorsed by leaders of the other church bodies. This was true, for instance, in the important ZEC statement, "Economics, Politics and Justice," that was issued in the wake of the 1991 "IMF riots,"<sup>8</sup> attempted military coup, and movement toward multi-partyism.

### *Inductive Approach*

The philosophical/theological methodology that begins with the reality experienced and moves to theoretical understandings is a mark of contemporary CST around the world. It is an application of the "see, judge and act" approach popularised in the social action movements inspired by Canon Cardijn in the mid-1900s and the "pastoral circle" approach that my colleague Joe Holland and I developed in the 1980s.<sup>9</sup> Though sometimes recently disparaged in more conservative church circles, this approach is certainly endorsed in the "Introductory Statement" of *Gaudium et Spes* where *reading the signs of the times* to discern the situation of women and men in the modern world is clearly described as a starting point for the church's mission.<sup>10</sup>

A good reading of the signs of the times, followed by a cogent social analysis, was the method employed by the Zambian bishops in their 1993 letter on the effects of the IMF-World Bank imposed SAP reforms. Entitled, "Hear the Cry of the Poor," this letter begins with a story of a woman facing immense problems of poverty, with the specific case of poor health care offered by government facilities. Similarly, the Fortieth Anniversary letter referred to above does an inductive review of national history, its graces and sins, to discern the hopes and resolutions for the future.

The inductive approach praised by *Gaudium et Spes* is facilitated by the structure of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) in Zambia. Over 250 parishes around the country have local CCJP teams, well trained in CST, social analysis and political advocacy. By feeding in their local experiences, these groups enable the national Commission to prepare very good annual statements on the government's national budgets, with recommendations for a set of more pro-poor, pro-justice priorities in policies.<sup>11</sup>

### *Consultative Fashion*

We all know that pastoral statements are usually not written by one person, but by a committee of advisors and experts on a particular topic. This assures the degree of technical and theological competence necessary for the document to gain acceptance and have an influence. But beyond the committee approach there is also an approach occasionally used that involves wider public consultation. The consultative fashion can be very creative, but can also be a bit contentious when different points of view are heard from those who are solicited to offer input.

When I worked at the Center of Concern in Washington DC before coming to Zambia in 1989, I saw three examples, two successful and one unsuccessful, of an effective consultative fashion of developing CST. The first two involved the production of pastoral letters by the US Catholic Bishops on peace and on the economy, where insights were gathered from hearings around the country on what should be said about these important topics. This approach resulted in two letters that serve as standards for excellent CST. The third example did not fair as well. A letter on women in society and church, developed through the same open hearing process, was halted by the Vatican, to the loss of significant religious and social insights and responses.

The Zambian church's experience has on occasion utilized the consultative approach to make its CST more credible and more relevant. A good example is the Bishops' pastoral letter, "The Future Is Ours," published in 1992 at the start of the Third Republic, following multi-party elections. In preparing the letter, ZEC requested the diocesan offices to solicit suggestions and recommendations for the country's key policies in this new era. This resulted in a very good document. Besides the expected political and economic discussions, one topic is raised which, in my opinion, surfaced because of the consultative fashion. This was the urging of all Zambians to be personally responsible and take up hard work to move the country forward. This echoes the injunction of *Gaudium et Spes* for personal responsibility in the political order.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the future is ours!

In Zambia, a consultative fashion is also possible because of the inductive approach utilized through the activities of the 250 local CCJP groups. The national CCJP statements on the government's budget, mentioned immediately above, are effective because of consultation with the local groups. In my opinion, wider consultation would have helped improve some others statements such as those on family and on abortion. I will return to that later in the discussion of content.

### *Practical and Policy Relevant*

It is understandable that universal church statements (e.g., encyclicals, decrees of Councils and Synods) will usually be fairly general and non-specific. Happily, *Gaudium et Spes* does occasionally speak more concretely and practically in some appropriate instances, for example in discussion of "new forms of art...introduced into the sanctuary,"<sup>13</sup> "gigantic rural estates...insufficiently cultivated,"<sup>14</sup> "civic and political education...painstakingly provided."<sup>15</sup>

The Zambian CST has had to take up issues of daily concern for the people and address larger topics that have consequences for the nation's future. While repeating the caution of *Gaudium et Spes* about politics and the church,<sup>16</sup> the leaders of the Zambian church have not hesitated to be quite practical and policy relevant when addressing key economic and

political issues. This is done not to lay down laws that all Catholics must follow but to introduce into the public discourse very specific topics that have great significance for the common good of society. Two good examples are "Hear the Cry of the Poor" (1993) and "Let My People Go" (2004). The first spoke practically about a mechanism for price control to limit the impact of spiraling costs on the poor (a policy unacceptable to the IMF and World Bank because of interference in the free market); the second urged a policy of a popular Constituent Assembly to be adopted to deal with the new Constitution (a point opposed by the President because of possible infringement on his powers).

Another example of practicality and policy relevance in CST is the work of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) on a monthly "Basic Needs Basket" (BNB).<sup>17</sup> This BNB provides data that highlights the great *gap* between what is required to meet basic needs for a family of six (currently around USD 210.00) and what employed workers take home as pay (currently ranging for most civil servants, for example, from between USD 50.00 to USD 150.00). This very specific information is used in policy advocacy campaigns for improved wages, nutritional adequacy for ARV recipients, agricultural inputs, attention to gender differentials, etc. And all of this within a CST framework for sustainable development!

### *Values Approach*

While it is obviously true that all CST is about values, it is sometimes important to stress that explicit attention to values is more effective -- both *pedagogically* and *politically* -- than frequent references to "quotations" from papal encyclicals and other church documents. This in no way lessens the *authority* of official documents, but simply makes the obvious point that it is for the most part the values espoused that make the difference and not the authority cited. Indeed, it is the set of values that provide CST's power to *clarify*, *motivate* and *sustain* in the struggle for great justice, development, peace and the integrity of creation. A good set of values drawn from the CST can be found in introductory material of the latest edition of the very popular book, *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret*.<sup>18</sup>

In the Zambian picture, constant reference is important to the values of (1) *human dignity* (e.g., what happens to workers with families when a company is privatised?), (2) *community* (how can we justify an ever-growing gap between rich and poor?), (3) the *option for the poor* (e.g., how can the views of the majority poor influence constitutional development?), and (4) *integrity of creation* (e.g., will new industries violate our fragile ecological situation?). The CST of the church in Zambia -- documents and in actions -- has clearly emphasised these values over the years. The examples already cited in this paper demonstrate that emphasis.

A new institutional commitment to the values approach is the establishment a few years ago of the African Forum on Catholic Social Teaching (AFCAST).<sup>19</sup> With a current working group of a dozen CST practitioners (teachers, church officials, activists) from countries in southern and eastern Africa, AFCAST promotes study and implementation of the values -- principles, norms, standards, ideals -- of CST. Its commitment to promoting social justice is grounded in the belief that the CST provides a value-added dimension to public policy discussions, debates and decisions. Recent topics focused on are issues of great relevance to Africa: elections, poverty eradication, land reform, corruption, integrity of creation and church-state relations.

### 3. CONTENT

There are of course many topics that might be highlighted in this section. But I choose five that are useful in the work of the JCTR and the CCJP that I have personally experienced. These topics are clearly developed in the sections of *Gaudium et Spes* under consideration and in the documents and activities of the church in Zambia.

#### *Political Democracy*

As mentioned earlier in the paper, Zambia is a struggling democracy, trying to shape both the *institutions* and the *attitudes* that were sadly lacking in the first 27 years of our nation's history. When defeated in multi-party elections in 1991, the founding president, Kenneth Kaunda, stepped down in an exemplary fashion. The second president, Frederick Chiluba, was forced to step down ten years later, when civil society (led by the churches) rebuffed his efforts to change the constitution in order to secure a third term. (Chiluba is now under arrest and on trial for "plunder of the national economy" through a series of corrupt activities.) Elected third president in a 2001 election fraught with irregularities,<sup>20</sup> Levy Mwanawasa is in conflict with opposition parties and civil society about his constitutional reform process.

The church has played a key role in each of these moments in the political history of Zambia.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, even before Independence, the Catholic bishops (all ex-patriates) issued two strong pastoral statements challenging the non-democratic rule of the English colonial powers. From early days of the new Republic, statements have been made that call Zambians to greater political responsibility and that challenge the government to institute more effective democratic arrangements.

One interesting development can be noted. In a 1974 letter on "The Tenth Anniversary of Independence," the Bishops encourage Christians to cooperate with the government in promoting social welfare but "do not specifically urge Church members to be politically involved as a way of promoting justice."<sup>22</sup> However, in the 1987 ecumenical letter, "Christian Liberation, Justice and Development," there is explicit call for all Zambian Christians "to involve themselves more actively in the political life of the Country."<sup>23</sup> This is certainly more in keeping with the emphasis in *Gaudium et Spes* to take up more effective political responsibility<sup>24</sup> and the call of the African Synod for Christians to be engaged in the democratic struggle and even a call for "holy politicians."<sup>25</sup>

By many, the church was called the "midwife" for the birth of multi-partyism in the 1991 elections. Education, prayers, election monitoring, challenges: all these activities marked the church's presence at that key moment. And these activities have continued and expanded since then. The stress placed by *Gaudium et Spes* on civic and political education<sup>26</sup> has been responded to in the works of the CCJP (e.g., through its 250 local committees) and JCTR (e.g., through its CST homily guidelines and annual calendars). Another significant contribution to this education comes from the five church-sponsored community radio stations. To be honest, these stations have sometimes faced political persecution (even threats of state prosecution!) by trying to communicate openly and fairly about the political situation in the country.

#### *Economic Development*

We must acknowledge that *Gaudium et Spes* is pre-*Populorum Progressio* and pre-UNDP *Human Development* reports. As such, it does not bring out so very forcefully or fully the new thinking about *sustainable and integral development*. But it certainly does lay down the foundations for that thinking, especially in its discussion of socio-economic life, which opens

with the statement: "In the socio-economic realm, too, the dignity and total vocation of the human person must be honoured and advanced along with the welfare of society as a whole. For the human person is the source, the center, and the purpose of all socio-economic life."<sup>27</sup> And, of course, today we would place that human person in the community of creation, with greater respect for the God-given dignity of the natural environment.

I believe that particularly relevant to the Zambian situation is the discussion in *Gaudium et Spes* of (1) economic resources that should be put to the use of development of all the people, even with necessary state action, (2) narrowing the growing gap between rich and poor, (3) agricultural progress to be emphasised, (4) workers' decent wages and good conditions to be provided (with the proper role of trade unions), and (5) the common purpose of created things qualifying the understanding of property.<sup>28</sup>

As indicated already, the church in Zambia has since earliest days been actively involved in economic development efforts with and for the people. Local parish training programmes, technical schools, agricultural projects, cooperative schemes, housing projects: these and many other practical efforts have marked the church's history – with varying levels of success.<sup>29</sup> But since Independence these programmes have been supplemented by advocacy efforts to assure better government policies for effective development. Pastoral letters (many of them ecumenical), CCJP statements, local diocesan and parish advocacy programmes and cooperation with wider civil society efforts have all contributed to the push for more equitable socio-economic development, especially relating to Zambian government priorities.

But the impact of wider international policies has not been neglected. As the consequences of IMF and World Bank neo-liberal policies became clear in the lives of the ordinary Zambian, the church raised a clarion call to set as the evaluation criteria of the imposed economic reforms one clear norm: "they must serve all the people."<sup>30</sup> The development model of liberalisation, privatisation, curtailment of social services and overall retreat of the state has not met that criteria in the Zambian experience.<sup>31</sup> That was made very clear indeed in the 1993 pastoral letter, "Hear the Cry of the Poor," and repeated as recently as the 2004 ecumenical letter for the Fortieth Anniversary of Independence, "Looking to the Future with Hope."

The Jubilee 2000 Zambia campaign was launched in 1998 by a joint pastoral statement, "Cancel Zambia's Debt!" There it was made clear that the debt *could* not be paid back because that would be economically destructive, *would* not be paid back because that would be politically destabilising, and *should* not be paid back because that would be ethically discriminatory – hurting the poor the most.<sup>32</sup> The debt campaign is a good example of churches and civil society cooperating together for economic development.

### *Cultural Questions*

African cultures are many and varied. In Zambia, culture is a key to development and national unity. As *Gaudium et Spes* clearly put it, "It is a fact bearing of the very person of the human that the person can come to an authentic and full humanity only through culture, that is, through the cultivation of natural goods and values."<sup>33</sup> In *Gaudium et Spes* the right to culture is balanced with the need to create harmony with genuine Christian formation.

This effort at balance is at the heart of the task of *inculturation*: making our faith understanding and expression *authentically Christian* and *genuinely African*. (It is noteworthy that the concept of inculturation is not used in the discussion of culture in *Gaudium et Spes*.) The Zambian bishops devoted several paragraphs to inculturation in

their 1991 pastoral letter on the church's centenary, "You Shall Be My Witnesses." Noting considerable progress in this task since the days of the early missionaries, the bishops called for further research and action to move forward.

An important example of research and action touching culture in the Zambian church is the recent product of the JCTR's Task Force on Inculturation, a small pamphlet for use in small Christian communities entitled, "Traditional Healing: A Pastoral Challenge for the Catholic Church in Zambia" (2004). The pamphlet, following the methodology of the pastoral circle, gets communities to *recount* their personal experiences of traditional healing, to *analyse* why this healing is still very popular, to *reflect* on the faith meaning of this practice, and to *respond* with good guidelines for approaching healers.

Another area of great importance in discussions of culture in Zambia is the *role of women*. "You Shall Be My Witnesses" devotes a section to the topic, asking how women are treated in families, work places, public life and the Church, and what the Church should do to promote greater justice for women. Related to women's issues – but of course, much wider – are the topics of *family* and of *abortion*. The fact that the African Synod called the church "the family of God" has prompted much reflection on the family. A 1997 pastoral letter from the Catholic bishops, "The Church as a Caring Family," tied this concept to the life of the small Christian community.

Zambian law is quite liberal on the matter of abortion. A major bishops' letter in 1997, "Choose Life," addressed the topic in a direct and pastoral fashion. Indeed, there is a story behind this document. It first was written quite narrowly, emphasising primarily the sanctity of human life and therefore the absolute evil of abortion. The second version, written after wider consultation, clearly maintains the church's teaching on no abortion, but promotes a positive approach to dealing with the causes of abortion, offering help to mothers, and creating greater respect in society for women's rights. And its tone is more compassionate than that of the first version. A good example of what consultation can do for faithful construction and effective communication of CST documents!

### *Training Programmes*

As noted earlier, civic education is stressed in the political discussions in *Gaudium et Spes*. But good *civic education* requires good *civic educators*. And the Zambian church has made a commitment to good training of pastoral agents to communicate the values of justice, peace, development and the integrity of creation. Courses on CST are mandatory in all seminary instruction – I have personally taught in these courses. Special workshops on CST are provided for women and men in formation for religious life. The purpose of this focus on pastoral agents is to equip them both to communicate the CST values and also to encourage the efforts of others involved in promoting these values through justice and peace work.

A recent bishops' pastoral letter, "Empowerment through Education" (2004), highlights the values that are essential to the centre of the Catholic education system. Justice is one of these central values and the students must be educated to know the social problems and to act to change the unjust situations in Zambia.

One of the best instruments for promotion of the CST values in Zambia has been a well organised and well trained network of justice and peace committees throughout the country. Members of these local groups, usually based in parishes, are required to go through five phases of training: (1) spirituality of justice (including CST), (2) research methods, (3) social analysis, (4) social action, and (5) evaluation. The national CCJP office and the JCTR office are staffed by highly competent women and men, able to do excellent research, make clear

presentations, and interact effectively with government and church personnel at national and international levels.

I am undoubtedly prejudiced, but I believe that Zambia has the best organised and trained justice and peace set-up on the African continent (comparing favourably with others outside Africa). But one area that we have not adequately developed through training programmes is a wider outreach to laity in general and in particular to those in influential positions. We need to do more of this. One significant event has been a more or less regular annual "retreat day" for Catholic Members of Parliament and other significant national leaders. This has provided exposure to CST values in an atmosphere of prayer and reflection – something much appreciated by participants.

### *Model of Church*

It is true to say that *ecclesiology* (the theology of the church) is key to CST. Of course the great document *Gaudium et Spes* is at its basic foundation an ecclesiological document. For to speak of the "church in the modern world" is to speak of a particular kind of church, a specific character of Christian community. Accordingly, *Gaudium et Spes* says clearly: "That is why this community realises that it is truly and intimately linked with humankind and its history."<sup>34</sup> The church in Zambia has been influenced by this vision of *Gaudium et Spes* and by the vision of "church as family" expressed by the African Synod.<sup>35</sup>

It is for this reason that a church that incorporates promotion of justice and peace into the task of integral evangelisation would react so negatively to the declaration of Zambia as a "Christian Nation" made by President Chiluba shortly after his 1991 inauguration. It is not clear exactly what his intention was, other than to gain political mileage with more conservative church members. But the letter "The Future Is Ours" expressed strongly the conviction that "a nation is not Christian by declaration but by deeds"– especially the deeds of justice and concern for the poor.<sup>36</sup> And in 1995, during the debates over constitutional amendments, the ZEC and the CCZ issued a joint statement opposing the inclusion of the Christian nation declaration in the constitution. Significantly, their opposition was rebuffed, and the Catholic Bishops have again, in the 2003 Pastoral Letter on the constitutional review, "Let My People Go," stated their opposition to this declaration, as religiously and politically untenable.

## 4. LESSONS

To really become a "Church in the Modern World" requires more than a brilliant document, no matter how theologically solid, pastorally oriented and politically sensitive that document might be. Certainly the many and varied papers presented at this "Call to Justice" Conference will demonstrate the truth of that statement. An essential part of the growth into a community responsive to the "joys and hopes, sorrows and anxieties" of our sisters and brothers is a learning from the lessons all of us gain from *experience*. What I have attempted in this paper is to highlight the *Zambian experience* by noting the church's efforts to put the CST into daily life. I believe that reflection on some aspects of the methodology and content of that experience can indeed offer some important lessons for the church universal.

### *Reading the Signs of the Times*

*Gaudium et Spes* makes clear at the outset of its discussion the duty of the church "to read the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel."<sup>37</sup> This duty demands a

serious study of the world in which we live, the expectations that people have and the significant characteristics that mark it in the unfolding of history. Without such a commitment to discern God's action in history around us, the church has neither ability nor legitimacy to share something it would call "Good News" with people.

This has surely been the experience of the Zambian church. The fact that the church is seen – by members and non-members alike – as an important actor in the life of the country is, in my opinion, largely due to its service of the people in relevant word and deed. Surely the Catholic Church in Zambia has had a mixed history of grace and sin. Our church may have a *divine foundation* but it also is a *human institution*! As such, it can and does face difficulties and fall into mistakes.

But the fact is that the Zambian church has not faced some of the difficulties or fallen into some of the mistakes other churches in Africa (and elsewhere!) have experienced. Difficulties and mistakes like tribalism, withdrawal of leadership from public life, over-zealous involvement in an other-worldly religiosity, fixation on narrow personal moral issues to the neglect of wider social moral issues, etc. The CST of the Zambian church reveals a serious attempt to read the signs of the times and this surely has had its effect in enabling the Zambian church to be a true "church in the modern world" according to the letter and spirit of *Gaudium et Spes*.

### *Intelligent Research*

More than simply reading the signs of the times, the church needs a commitment to serious investigation through scholarly research of what is happening and how the church can respond. The task of being prophetic is not only helped by good study but the lack of that good study can indeed hinder a truly effective prophetic voice. No one listens – or should listen – to shoddy analysis or unwise pronouncements, however well intentioned.

The experience of the Zambian church has shown that intelligent research does make a difference. This is evident in the work that several scholars – laity, sisters, priests – have done on issues of importance in Zambia today such as theological reflection, inculturation, education, HIV/AIDS, gender issues, church history, socio-economic problems, etc. It is also shown in the commitment to place well-trained staff at the ZEC secretariat, in the offices of the Catholic Centre for Justice, Development and Peace, and in the team of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection.

What this results in is a *respect* that is paid to the statements coming from the church, even if there is *disagreement*. For example, the CCJP's annual budget analyses seriously challenge the government's priorities, but key government officials come to the forums to debate the findings and recommendations. The JCTR's critique of the IMF and World Bank proposals for debt relief (such as the HIPC initiative) get widely circulated nationally and internationally and taken into account when evaluations of these programmes are made.

An example of the value of intelligent research on a highly controversial topic is what has occurred in the on-going debate over the refusal of the Zambian government to allow the importation of genetically modified foods (popularly referred to as "GMOs") into the country. This refusal has gone on during serious food shortages and in the face of immense pressure by the government of the United States of America. There has even been considerable dialogue with some offices of the Vatican that have tended to show a more favourable stance toward GMOs. But after its own research, in cooperation with others nationally and

internationally, the JCTR has supported the Zambian government's position as more in accord with clear CST principles, reliable scientific data and sound economic analysis.

### *International Cooperation*

One of the strengths of the church in Africa in building a good CST foundation has been good international cooperation. This has involved sharing of information, programmes, materials, personnel, etc. This has occurred not only at levels outside of Africa (e.g., with the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and with development and advocacy groups) but also at the African continental and regional levels.

The Zambian church is a member of AMECEA, the regional conference of bishops for eastern Africa. But Zambian representatives also participate in the programmes of IMBISA, the regional conference of bishops for southern Africa. A good example of cooperation was in the preparations for the African Synod that met in Rome in 1994. There was very good exchange among bishops and consultants in the AMECEA region, which meant that the AMECEA bishops went to the Rome well prepared and confident in their presentations on the Synod's key topics. These bishops played an influential role in the debates, decisions and documents of the African Synod.

Another example of international cooperation that benefits the Zambian church is the work of AFCAST. As mentioned earlier in this paper, AFCAST strives to make the CST relevant to policies that profoundly affect the development of people in Africa. As this organization matures, it will continue to assist the church in Zambia to be a "church in the modern world."

### *Justice in the Church*

I imagine that my experience is not unusual: every time I give a lecture or workshop on the church's call to promote justice, I receive a question like, "Does this also mean promote justice in the church?" Of course I can answer with a very clear yes, recalling the strong words of the 1971 Synod of Bishops to the effect that those who would teach justice to others must first be seen to be just themselves!

The theme of justice in the church is certainly hinted at in the discussion in *Gaudium et Spes* of the help which the church strives to give to human activity through Christians.<sup>38</sup> There it is recognized more in a *negative* fashion, however, by noting that defects in the church hinder the communication of the gospel. But there is no full discussion of the witness of justice that the church is obliged to give in social matters within its own organization if it is to authentically and effectively work for justice in the wider society. This message was more clearly developed by the 1971 Synod. And it is a point picked up by the African Synod with the message that justice must start within God's family itself.<sup>39</sup>

Within the Zambian church, the issues of justice are not all that unique. The questions that usually arise are around wages paid to church workers, treatment of women (including the role of women in decision-making places), participation of laity in shaping priorities in the church (through councils, etc.), and the principle of subsidiarity that recognises the legitimate role of the local church. Many of the statements coming from the bishops over the years touch the issue of justice in the church either directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly. But I believe it can fairly be said that there is need for greater focus on this topic if the church is to retain credibility in its prophetic role in society at large.

## CONCLUSION

The Zambian experience of being a "church in the modern world of Africa" points to an on-going effort to build a Christian community that has a message at once credible and relevant. *Credible* in that its message can be believed because the church tries to practise it itself, and *relevant* in that its message relates to real life concerns of the African people. Truly, the "joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties" of the people are our own!

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