

SECAM STATEMENTS

The fifth Plenary Meeting of the SYMPOSIUM of the Catholic Bishops in Africa and Madagascar met from 24-30th July 1978, at Nairobi (Kenya). The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference was represented by Bishop M. Zwane (Manzini) and Bishop H. Bucher (Bethlehem) who presented a paper on some aspects of the theme of the meeting: CHRISTIAN FAMILY LIFE IN AFRICA TODAY.

Archbishop J. P. Fitzgerald, OMI, was presented as member of the Standing Committee of SECAM while Owen Cardinal McCann Cape Town was resent ex-officio together with the other Cardinals of the African Continent and Madagascar.

The administrative headquarters of SECAM are located in Accra (Ghana).

Secam was founded in 1969 as a consequence of a growing need for proper liaison between the 32 Bishops' Conferences of Africa and Madagascar. The total number of Catholics in this area is 52 million. Secam purports to facilitate the inter-communication between Bishops' Conferences. It also serves as a co-ordinating agency for special studies in the pastoral and socio-economic spheres.

At the end of the Nairobi meeting a Declaration on Justice and Peace was issued. The Assembly also addressed a message to Christian Families. The text of both reads as Follows:

JUSTICE AND PEACE IN AFRICA

Introduction

1. Meeting in plenary Assembly from July 24th to 30th, 1978, we, Cardinals and Bishops, members of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) wish to express our solidarity with all the men of this Continent, irrespective of race or religion.
2. "The joys and hopes, the sorrows and anguishes of contemporary men, especially the poor and all those who suffer, are also the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anguishes of the disciples of Christ" and of their pastors.

I. The Hopes and Sufferings of Africa

3. We have good reason to be glad and hopeful in considering the many efforts made by the sons and daughters of this continent in general and by our leaders in particular to promote or rehabilitate fundamental African values. We are referring to the search for dialogue in the settling of differences; to the desire to establish real economic and cultural co-operation among states; to the efforts made to safeguard the unity of Africa; to the determination shown in the defence of the dignity of the African man.
4. We are particularly happy about the recognition given to the fundamental rights of the human person in the Constitutions of our various countries.
5. These facts form part of the achievements on which the African Continent and Madagascar can build a better future.
6. It must, however, be admitted, alas, that it is for other reasons that Africa finds herself to-day at the centre-stage of the world scene. In affect, to the various forms of injustice and persecution perpetrated by certain dictatorial police-state regimes have now been added new elements.
7. It is first of all the increase in armed conflicts between neighbouring countries or civil war brought about by the injustices of the powers that be and confrontations with rival political groupings.
8. But a more serious situation has been created. Foreign powers are no longer content to just provide money, arms and logistic support to the warring factions on the Continent. Now, taking advantage of ideological differences and alliances as well as border disputes, they are turning Africa into their battlefield.
9. In Southern Africa, we are witnessing an escalation of the war of liberation. There is also the fight against apartheid. If a solution is not found in good time to the situation in this region, it will end in a terrible bloodbath.

10. Furthermore, as a result of a political system based on partisan interest, the Continent suffers from an ever-growing political instability. Since 1960 Africa has witnessed 43 coups d'état, ten of which have involved the assassination of heads of state.
11. Finally, in certain countries, there is a fanatical proselytism or a veritable religious persecution often disguised under political and ideological motives. Certain governments have even gone so far as to ban Catholic and other forms of worship.

II. Man's Liberation

12. As Bishops of the Catholic communities in the whole of Africa and Madagascar man, irrespective of the colour of his skin, his ethnic origin, his social condition, or his cultural or religious environment; what is at stake are his aspirations and hopes, his struggles and sufferings, his successes and failures.
13. Christ, according to our faith, came to save and liberate this man, "to liberate him from everything that oppresses him". This is a total liberation, which concerns man in all the dimensions of his being and existence. This liberation, therefore, is not only of the spiritual and interior order; it has a direct impact on the concrete, individual and collective life of mankind.
14. Christ liberated every man and the whole man. In him and through him all men have become fundamentally equal: they are brothers. Hence as regards the human person, the liberation of man means decolonisation, development, social justice, respect for his inalienable rights and fundamental liberties.

III. Human Rights in Africa

15. If we have made observations on peace, social justice and human rights, this is because in many countries of Africa human rights are flouted and trampled under foot.
16. As we did last year, we denounce all that which constitutes a violation of human integrity, such as mutilations, physical or moral torture, psychological coercion; everything that offends human dignity such as sub-human conditions of life, arbitrary imprisonments, deportations and degrading working conditions.
17. We condemn all the crimes committed in the name of the "security of the state", as if the State were absolute and not at the service of the citizen, that is to say, the human person and not the State which has a transcendental character.
18. We condemn the political system based on falsehood's as well as intolerance, the system of informers, political murders, all forms of violence, corruption and the shameless enrichment of a small class at the expense of the broad masses.
19. We would like to remind all the followers of Christ that there can be no dichotomy between their Christian conscience and their political conscience. Even in political matters, they should remember that they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. (Matth. 5:14).
20. We would also like to draw attention to the fate of the four million refugees and political exiles seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, to escape from the war raging in their native land or to escape from political, ethnic or religious persecution.

IV. Africans as masters of their destiny

21. Despite its ups and downs, to-day's world is gradually tending towards the formation of a true international **community**. From our Christian point of view, we see in this phenomenon the beginning of the achievement of God's plan for humanity as Creator and Saviour. The Catholic Church has therefore always supported the efforts of international organisations, which are working for a world characterised by solidarity.
22. It is for this reason that the Church of Africa and Madagascar has been following with interest the evolution of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). This organisation certainly has an important role to play in the promotion of African Unity and solidarity as well as in safeguarding the peace and development of the Continent.
23. But to be able to play this role fully, the member states of the OAU should leave behind them their differences, which threaten to split Africa into two opposing blocs. It is necessary that our leaders respect the principle of non-alignment which inspired the Founding Fathers of the Organisation, so that their actions will be motivated only by the welfare and prosperity of their peoples. Thus it will become possible for the states on the continent to keep out foreign

- powers, which seek above all to extend their spheres of influence within the framework of a global strategy and to promote their own economic and ideological interests.
24. It is equally important that African states refrain from granting military bases to foreign powers, so that they are not dragged into a global strategy which will not always be compatible with their own interests.
 25. On the other hand, it is high time that a stop was put to this mad arms race. What Africa needs most is not arms to kill and destroy, but increased means for promoting and speeding up her economic, social and cultural development.
 26. To lead Africa to her unity, to achieve her development and to establish peace, we need men who are effectively well predisposed and inspired by a spirit of service and who love and respect their fellowmen. It is in this sense that the Church in Africa and Madagascar is committed to participate in the training of such people.

Conclusion

27. To lead to unity, total development and prosperity in Africa is a long one. It is the sons and daughters of this continent who will be the architects of Africa's well-being.
28. But on one condition, however: namely that all Africans are made to feel involved in the work of building Africa. This will be possible only if each one receives his portion of the fruits of development and sees his dignity respected. This is why we affirm our commitment to promote the rights of the human person in Africa, especially the satisfaction of his basic needs.
29. We invite all men of goodwill to take part in this fight, motivated by fraternal love and the search for justice.

NAIROBI
29 July 1978

MESSAGE TO CHRISTIAN FAMILIES

1. We, Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops, representing the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, assembled in Nairobi for the Fifth Plenary Assembly of SECAM, salute all Catholic families as we end our discussions on Christian family life in Africa today.
2. We appreciate the Christian witness, which your family is giving and we admire the courage with which you uphold the values of the Christian family, especially of love and service, of unity and indissolubility, in the face of dangers which threaten the solidity of the family throughout the world.
3. We pay tribute to the steadfastness of your Christian family life and we encourage you to continue to practise the virtues of the covenant of love, which is your family.
4. Your family is built on the great Sacrament of Matrimony, which, as St. Paul tells us, reflects the mystical union of Christ and His Church. It is this covenant that you entered into when you pledged yourselves, body and soul, to one another.
5. Continue to be faithful to the commitments you freely and whole-heartedly made before God on your wedding day. May you always be mindful that the Sacrament operates in you throughout your whole married life.
6. We pray that your mutual promise to love and help each other, for better or worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, may even grow stronger as the years go on. We also pray that your loving acceptance of your duty to bring up your children in the love and service of God may be upheld and strengthened.
7. May the Holy Family of Nazareth in which love, mutual respect and obedience flourished, be your model. Mary and Joseph assisted each other and carried out the task given to them by God. Jesus Himself gave testimony of loving submission to His Mother and Foster Father.
8. We thank those families, which have generously allowed their sons and daughters to devote their lives to the service of the Lord in the priesthood or religious life. We invite all parents to encourage their children to heed to God's call, and we ask the youth of the whole of Africa to think of the priestly and religious vocation, and also to think of involvement in the lay apostolate.
9. Consider that your vocation as parents makes you instruments of the creative power of God, in bringing new lives into the world. You certainly share with us our feeling of horror in the face of the widespread evil of abortion, which is a new form of the slaughter of the innocents.

10. You have to face daily dangers, which threaten the Christian family. Do not allow the values that characterise Christian family life to be weakened.
11. The spirit of immorality and permissiveness, which pervades society today threatens to enter the domestic sanctuary which is your home.
12. We call on all those in authority to uphold the family in its grandeur, its freshness and its beauty, as being vital the vital cell of society: where an authentic family life exists, the society itself is healthy. May they protect the family with just laws, which will enable it to fulfil its role as the first educator of the future citizens of the society.
13. We proclaim the right of all members of a family to live together as this communal life is essential to mutual love and to the education of children. We therefore condemn all systems of labour, which separate husbands from their wives and children for long periods of time.
14. We draw your attention to the new dynamic trends, which appear in the present evolution of our world. Make every effort to recognise and accept the values of these trends, especially those that are expressed in our youth and by them, such as great desire for meetings, co-operations and universal brotherhood, a generosity in the service of the poor, the underprivileged and the oppressed, a concern that leads to a commitment to social justice, a sincere search for authority accepted through dialogue and merited through example, and a simple life apposed to consumer society. These aspirations quite often come very close to African values, which must be upheld, namely, hospitality, sharing, solidarity, dialogue, etc.
15. May you dear fathers and mothers, inspire others to live according to the Gospel. May you and your children, by example, words and life bring Christ to those who know Him not or fail to follow Him. May you cause the Reign of Christ in His love, justice and peace to flourish in the hearts of your community, your nation and the whole of Africa. May you always be faithful members of the Church of Christ and a shining light to all mankind.