

2960/19

**MESSAGE OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES
ON THE OCCASION OF THE XVIII PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF SECAM AND THE
CLOSING OF THE YEAR CELEBRATING THE GOLDEN JUBILEE OF ITS
CREATION KAMPALA, 20-29 JULY 2019**

Dear Cardinals,

Dear Archbishops and Bishops,

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am happy to be here with you in Kampala, like my predecessor in the office of Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Archbishop Sergio Pignedoli, was 50 years ago. The eighteenth Plenary Session of SECAM marks the closing of the Jubilee Year celebrating 50 years of the existence of this Symposium. This Jubilee is cause for joy and hope: joy for the gifts of grace received over the past 50 years and hope for the work that will be accomplished in the years to come, with the grace of God.

First, I would like to extend to you the greeting and congratulations of Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, who delegated me to represent him on this austere occasion and who assures us of his spiritual closeness.

“Church - Family of God in Africa, celebrate your Jubilee! Proclaim Jesus Christ your Saviour.” This theme is in line with the Special Assemblies for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, held in Rome from April 10th to May 8th of 1994 and from the 4th to the 25th of October of 2009, which concluded with the publication of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations *Ecclesia in Africa* of Saint John Paul II and *Africae Munus* of Pope Benedict XVI. The theme of your jubilee celebration establishes a special link between the past and the present and highlights the mission of the Church on this continent.

SECAM, whose creation was and still is an authentic sign of God, can become a great force for the future of the Church in Africa. As such, it is our sincere desire that this anniversary will be an occasion for reflecting on and embracing spiritual and pastoral renewal, both on your part and that of the entire Church on this continent. Joyfully drawing from the font of inspiration of the founders of SECAM, may this encounter be a revitalizing force for the Church as a source of hope for all African people.

In fact, the Church in Africa is called to be the Family of God, who witnesses to Christ (Acts 1:8) as “the salt of the earth and the light of the world” (Mt 5:13-14). This mission has been proclaimed from the very beginning of the Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM/SCEAM). During the visit of Pope St. Paul VI to Kampala in 1969, the first visit of a Supreme Pontiff to Africa, the Pope offered a message that strongly urged the Church in Africa to *be aware of itself and of its great task throughout the continent*: “By now, you Africans are missionaries to yourselves!”¹

The reasons for his visit were given in advance during the General Audience of 30 July 1969 and included the following: to take part in the conclusion of the Symposium of African bishops, to consecrate new indigenous bishops, to honor the Ugandan Martyrs, whom he canonized in 1964, and to confer the sacraments of baptism and confirmation upon twenty-two new African Christians (“twenty-two” in remembrance of the twenty-two Ugandan Martyrs). During the visit, Cardinal Hyacinthe Thiandoum, one of the founding fathers of SECAM, made the following comment: “If I were to sum up the visit of the Supreme Pontiff to Kampala in one phrase, I would say that he came to help Africa establish her religious identity card for the integral development of the black man. From this encounter with the highest moral authority, the Africa of believers has made great progress in understanding herself and her own personality.”

The promotion of African cultures, which today is synonymous with inculturation, was an important point in the magisterial teaching of St. Paul VI, especially for Africa, although not exclusively. Paul VI, a protagonist of African culture, which was deemed suitable for expressing the Christian faith, stated, “The Church greatly respects traditional African moral and religious values, not only for their meaning, but also because she sees in them the providential foundation in which the Gospel message can be delivered and on which the construction of a new society in Christ can begin.”² Thus, with Paul VI a reflection on the interplay between culture and the Gospel began and was solidified. This reflection, which was encouraged by Paul VI and is still ongoing, gave rise to an African theology that has as its primary goal the inculturation of the Gospel.

In that sense, speaking of the image of *Church Family of God*, adopted as an idea-guide particularly suitable for the evangelization of Africa, St. John Paul II said, “It is earnestly to be hoped that theologians in Africa will work out the theology of the Church as Family with all the riches contained in this concept, showing its complementarity with other images of the Church.”³ On his part, Pope Benedict XVI affirmed that, “The Church’s initiatives for a positive appreciation and safeguarding of African cultures are well known. It is very important that this continue, at a time when the intermingling of peoples, while a source of enrichment, often weakens

¹ Paul VI, *Homily*, Kampala (Uganda), 31 July 1969.

² Paul VI, *Africae Terrarum*, 14.

³ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 63.

cultures and societies. The identity of African communities is at stake in these intercultural encounters. It is imperative therefore to make a commitment to transmit the values that the Creator has instilled in the hearts of Africans since the dawn of time. These have served as a matrix for fashioning societies marked by a degree of harmony, since they embody traditional formulae for peaceful coexistence. These positive elements therefore need to be emphasized, lit up from within (cf. Jn 8:12), so that Christians may truly receive the message of Christ, and in this way God's light may shine before the eyes of all. Then, seeing the good deeds of Christians, men and women will be able to give glory to 'the Father who is in heaven' (Mt 5:16)."⁴

Paul VI encouraged this process and, in a letter addressed to Cardinal Paul Zoungana in 1974, he proposed the following method: "We are not talking about constructing new doctrines, nor hurriedly imposing some insertions or changes that would push aside the profound sense of the teaching of Christ [...] It was and will be in the future the duty of Christians to find, thanks to a more complete study of the genius of one's own civilization, the forms, symbols, and even rites that better correspond to the religious needs and soul of their contemporaries."⁵

It is important to recall that the goal of inculturation, both yesterday and today, is to allow the Church to emerge as authentically African yet always profoundly Christian and Catholic, as a sign of the saving presence of God in the very midst of the local realities in Africa. It is hoped that the Church in Africa will have her proper way of life and her own impact on African society. As Pope Francis reminds us, "An evangelized popular culture contains values of faith and solidarity capable of encouraging the development of a more just and believing society, and possesses a particular wisdom which ought to be gratefully acknowledged."⁶

With the ordination of a symbolic number of bishops, 12 in all, coming from almost all the different parts of Africa, Paul VI marked the beginning of a new era of evangelization. "He appointed twelve" (Mk 3:14), making them the principal pastoral agents of Africa. This call, which harkens to the collegial nature of the Apostles, was and still is an invitation to SECAM to live with "collegial affect," or "affective collegiality," which gives rise to a deep concern on the part of bishops for other particular churches and for the Universal Church. Such collegial affect is to be actualized and expressed in different ways, even institutional. This collegial nature of apostolic ministry, which was desired by Christ himself, implies a solidarity between the episcopacy and particular churches. For you, this should concretely translate into, among other things, a tangible participation in the activities of SECAM and its structures, regarding both personnel and finances. We invite you to spare no effort or initiative in order to make this solidarity effective, through well-developed structures that are adapted to actual circumstances

⁴ Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, 38.

⁵ Paul VI, *Lettre au Cardinal Paul Zoungana*, 23 December 1974, in *Insegnamenti* (1975), 76-77.

⁶ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 68.

and situations. “In this way the Church will bear witness to the unity for which Christ prayed.”⁷

In addition to her overall development and the need to grow in awareness of her pastoral and missionary responsibility, Pope Paul VI noted that the local Church was in search of solutions to the complex problems that arose in Africa immediately after acquiring political independence. He stated, “The African Church is confronted with an immense and original undertaking [...] she must educate the people in the new forms of civil organization; while purifying and preserving the forms of family and community; she must give an educative impulse to your individual and social virtues: those of honesty, of sobriety, of loyalty; she must help develop every activity that promotes the public good, especially the schools and the assistance of the poor and sick; she must help Africa towards development, towards concord, towards peace.”⁸ Fifty years later, it would be difficult to say that the situation has changed significantly. In fact, still today, situations arise that require the establishment of a just social order. “The three principle elements of the theme chosen for the 2009 Synod, namely reconciliation, justice and peace, brought it face to face with its ‘theological and social responsibility,’ and made it possible also to reflect on the Church’s public role and her place in Africa today.”⁹ It is not an easy mission, since it stretches into the sphere and duty of politics, which is not one of the direct competencies of the Church. Additionally, “According to her social teaching, ‘the Church does not have technical solutions to offer and does not claim ‘to interfere in any way in the politics of states.’ She does, however, have a mission of truth to accomplish ... [one] that the Church can never renounce. Her social doctrine is a particular dimension of this proclamation: it is a service to the truth which sets us free.”¹⁰

In such a way, the Church in Africa is called to form “upright consciences receptive to the demands of justice, so as to produce men and women willing and able to build this just social order by their responsible conduct. The model par excellence underlying the Church’s thinking and reasoning, which she proposes to all, is Christ.”¹¹ In the same regard, Pope Francis reminds us, “In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving

⁷ Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, 106.

⁸ Paul VI, *Homily*, Kampala (Uganda), 31 July 1969.

⁹ Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, 17.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 22.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love.”¹²

Calling to mind all that SECAM has done to help bring about growth and development in the Church in Africa, I would like to conclude by inviting you to truly internalize and make your own the words of Pope Francis when he speaks of the need for transformation and conversion in the Church. He reminds us that “Christ summons the Church as she goes her pilgrim way... to that continual reformation of which she always has need, in so far as she is a human institution here on earth. There are ecclesial structures which can hamper efforts at evangelization, yet even good structures are only helpful when there is a life constantly driving, sustaining and assessing them. Without new life and an authentic evangelical spirit, without the Church’s ‘fidelity to her own calling,’ any new structure will soon prove ineffective.”¹³ Counting on the help of SECAM, the Church in Africa, in her components and structures, is called to constantly reform herself and conform herself with greater fidelity to Christ.

Uniting our prayers to the intentions of the Church throughout Africa and the adjacent islands, we entrust your Plenary Session to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Africa and Star of Evangelization, as well as to the Holy Ugandan Martyrs, hoping that your time together and efforts will bear much fruit.

Rome, 29 June 2019, Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul.

Archbishop Protase Rugambwa
Secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples

¹² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 120.

¹³ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 26.