



Africa Prepares for the Synod on Synodality

A Summary of the 6th Week Synodal Conversation



THEME: THE MISSION IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

Opening Prayers and Speech

The plenary moderators Milliam Kayange and Likibi Bergerac invited Cardinal Stephen Ameyu Martin from Juba, South Sudan to lead the participants in an opening prayers. His eminence prayed “that the Holy Spirit may fill the heart of missionaries in African and Africans with apostolic zeal, that they may boldly proclaim the good news of salvation, inspiring them to be creative and simple in their witness following example of early disciple of Pentecost. He prayed that the fire of the holy spirit burn within them, strengthening their unity and their missionary commitment like the church in Africa as she embraces a new digital technologies to spread the gospel to the ends of the continent and to help our leaders to discern how best to integrate these modern means into pastoral activities of parishes and dioceses.

He also prayed that the people of Africa thirsting for the living water of God’s love encounter the risen Lord through the witness of African Christians and be renewed in the church the passion for evangelization that she may bring the light of Jesus to all who dwell in darkness. He prayed that the Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful in Africa and enkindle in them a fire of God’s love that they may be joyful Patriots of Salvation to the world.

In his opening speech, the cardinal in reference to the humanitarian crisis due to the ongoing war in Sudan and South Sudan, highlighted the pros and cons of digital technology. He called on the young people in Africa to use the advancement in technology as an opportunity to bring about positive change and transformation in their communities, countries and on the African continent. In his words “young people in Africa should use the digital platforms in order to dialogue, because without dialogue we cannot live in this world” citing Pope Francis, the cardinal noted that dialogue is the basis of humanity and without dialogue we would not spread the gospel.

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Prayer for Missionary Work and Addressing African Violence

In his presentation, Cardinal Stephen Ameyo reflected on the current war in Sudan and regretted that many people are dying in Sudan due to the war. He said drones were being used to kill many people in Sinar in Sudan and termed this a misuse of technology. He noted that although technology was good at spreading information, it also had challenges. "People are using electronics to kill one another in Sudan. People are misusing the technology God has given us and have wasted time in wars that have no meaning," he wondered.

Cardinal Ameyo said the new technology can be used to dialogue and to impact the society. He noted that Sudan has elements of religious fundamentalism and overwhelming violence. He called upon young people in Africa to use the digital age to change lives. He observed that the church cannot grow in wars and violence and therefore needs to form a non-violent movement.

He gave an example of Rwanda as a successful story of a nation that has reunited and forged ahead after a bloody genocide in 1994. "We can learn from Rwanda, which brought her people together through reconciliation. The church in Africa must trust itself, evangelize people, and be evangelizers," he said and added that unless dialogue is given a chance, no solution can be reached.

The Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba, and Archbishop Moses Zoe spoke about the ongoing violence in Africa, particularly in Sudan and South Sudan, and the misuse of technology for killing. They called on young people to use new technology as an opportunity to bring about positive change in their societies and emphasized the importance of dialogue as a basis for humanity. Bergerac acknowledged the Archbishop's message and called for immediate action towards reconciliation and development.

Digital Environment for Young People

Bergerac and Milliam, both young faith influencers from Africa, discussed the importance of the digital environment for young people, emphasizing its potential for connection, information access, and skill development. They also highlighted the need for responsible and safe navigation of the digital space. The session featured speakers from Nigeria and Kenya who shared their experiences in the digital space and cautioned against addiction to the digital environment.

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Bindré, a sociologist from Burkina Faso, spoke about the importance of engaging young people in social media and the internet, while also cautioning against overuse and the need for balance. Claire, a student at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa from Kenya, and an African digital faith influencer, expressed her hope that the voices of young people would be considered in the upcoming Synod of Synodality.

Social Media for Youth Mobilization and Digital Influence

Claire discussed the potential of social media for young people within the church to mobilize around social good and evangelization. She emphasized the importance of understanding the audience, platform, and creating engaging content. She also highlighted the advantages of social media, such as accessibility, reach, organizational tools, engagement and dialogue, amplifying voices, and youth empowerment. Jude Ilo, a peace advocate from Nigeria, then took over to discuss how young people in Africa can use digital space to become digital influencers and missionaries, focusing on promoting the gospel and making optimal use of digital platforms. He also pointed out the challenges young people in Africa face in the digital environment.

Digital Evangelization and Pastoral Training for Young People

Jude Ilo emphasized the importance of young people in the digital era, advocating for their conscious use of digital spaces and social media platforms for evangelization. He highlighted the need for pastoral training for young people to effectively use these tools for spreading the gospel, especially in Africa. Jude also called on church leaders to speak out against intimidation faced by Christians on social media and to support young people in sharing their faith. Finally, he encouraged collaboration with influencers to promote core African values.

Bergerac then introduced the discussion on the digital environment as a mission space in Africa, with contributions from Monsignor Gerard Moussa and Domini Dominica Dipio who said one cannot become a missionary if he/she is not deeply rooted in Christ.

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Digital Media, Peacebuilding, and Church Adaptation

Bishop Gerard Moussa discussed the use of digital media for peacebuilding and mission, highlighting its potential for both positive and negative impacts. He emphasized the importance of understanding and navigating the challenges of digital media, such as distractions, misinformation, and media toxicity, and urged reflection on the responsible use of digital media to avoid misinterpretations of Christian teachings. Dominic then discussed the need for the church to adapt to the digital environment, the importance of identifying weaknesses and threats, and the role of individuals in being well-versed in Catholic teachings and values to effectively communicate the message. The role of the Church in providing media literacy education was also reaffirmed.

Integrating Traditional Values in Evangelization

The participants discussed the importance of integrating traditional African values and social media into their evangelization efforts. They emphasized the need for training and formation for both young and old members of the team, as well as the importance of digital literacy for people of all ages. The meeting also highlighted the potential dangers of misinformation and the need for responsible use of digital tools, particularly for priests and religious figures.

Closure: After spontaneous prayers by the participants, one of the moderators called on Cardinal Stephen Ameyu to say the closing prayers and final blessings.

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