



# Africa Prepares for the Synod on Synodality

## A Summary of the Synodal Conversation (19/07/2024)



### THEME: THE REVISION OF THE *RATIO FUNDAMENTALIS INSTITUTIONIS SACERDOTALIS* IN A MISSIONARY SYNODAL PERSPECTIVE.

#### Opening Prayers and Speech

The opening prayer for this synodal conversation was led by Bishop Simon Masedole of Tanzania. His Lordship prayed that the Holy Spirit fills the heart of the faithful, enkindling in them the fire of God's love. At the end of the prayer, one of the moderators Miss Milliam invited the Lordship to give an opening speech.

In this speech, Bishop Simon, stated that with the document "*Ratio Fundamentalis institutionis Sacerdotalis*", the church calls us as an African Church not only to meditate but also to come before God and serve Him. As an African Church but as an entire church we have the responsibility to form the young ones for priestly vocation. Thus, his Lordship enjoined all the participants that together they try to unravel what the mother church gives them or calls them to do in the revision of the document *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* in a Missionary Synodal Perspective to us as an African church. He highlighted the four dimension of seminary formation: human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral all of which seek to explain the integral nature of the seminary formation.

#### FIRST PART

- **Seminary Formation in Africa**

One of the moderators, Mrs. Sheila Pires invited the first speaker of first session of the palaver, Fr. Callisto Lochebg. His presentation focused on the seminary formation in Africa today, looking at what is working and what is not based on experiences from different parts of Africa focusing on integral formation and maturity of candidates capable of preparing them to meet the new context in pastoral ministering in changing and pluralistic society in a digital age. She also emphasized that the revision will look particularly on which aspects, criteria or provisions of the current Ratio fundamentalist corresponding to a missionary synodal church, and which are mostly needed to rethought in Africa.

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He highlighted the fact that a call to serve and be prepared to be a priest is a response to God's revelation and communication in our hearts. And this response is what we call faith and such faith entails trust that God who calls us will not abandon us.

However, the presenter pointed out something that is lacking in the formation process that we have to face which is that the subject taught in the seminaries has little application to the concrete life of our people in Africa. He opined that training in philosophies in the seminaries be taught in such a way that they can be applied in real life experiences. He pointed out also the need to deliberately train the young people in formation house to self-sacrifice and detachment. He stressed the fact that evangelization is impossible without self-sacrifice. Virtue of meekness is another point raised by the presenter which needs to be inculcated in the lives of seminarians undergoing synodal formation. This virtue he insist would help us as Africans to live and work with people from different tribes and embrace diversity.

He also stated that seminary formation should insist on detachment from material things and places and people and exhorted young people under formation to be witnesses to the truth as transmitted from the Church. To sum up his presentation, Fr. Callisto recommend that we rethink the way, we teach, train especially to train the seminarian to apply what they learnt to the concrete situation and then make it permanent.

The second speaker on this theme, Fr. Nicholas Segeja began by citing Pope Benedict VI, "the formation of seminarians should find a natural continuation in the ongoing formation of priests so that the two form one single reality as a concern of the whole church". Hence the first challenge is to ensure that the formation going on in the seminary makes a continuation with the life of the priest. The presenter stated that in this context, the synthesis report of the synod on synodality, explicit requests that formation of candidate for the ministry be linked to the daily lives of the communities and should not create an artificial environment separate from the common lives of the people. He further stressed the importance of the touch of the poor and the marginalized. He raised three points of interest important in formation to the priesthood: first, the formation to the priesthood is an ongoing exercise.

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Second, the whole church should be involved in this formation and thirdly, the formation for the ordained ministry is relational. He insists that formation should help seminarians to mature in the skills of doing palaver, i.e., listening to one another, dialoguing helping cleric to become faith influencers but promoting opportunities of helpful communication (palaver) in the Church Family. The presenter reminded participants that formations has something to do with the spirituality of communion and has to focus on readiness to enter into a dynamic, constructive, perspective and prayerful speaking, listening and dialogue. He emphasized the need to have seminarians who can help to make sure that the church works in this dimension.

Concluding his presentation, Fr. Nicholas asserted that this moment seeks to promote personal and communal identity as a synodal church and family at different levels. It is an effort attempting to make sure that through palaver the current dialogue, each and every one is pastorally enabled to do the right thing in the right way with value in the church family.

### Interventions

The moderator, invited the participants to make contribution in the light of the just concluded session. Toussaint Kafarhire a Jesuit Priest, puzzled if we the church in Africa have enough freedom to question the way, the structure that we have inherited from the colonial church in terms of education, training and formation of priests. Sr. dominic Dipio pointed out the fact that most newly ordained priest are often overwhelmed by the intensity of the assignment given to them after ordination due to the fact that there is a disconnect in the seminary formation and the real life experience. ***“The whole thing of leaving the ongoing formation to themselves can be quite a challenging. So we need to support especially the young ones we see so many, you know, blown off. Shortly after the experience of coming out of the seminary, a very protected environment and ongoing formation left to themselves”*** She concluded.

In his opinion, Cardinal Stephen Bristin of Capetown South Africa, advised that we should never forget that the formation of priests, both seminarians and ongoing formation is the ultimate responsibility of the diocese but he questioned whether

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our seminaries have the means to form seminarians in the virtues, such as mercy, compassion and generosity which are essential to our faith. “I firmly believe that women should be involved in the formation of seminarians and lay people in general should be involved. Students and seminarians shouldn't lose their contact with the struggles, the joys, and the grief of ordinary people” he concluded. Fr. Augustine Anwuchie a Nigerian priest and one time formator, pointed out that most seminarians do not live authentic lives while in the seminary because of how seminary formation is structured which makes them to adopt a “survival mentality” driven by fear factor. He recommends that formation to the priesthood in Africa should encourage disposition to openness, communication and authenticity doing away with the survival mentality.

### SECOND PART

***What are the New things being proposed and how can we contextualize formation in Africa Using the Ratio Fundamentalis to better connect with the needs, pastoral priorities and challenges Facing Africa today as identified in the Campala Documents the 2 African senates and the many proposal in Africa.***

The presenters for this session were Fr. Vitalis Aniehobi and Bishop Simon Masondole. Fr. Vitalis presented on contextualizing ratio fundamentalis for the African Church, emphasizing reformed formation for priests and lay involvement. Bishop Simon discussed mental health and integrating psychology into seminary curriculums. Valentine suggested reviewing curriculums to address practical clerical issues like poverty.

### Interventions

Response from Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu, Dicastery for Evangelization and Vice Chancellor, Urban University, Rome. Archbishop Nwachukwu weighed in on some of the key points shared during the palaver on the Ratio Fundamentalis. He stressed the importance of developing national Ratio Fundamentalis because the episcopal conferences are required to contextualize the Ratio to meet the pastoral needs of their countries.

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Rome cannot do this for local Churches. He emphasized the need for African bishops, working in their national conferences, to prioritize the development of their national Ratio Fundamentalis.

On the question of seminary formation in Africa still being westernized, he disagreed with this claim saying that the office of Evangelization in Rome is headed by a Philipino Cardinal and that he, an African, is in charge of the Section of First Evangelization responsible for Africa. He proposed that rather than continuing to claim that the African Church is a victim of some Western interference and imposition, the time is ripe particularly in this Synodal process, for African Catholic bishops, theologians and pastoral agents to become more creative and more self-critical in supporting the call for the renewal of seminary formation by bringing up some ideas and proposals on how they can respond to this call through the national Ratio. Maybe in the past, one could sustain such claims in some instances, but he does not think that this is the case today.

Finally, he supported the proposal for expanding formation in the African seminaries to include formation of future priests in Africa for mission beyond Africa. Many of the priests being formed today, he says, will be serving their brothers and sisters in Europe and North America, so it is important to include such inter-cultural missionary formation in the curriculum. Thus, while there is the need for contextualization of formation in the seminary to meet the pastoral needs of the local Church; it is equally important, he admits to have an openness to service the Universal Church outside Africa. There are common principles which must be upheld in the Ratio applicable for the formation of Catholic priests everywhere; but there are important local applications that must be developed by local churches--the episcopal conferences have the mandate to realize this intention of Pope Francis clearly expressed in the Ratio.

Clema highlighted integrating African culture, and values, and addressing emerging issues through ongoing formation. Cardinal Napier discussed the lay influence on seminarians. Fr Ali proposed using digital tools positively. Barnabas advocated a Town Hall model with lay interaction and experienced priests guiding students.

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### Closing

Sheila wrapped up the discussion and invited participants to say a prayer as the meeting came to an end. Several participants, including Francis, Margaret, Bergerac, and Chioma, offered prayers for various aspects of the Church and its leaders. Cardinal Stephen Brislin blessed the group and thanked them for their positive discussion. Sr Jane displayed a certificate that the participants will receive at the end of the palaver sessions in September 2024 and urged participants to invite more people to join the weekly palaver sessions. The palaver is set to continue the following Friday with different topics.

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