



Africa Prepares for the Synod on Synodality

A Summary of the Synodal Conversation (23/08/2024)



THEME: THEOLOGICAL CRITERIA AND SYNODAL METHODOLOGIES FOR DISCERNING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Summary

The meeting centered on the significance of synodality in the African Church and its cultural implications. Topics discussed included gender identity, media portrayals of the Catholic Church, traditional teachings on marriage, and redefining African sexuality. The discussions also touched on the relationship between culture, Christianity, and the Church, and ended with a commitment to take meaningful action for the future of the African Church.

Opening Remarks

Milliam Kayange, the English moderator, welcomed participants to the 12th African Palaver Session, organized by PACTPAN. Following technical instructions from Stanley, the IT manager, Bergerac Likibi from Congo Brazaville, the French moderator, invited Archbishop Andrew Fuanya to lead the opening prayer and allocutio. The archbishop emphasized the unity of the Church as one holy Catholic Church, rejecting calls for a distinct “African Church.”

INTRODUCTION

Fr. Ikenna Okafor from Nigeria moderated the session, outlining the structure and introducing the five main speakers:

1. Archbishop Andrew Fuanya
2. Bishop George Bizimana
3. Sr. Nkechi Iwuoha
4. Fr. Emmanuel Konvolbo
5. Dr. Chancel Likouka

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FIRST SESSION OF THE PALAVER

Synodality, Traditional Teachings, and Africa

Archbishop Fuanya highlighted Africa's crucial role in the concept of synodality. He stressed the importance of preserving doctrinal integrity and traditional teachings on issues like homosexuality and the ordination of women. He emphasized that African perspectives on these issues are rooted in faith, not politics, and that the Church must remain unified and not be swayed by individual leaders.

Culture, Tradition, and Gender in the Church

Discussions also explored gender identity and media portrayals of the Catholic Church. Bishop George Bizimana emphasized the Church's continuity with tradition, the importance of the magisterium, and the dangers of relativism. He argued that the Church's teachings must remain consistent, and its authority must be respected.

Catholic Teaching on Marriage and Youth Perceptions

Bishop George reinforced the Church's teachings on marriage as a stable, indissoluble union open to procreation. Dr. Chancel Likouka discussed how economic and social factors, along with inner wounds, shape young people's perceptions of marriage. He highlighted the increasing demand for dowries, fears of bad marriages, social media influences, and the lack of responsible parenting.

Training Young Africans on Responsible Sexuality

The need for educating young Africans on responsible sexuality was emphasized, particularly in addressing childhood trauma and abuse. Sr. Nkechi underscored engaging youth as stakeholders in discussions on sexuality and the Church's role in fostering healthy marital experiences. Fr. Jean Emmanuel Konvolbo highlighted the economic pressures leading some young women to marry early and the struggles others face in marriage and family life, stressing the importance of proper preparation for marriage.

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SECOND SESSION OF THE PALAVER

Christianity, Marriage, and Social Issues in Africa

Participants discussed the centrality of marriage and family life in Christianity, particularly in Africa. They called for pastoral responses to social issues like violence against homosexuals and explored the potential role of women in ordained ministry. The concept of 'fiducia supplicants' was also discussed as a means of extending God's mercy to marginalized individuals.

Redefining African Sexuality and Empowerment

Bridget raised concerns about unhealthy sexual practices and the need for realistic teaching approaches. Mgcini stressed the lack of empowerment for young people regarding sexuality and marriage, while Sr. Katunge emphasized the importance of preparing for marriage from an early age. Bonface blamed social media for misleading youth and called on the Church to guide them. Other participants suggested introducing sex education in high schools and addressing divorce in culturally relevant ways. The discussion also highlighted the need to demystify sex within African contexts.

Culture, Christianity, and Church Engagement

Maurice and Bridget discussed the interaction between culture, Christianity, and the Church, focusing on the need for philosophical engagement with culture and the Church's teachings on truth and human dignity. The conversation extended to the Church's approach to sexuality, emphasizing the joy of love and the importance of conversion experiences in shaping the Church's stance.

Fr. Edward Obi questioned why Africans fear following a path rooted in their own culture. Maurice Agbaw-Ebai proposed an African philosophical approach to culture, while Fr. Augustine called for the inculturation of local cultures within the Church.

Revitalizing Pastoral Care and the Synodality Process

Bergerac facilitated reflections from Sr. Nkechi and Fr. Emmanuel on the contributions shared during the session. Dr. Côme Chancel emphasized revitalizing pastoral care for children and youth in the Church and reevaluating marriage and family life from an African cultural perspective. The meeting also focused on the Synodality process, underscoring the Holy Spirit's role in guiding synods and committing participants to take action for the future of the African Church.

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Closing Remarks

Bergerac Likibi wrapped up the session, thanking the main speakers. Milliam invited five participants to lead spontaneous prayers, and Fr. Stan asked Cardinal Napier to give the final blessing. Prayers were offered for couples struggling in marriage, families facing challenges like alcoholism and divorce, and policymakers working on family-related issues. Cardinal Napier concluded by praying for the transformation of every parish and diocese and awakening all Christians to their calling.

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