

SECAM-SCEAM

Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar
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COMMUNION AND SOLIDARITY BETWEEN EUROPE AND AFRICA IN THE AGE OF HUMAN MOBILITY

SECAM-CCEE seminar
"I was a stranger and you made me welcome" (Mt 25,35)
Migration as a new point of evangelisation and solidarity.

19th – 23rd November 2008, Liverpool, United Kingdom.

Message

1. We, twenty-one Bishops, Archbishops and Cardinals, representatives from Europe and from Africa convened by the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (**CCEE**) and the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (**SECAM**), have been meeting here in the Archdiocese of Liverpool, in the United Kingdom, from November 19 to 23, 2008, on the theme "***I was a stranger and you made me welcome***" (Mt. 25:35): ***Migration as a new point of evangelisation and solidarity.***

After our first planning meeting in Rome in 2004, this is the second Afro-European Conference that we have held, on the theme: ***Communion and Solidarity between Africa and Europe.*** It follows the first Conference held last year in Elmina, Ghana, on: "***I know the suffering of my people***" (Ex. 3:7): ***Slavery and new forms of slavery.***

With the help of experts in our theme as well as participants from some of the Church agencies, and representatives particularly from the Holy See, namely from the Pontifical Councils for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples and *Cor Unum*, we have studied and discussed in depth the theme of this CCEE-SECAM seminar and shared experiences from dioceses and Episcopal conferences both in Europe and Africa.

Having brought our study sessions to an end, we cannot but thank the Archbishop of Liverpool, together with his Curia, Clergy, Religious and Laity, who have made our stay and seminar here such a wonderful experience of Church in communion and solidarity. Indeed, we felt ourselves to be one Church – the family of God.

We hereby issue this message to all our brother Bishops and pastoral agents of the Church in Africa and Europe, and even the world over.

2. Migration, namely the movement of people from one location to another for temporary or permanent living, is presently a worldwide phenomenon, which calls for increased pastoral attention by the Church and her pastors. This worldwide phenomenon covers persons of various categories, such as migrant workers and their families, students, refugees, asylum-

seekers, internally-displaced persons, stateless persons, victims of human trafficking, particularly women and children, and others.

Our focus during this second CCEE-SECAM seminar has been especially on how this complex phenomenon presently affects and involves peoples from Africa and Europe, and what pastoral challenges it poses for the Church on our two continents.

3. We have come to the conviction that there is the need to study seriously and apply conscientiously the Church's teachings on this phenomenon, important among which are the most recent Instruction "*Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*" of 2004, "*Pastoralis migratorum cura*" of Pope Paul VI (1969), "*Exul Familia...*" of Pope Pius XII (1952) and "*Deus caritas est*" of Pope Benedict XVI (2006).

4. From these Church documents and the various experiences presented at this seminar, we would like to affirm that the stranger is not to be seen as a threat or a problem, but rather to be seen, through the lens of the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of the Church, as the migrant or refugee who should be welcomed first and foremost as a child of God, created in his image and likeness, and therefore possessing inalienable dignity and rights that the Church must promote and defend at all cost. Secondly, the migrant is also saved by the blood of the Saviour Jesus Christ, and therefore is heir to the Kingdom of God. Furthermore, he/she is not just anybody, but indeed is a brother/sister in the Lord Jesus Christ. We also are convinced that the migrant is indeed an occasion of grace from God and he/she brings with him/herself a new wealth of culture, spirituality, intellect and intelligence, creativity and still more of humanity. No wonder Jesus Christ enjoins on all, as our theme for this seminar powerfully states, "***I was a stranger and you made me welcome***" (Mt. 25:35). Therefore we must welcome the stranger, the migrant as a way to serving Christ, the Saviour of humanity, because we are told "***whatsoever you do to the least of my brethren, that you do unto me***" (Mt. 25:40). In truth, Christ demands our love for the migrant as Our Holy Father Benedict XVI exhorts in *Deus caritas est* (20, 31ff) .

5. We resolve, therefore, to come to greater awareness of the presence of migrants of any category and of their plight in our dioceses and Church jurisdictions. We call on all Episcopal Conferences in Africa and in Europe to put in place, where they are absent, appropriate institutions for the study of migrants, and especially for welcoming them and providing pastoral care for them. As a priority, attention should be given to the phenomenon of itinerant people, especially concentrating on the situation of refugees, migrant workers, women and students, who often are the most vulnerable.

6. We also call for regional Episcopal conferences to be keenly involved in this ministry, since migrants move, voluntarily or otherwise, across borders, seeking solutions to their life's problems, whether they are social, political, economic, cultural, religious, or spiritual.

7. We recommend that competent priests, deacons and pastoral agents be appointed at various levels (e.g. chaplaincy, parish, diocesan, regional, national, etc.) for the pastoral care of migrants, with special attention to women, children and students who are most easily exploited by unscrupulous persons and cartels, which render them victims of immoral practices, drug pushers, and crime rings.

8. National Episcopal and Regional conferences should give priority to the study of this phenomenon of migration, in order to find solutions to the root causes of what makes someone a migrant, especially the movement of refugees, exiles, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, etc. from Africa to Europe. In this study, too, attention should be paid to the human rights and social dignity of these people, who are our brothers and sisters, as well as to their families, their cultural identity and heritage, which should not be compromised in any way. Moreover, migrants should receive a welcome and respect that encourages a spirit of fraternity and mutual enrichment, leading to open collaboration among those involved.

9. As Bishops and pastors, we should be ready to exercise our prophetic roles of advocacy, in favour of these *"least of the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ"*, so that state authorities and international bodies such as the African Union, the European Union and the United Nations organs, are urged to promote and defend the rights and dignity of persons who find themselves as migrants anywhere in the world, voluntarily or otherwise. We also encourage our laity who are engaged in the "things of the world" to be truly *salt of the earth* and to bring the *light of Christ Jesus* into the socio-political, economic and cultural realms of life (see Vatican II, *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 2 & 7).

10. Thanks to the fraternal and frank exchanges that have taken place during this seminar, we, pastors from Africa and Europe, have come to appreciate with gratitude the wonderful sharing of *"goods and wealth"* that this phenomenon of migration has brought to the Church in Africa and Europe, and even worldwide. We are indeed grateful to the Church in Africa for making available missionary priests and religious who are serving as pastors and pastoral agents in parishes and institutions in Europe, thus returning something of the gifts that Africa received from the Church and missionaries of Europe in centuries gone by. We also thank God for the rich liturgical celebrations and pastoral vitality that Europe is experiencing of late, thanks to the presence of migrants from Africa who are of the Catholic faith.

The Church in Africa is also most grateful for the many gifts she receives through fraternal sharing and exchanges that arise from the presence of our African brothers and sisters who are migrants in Europe today and are receiving great pastoral care and concern.

11. In conclusion, it is the hope and prayer of us Bishops, Archbishops and Cardinals, at this second CCEE-SECAM seminar, that our two continental Episcopal organs will continue to study and share experiences for the benefits of our peoples, and see migration today indeed as a ***"new point of evangelization and solidarity"***, in fact a *kairos* for greater communion and solidarity in the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church."

May the Church in Europe and Africa continue to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to become more truly the sacrament of the Body of Christ in a world where there is no distinction of status, and where ***"if one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it; if one part is praised, all the other parts share its happiness"*** (1Cor. 12:26).

12. As we look forward to the next planning meeting in Rome in 2009, followed by an Afro-European seminar in Africa in 2010, and then to a Worldwide Conference in 2011, we pray that ***"...to him who by the power working in us is able to do so much more than we can ever ask for, or even think of; to God be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus for all time, for ever and ever! Amen"*** (Eph. 3:20-21).

Liverpool, United Kingdom, 23rd November 2008