



COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION
USG/UISG SECRETARIAT

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Reflections for Religious in Africa in preparation for the Synod

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Peace and all good! The JPIC Commission of the Superior's General of men and women religious (USG/UISG), based in Rome, wish to encourage our membership to reflect on the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Africa Synod, and its implications for the life and ministry of religious Institutes in Africa. Religious will no doubt already be reflecting on this document along with many other partners on the pastoral implications, particularly at the parish and diocesan level.

The Commission wishes to offer three articles, written by three African religious, in order to stimulate reflection on some challenges for religious, based on the Synod process and *Instrumentum Laboris*.

All 3 articles are available in English, French and Portuguese. The content of the articles are based on the theme of the Synod, *'The Church in Africa in service to reconciliation, justice and peace, You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world'* (Mt 5: 13, 14)¹

The three articles are:

Justice and Peace in Africa today

by Fr. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, SJ, Kenya –

In English at: http://jpicformation.wikispaces.com/EN_Africa+Synod

In French at: http://jpicformation.wikispaces.com/FR_Synode+Africain

In Portuguese at: http://jpicformation.wikispaces.com/PT_S%C3%ADnodo+da+%C3%81frica

Reconciliation in Africa today

by Sr. Teresa Okure, SHCJ, Nigeria –

In English at: http://jpicformation.wikispaces.com/EN_Africa+Synod

In French at: http://jpicformation.wikispaces.com/FR_Synode+Africain

In Portuguese at: http://jpicformation.wikispaces.com/PT_S%C3%ADnodo+da+%C3%81frica

The Integrity of Creation: Challenges for African Religious today

by Frei Ilídio Jacinto Inácio, OFM, Mozambique –

In English at: http://jpicformation.wikispaces.com/EN_Africa+Synod

In French at: http://jpicformation.wikispaces.com/FR_Synode+Africain

In Portuguese at: http://jpicformation.wikispaces.com/PT_S%C3%ADnodo+da+%C3%81frica

We also take this opportunity to thank those who participated in the JPIC formation seminars held in Africa since 2007. We encourage other religious to take part in future JPIC formation events. Watch the JPIC calendar for future JPIC formation events in Africa in 2010 at: http://jpicformation.wikispaces.com/EN_calendar. The JPIC Commission wishes to draw your attention to some excellent resources on this JPIC Formation web page.

In Christ,

Gearóid Francisco Ó Conaire ofm
Executive Secretary
JPIC Commission

¹For a copy of the Synod Document go to: <http://www.zenit.org/article-25422?l=english>



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**Justice and Peace: "Salt of the earth...Light of the world": Challenges of
the African Synod for Religious Communities in Africa
Fr. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, SJ, KENYA**

The Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops announces a theme that touches the core of Africa's contemporary socio-political, cultural, religious, and economic predicament: reconciliation, justice, and peace. The Synod's focus represents a *kairos* for the church and for the continent (cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 146). Wherever we look, Africa yearns for reconciliation, justice, and peace - from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to Somalia, from the war-ravaged Sudan's Darfur region to the combustible Niger-Delta region in Nigeria. The cry for reconciliation echoes from divided communities; the demand for justice rises from millions of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and the longing for peace flows in the tears of millions of victims of war and conflict in Africa. These collective cries and echoes from the continent set the framework within which to consider the theme of the synod.

The question can be asked: in what ways does the Synod's theme concern communities and institutes of consecrated persons in Africa? In responding to this question we need to be aware of a longstanding prejudice that religious live on the margins of real life in Africa. Not only does religious life insulate its members, it also shelters them from the scorching heat of injustice and the harsh realities of division and strife. This is only a prejudice. In truth, religious life places consecrated persons at the heart of God's actions in the world. Just like the church, the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of millions of African peoples are also those of institutes of consecrated persons (see *Gaudium et spes*, no. 1). Viewed from this

perspective, the second African Synod represents yet another invitation for religious and their communities to engage more intensely in God's project of re-creating the earth and building a reconciled, just, and peaceful African continent.

This brief reflection for religious institutes in Africa presupposes three basic principles. First, the mission of reconciliation, justice, and peace are constitutive of the life, teaching, and ministry of Jesus Christ (see Luke 4:14-21). Thus the responsibility of religious in Africa - and, indeed, all Christians - to participate in the mission announced by the African Synod stems from the invitation to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ (cf. IL, no. 40). Secondly, it is important to consider religious life within the context of the community called church. Religious communities in Africa as in elsewhere do not form a separate church. As *Lumen Gentium* demonstrates clearly, religious form an integral part of the People of God. Consequently, we can reasonably expect that whatever poses challenges to the church in Africa will also find deep resonances within religious communities. A third and final principle is the principle of sacramentality: the mission of reconciliation, justice, and peace embodies first and foremost a way of life rather than ideologies to be foisted on other people. The church and religious communities in Africa bear responsibility for practicing these virtues as a prerequisite for preaching them.

This brief article addresses a simple question: considering the theme of the second African Synod, what are some challenges posed to members of religious institutes for their life and mission in Africa?

As indicated above, reconciliation is a lived virtue. Examples abound of how Africa has been torn asunder by tribalism and ethnicity. Not only does this negative process destroy the lives of millions of Africans; it also retards the socio-economic and political development of the continent. In this context, the witness demanded of religious is to model a reconciled community for the rest of the continent. Like the church, religious institutes "must become more and more a reconciled community, a place where reconciliation is proclaimed to all people of good will" (Ibid, Preface). To take but one example, during the post-election violence in Kenya in early 2008, the veil of tranquility covering religious life was torn to shreds by tribal and ethnic sentiments as sisters turned against sisters and brothers against brothers. Professing the same vows and promoting the same charism did not shield some religious communities from the atrocious strife and divisive sentiments that assailed the rest of the Kenyan society. What happened in Kenya gives an indication of the larger continental profile. On the eve of the second African Synod, religious institutes in Africa face the

pertinent challenge of how to overcome the scourge of tribalism and ethnicity and thus become a symbol or a sacrament of a reconciled community, a beacon for the rest of Africa. This challenge embodies a call to religious institutes and their members to assume more concretely the "ministry of reconciliation," in deeds, rather than by words (Ibid, no. 42). It implies setting an example for the rest of the church and Africa "through the witness of their lives"(Ibid). As the synod's *Instrumentum Laboris* rightly asserts, peace, like reconciliation, "is primarily born from within, in the interior of individuals and communities" (Ibid, no. 47).

The principle that those who preach justice and peace must first be seen to be just and peaceful holds true for religious as it does for the rest of the church. There is no dearth of situations in Africa crying out for justice and peace. Whether in the oil-rich and impoverished Niger-Delta region in Nigeria or the war zones of Darfur in Sudan, the longing for justice and peace remains ineluctable. Yet in turning our attention to these cases of flagrant violation of justice and abuses of human rights, we risk overlooking the challenges of justice and peace for religious communities as well.

When it comes to justice, one issue that the church in Africa and, therefore, religious communities continue to struggle with concerns the dignity of women. Across the continent of Africa thousands of religious women proclaim the reign of God in concrete acts of charity and compassion. Yet the question remains: to what extent is the dignity of these consecrated women honored, recognized, and celebrated in church and in society? *Instrumentum Laboris* candidly admits that "women and the laity in general are not fully integrated in the Church's structures of responsibility and the planning of her pastoral programmes" (no. 20, cf. no. 30); "women continue to be subjected to many forms of injustice. . . . women are oftentimes given an inferior role" (nos. 59-61; cf. no. 117). Beyond admissions, the church faces the challenge of translating expressions of concern into deeds of justice, fairness, and equality. This assertion invites religious institutes to be at the forefront of the mission of promoting justice, dignity, and peace for African women in church and in society. Since it is impossible to give what one does not have, consecrated women and men face the challenge of practicing justice, equality, and fairness within their institutes and communities as living witnesses to the church and the African society.

A frequently repeated nomenclature for the church in the documents of the African Synod is "salt of the earth" and "light of the world". Surprisingly little or no mention is made of the question of the integrity of

creation in *Instrumentum Laboris*. This is a disturbing omission. In the present context of debates about global climate change, the church and religious communities cannot enjoy the luxury of silence, apathy, and indifference. Globalization has placed Africa on the receiving end of the depletion of the ozone layer, disastrous change of weather patterns, and unregulated carbon emissions. If the church and religious communities remain silent or indifferent, as it seems the case in *Instrumentum Laboris*, even the stones of the earth would cry out! The mission of reconciliation, justice, and peace "extends itself to all creation" (Ibid, Preface). In today's globalised world, religious communities in Africa face the challenge of how to preach and internalized principles of eco-justice, harmony with the created world, and honoring the integrity of creation. In keeping with the principles articulated above, honoring the integrity of creation requires adopting concrete steps and means with regard to how religious consume and replenish the goods of the earth. To date, little reflection exists on the theme of the integrity of creation and the challenges it poses for the life and mission of religious institutes in Africa. The occasion of the second African Synod offers an opportune time to initiate this reflection.

On the whole, the challenges facing religious communities and institutes in Africa on the eve of the Synod contain important implications for the formation of consecrated women and men. How do religious communities form their members to live these values of reconciliation, justice, and peace? (cf. IL, no. 54). For consecrated women and men in Africa, an authentic participation in the Synod's theme requires a radical reevaluation of their formation programmes (cf. Ibid, nos. 126-127). If taken seriously, this process of reevaluation could signal a significant shift away from the perception of religious life as insulation from serious issues facing the world to religious life as a mission to immerse and engage fully in the challenges of today's globalised world. Of these challenges, the quest for reconciliation, justice, and peace generates myriad priorities for action.

Some questions for reflection:

- 1) Several indigenous African communities practice different forms of reconciliation: how can religious institutes in Africa adopt and adapt some of these practices in order to live as reconciled communities?
- 2) What are some indicators of a lack of justice and respect for human dignity within religious institutes in Africa and what concrete steps can be taken to practice greater justice and promote dignity, equality, and peace within religious communities?
What concrete steps do religious communities take to use more renewable forms of energy and practice more energy-efficient ways of living?



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**RECONCILIATION: CHALLENGES OF RECONCILIATION FOR THE
RELIGIOUS IN AFRICA**

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The theme of the coming second African Synod, "The Church in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: 'You are the salt of the earth; . . . you are the light of the world.'" (Matt 5:13-14), is of special interest for the religious or consecrated persons who have singularly been described as "the heart of the Church". In this brief reflection, with special reference to the African context, we identify the key character of reconciliation in the Synod theme and the challenges which this poses to the religious in Africa and beyond.

First the Lineamenta (ch. 3, nos 41-52) then more elaborately the Instrumentum Laboris (henceforth, IL; ch. 2, esp. nos. 48-54) of the Synod spell out clearly the different dimensions of reconciliation within the African context: socio-political (no. 50), socio-economic (no. 51), socio-cultural (no. 52), and last but not least, reconciliation within the Church (no. 53). The IL underscores the challenge "to devise ways and means to rebuild communion, unity . . .; to regain courage in [the Church's] prophetic mission:" to make a commitment "to the task of forming lay leaders who are committed to their faith" and can assume a personal responsibility to live out this faith practically in the complex situations of today's world. It equally emphasizes the need to form "priests and women and men religious who are eager to be signs of and witnesses to the Kingdom" (no. 54).

The IL further addresses the religious under three categories: the institutes of consecrated life, societies of apostolic life and consecrated women (nos. 113-114). While these distinctions may be canonically correct,

in Africa people tend to see the religious, especially women religious, as one body. The word "religious" itself has roots in two Latin verbs: religare (to bind together) and re-eligere (to choose, select again). From religare comes the English word ligament and from re-eligere, election. Both verbs convey the sense of binding together primarily to oneself. This is especially true of re-eligere, since choice implies appropriating for oneself. These root meanings of the religious or consecrated persons call us to ask how we, as substantial or constitutive members of the Church, who are bound together in Christ by the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, can best meet some of the challenges listed in the IL. What further challenges of reconciliation are peculiar to or confront us as the religious within the Church?

Reconciliation and the religious (as seen above) belong inseparably together. From the biblical perspective, reconciliation, the restoring of persons or parties to a warm relationship of friendship and love previously rent asunder, is essentially God's work. God alone reconciles. Human beings accept and live this reconciliation in hope first for themselves, then with one another across boundaries and with the entire creation (cf. Rom 8:19-23). Two pivotal moments in biblical history encapsulate this: God's response to the sin of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3) and the mystery of the incarnation. In the first, God promised to put an end to the separations (personal, social and cosmic) caused by the "original" sin (a missing of the mark). In the second, God fulfilled this promise by personally becoming one with humanity in the inseparable union of the God-Word become flesh, "like us in all things except sin". This God who in Christ was reconciling the world to the divine self has entrusted to us, the Church, the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-19). The IL (nos. 42-43) elaborates further the scriptural dimensions of the divine work of reconciliation.

An important fact which emerges from the view of reconciliation as God's work through the mystery of the incarnation is that God was personally involved in this at a great cost to the divine self. By becoming one with us and by not holding our trespasses against us, but rather taking upon the divine self, the giving of his uniquely beloved son to save/reconcile us to God (John 3:16). Jesus, God-Word Incarnate, mediated this love unto death and resurrection, effecting "peace by his body on the cross" (Col 1:20). God thus took upon the divine self the debris that resulted in the breaking down of the barriers caused by our severing of relationships (in relation to self, to others and to creation; the original sin), in order to restore peace (wholeness), and establish justice understood as truth in relationship. A concrete result of this for Christians is that all of us "who are baptized in Christ have become one person with Christ" (Gal 3:28). An

all embracing question is "How do we as religious, ambassadors for Christ, participate as individuals and as a particular group in the Church in this divine work of reconciliation which God ministers to us and the entire humanity as a grace, free of charge?"

The Synod theme reminds us that we are a "Church in service to reconciliation", as "light of the world" and "salt of the earth". These images underscore the permanent aspects of our call to participate in the divine work of reconciliation. Light never becomes anything other than light. Darkness is an absence of light, but light is not an absence of darkness. Proof is that we can light even a match to dispel darkness, but can never bring darkness into light to quench it (though we may shut out light by means of curtains). Salt, too, always remains salt; we can bring nothing to sweeten it. Reconciliation seen in these terms becomes a way of life. As religious we are by character to be people who are permanently "in service" to reconciliation; not like a bus parked on the road or a counter closed with the sign "out of service". Such a sign should never be applied to Christ's followers, especially religious, the heart of the Church.

Our life as religious is a continuous or ongoing acceptance and mediation of the divine work of reconciliation in our personal lives, in our communities/Church and in creation until we (all human beings) together attain the God-given perfection of the new humanity in Christ and until God establishes the new heaven and earth (Rev 21:1) which is the ultimate goal of God's work of reconciliation. The march towards this new heaven and earth is the all embracing context within which we live and carry out our work of reconciliation within the Church. Our very character as religious calls us to be with and in Christ people engaged in binding together and reclaiming, reelecting what otherwise we would have rejected. We undertake this work first of all by personally accepting to be reconciled to God, then by becoming God's ministers of reconciliation in and with the Church, allowing God to continue to "appeal through us" to others that they too be reconciled (2 Cor. 5:20-21).

The Servant of God, John Paul II, identified the Church in three categories: the Roman Catholic Church (of which he was then the head), the Church of Christ (which embraces all Christians) and the Church of God whose scope is the entire creation. The IL also touches on this dimension when it recognizes the need to engage all peoples, Christians and non Christians living within the socio-political and other contexts and challenges of the continent and beyond (see nos. 8-13). How concretely then, do we minister in this Church of God, or how do we allow God to continue to appeal through us? For the answers we look in two directions: personal and

social/communal/ecclesial. While the focus is two-dimensional, the questions asked at each level apply equally to the other levels.

1. Personal. To what extent are we personally aware that we are privileged people whom God has reconciled to the divine self along with all other human beings? And that as recipients of God's act of reconciliation, our core mission is to be God's ministers of reconciliation? While many have made serious efforts to struggle with the challenges of this question, unfortunately one often meets religious who are jealous of one another, competitive, petty; boasting of their family backgrounds and worth within and across the communities. The evangelical counsel of poverty which invites the religious to welcome and celebrate others as God's gifts to the community (no matter their race, color or tribe) often gives place to a lifestyle of materialism, selfishness, the worship of the false trinity of "me, myself and I". Thus instead of reconciling the world to God in oneself, one becomes absorbed by and reconciled to the world and its value systems. One becomes a minister of rejection, division and discrimination in the community, the Church and the society (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa (EIA)* 49), rather than of reconciliation.

The challenge here is for each religious to reexamine her/his values, her/his attitudes towards fellow religious and all God's people. Do they rejoice at the talents and gifts of others and see them as assets for building up the body of Christ or as threats to their own ego and false self-worth? This applies not only to individuals but also to "superiors" who can deal ruthlessly with or even dismiss arbitrarily members they dislike or see as a threat. God in Christ was reconciling the world to the divine self not counting human sins against them. Do we hold on to the offenses of others and thus betray our own acceptance of God's reconciliation and our being entrusted with God's ministry of reconciliation? Are we vindictive and vengeful of others who have offended us? Or do we love and forgive as God loves, forgives, and reconciles us to the divine self? The vow of chastity will receive a much richer and more challenging meaning if it is explained as an essential aspect of the call to love as God loves (1 Cor 13), rather than negatively as abstaining from marriage and the love that goes with it.

2. Social/Communal/Ecclesial. Ministers and ministries have infrastructures for their effective operation. What infrastructures have religious in place to enable them to become God's effective ministers of reconciliation at the communal and ecclesial levels? How often do we as a community speak of this ministry of reconciliation or examine the extent to which it informs all our other ministries and apostolates? To effect the divine work of reconciliation, God crossed barriers, not only between the

Creator and the creature, the divine and the human, but God the sinless one became sin in Christ so that in Christ "we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). What boundaries have we crossed, do we need to cross in our communities (our religious communities and the communities in which we work within the Church and as Church) so that God's ministry of reconciliation entrusted to us as God's ambassadors may be most effective?

In reflecting on this question, it is good to be concrete, think for instance of how we relate to members of our communities who are not of the same race, nation or ethnic or interest group as ourselves. In some communities the operational structures are such that instead of effecting reconciliation, being a community of the discipleship of equals in Christ, we erect standing barriers based, not only on race and tribe, but also on such categories as the novices, first professed, final professed, jubilarians, ex-mother generals, those from rich and those from poor families, those with degrees and those without, and so forth. In some cases, superiors live a different life-style, have a different menu from other members of the community. The initiative of young sisters is often crushed under the guise of enforcing the vow of obedience, contrary to the renewed understanding of the vow. At times, people running for office in the congregations bribe members with all kinds of promises, including sending them for further studies if elected. These and similar practices breed eye-servant religious, who act not from personal conviction and commitment to Christ but in order to please or win favor from the superior. When we do these things, what light are we to the world, what salt to an earth that needs to be seasoned with the sweet, liberating, transforming and empowering or capacity building values of God's reign, which Christ died to establish? Can we say that these measures contribute to God's work of reconciliation in Christ to which we serve as ambassadors?

As said earlier, the belief is that religious are "the heart of the Church". But in practice, this is not the experience of many religious. The IL (no 20, under "Tasks to be Done") touches on this challenge without developing it. This affirmation, thin as it is, is an improvement on the position of the First Synod which in the Lineamenta only noted that there is a report that women are marginalized, though the EIA (nos. 82, 121) urged the Church in the continent to fight against "the customs and practices which deprive women of their rights and the respect due to them". This Second Synod and the religious themselves need to face this matter with the seriousness it deserves. The marginalization of religious and women generally or giving them token acknowledgement here and there is simply a sin, if our equality and oneness in Christ through Baptism is anything to go by. The practice distorts the image of God in woman, denies woman of her

baptismal right and new status in Christ ("when anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation"; 2 Cor 5:17) and greatly impoverishes not only the woman but the entire ecclesial and human community by belittling, killing and suppressing the God-given talents of women.

Here too, Church leadership needs to teach by example rather than by precept. If religious are truly "the heart of the Church", the Church jeopardizes its own life by dislodging them from their rightful place. The Year of the Priest (June 19, 2009 - June 19, 2010) might be an auspicious time for priests and seminarians to seriously rethink and reclaim their true imaging of or being configured to Christ who came not to Lord over but to serve even unto death and resurrection. Where this has not taken place, the Episcopal conferences may seriously implement the recommendation of the First Synod to set up a women's commission to critically study how to integrate women in the Church's mission.

On the inter-congregational level, religious communities will need to learn to collaborate, rather than compete, in such areas as promoting vocations and formation including that of priests, seminarians and the laity who know very little about the religious life. They can work together for the reconciliation of broken families, as in some places they do for trafficked women. They can undertake collaborative ventures to form their members on concerns for peace and integrity of the earth. The religious in Africa could also use this time of the Synod to revisit the issue of the Africa Forum of the Religious which was launched a few years ago in Cotonou, Benin, but which to date has exercised very little if any impact (assuming that the Forum has not died altogether).

The IL views the Synod process as a continuing dynamic (no. 14). What substantially and concretely can religious, as a body in the Church, offer to the Synod and beyond to impact the Church's ministry of reconciliation entrusted to it by God? Can the Synod in turn see religious concretely as integral members of the Church? If the religious in Africa can learn to raise their voice as one in the body of Christ, they will make a greater impact on the reconciling mission of the Church at all levels, by their very united witness.

Paul, Apostle of the Gentiles, whose special year we have just concluded (June 29th, 2008 - June 29th, 2009), is an outstanding example of what it entails to become God's minister of reconciliation. He did this both by his life-style and by his preaching, in his reinterpreting his received religion (rooted in an exclusive election theology) to embrace all, and in his relentless fight for the inclusion of the Gentiles. He crossed racial and gender boundaries practically by accepting Gentiles as brothers

and sisters and fellowshiping with them, even challenging Peter for not standing by the truth of the Gospel (cf. Gal 2:11-14). He called women his co-workers and had a special bond of ministry with them especially in the Church of Philippi where the leaders were mainly women (Phil 4:2-3). His own life gave witness to his teaching that when anyone is in Christ that person is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). And because all are one person in Christ, all discriminations based on race, sex and class are eliminated (Gal 3:25-28).

Religious and the entire Church need to reclaim this Pauline heritage which God gave us by making him our apostle. God's work of reconciliation, the ministry of which is entrusted to the Church and of which the religious embody in a special way within the Church, is men and women fully alive as persons reconciled to God, to one another and to the entire creation. It is indeed a noble call and a singular privilege to be entrusted with such a ministry as a way of life.

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**INTEGRITY OF CREATION: A CHALLENGE FOR AFRICAN
RELIGIOUS TODAY**

Frei Ilídio Jacinto Inácio, OFM, MOZAMBIQUE

Today's world is characterized by violence against the environment. As religious we are called to be heralds of the Gospel, in word and action, through our radical commitment to Justice and Peace, and in harmony with all of Creation. To be heralds in a secularized world means first of all that we undergo a profound conversion to the God of life, that we are open to the Gospel which liberates, and that we are reconciled with ourselves, with others and with all of creation, which God has placed in our safekeeping (cf. Gen 2, 15).

The Church in Africa is currently preparing for its upcoming Synod to be held in Rome in October. The topic of the gathering is *The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world" (Mt. 5: 13, 14)*. This synod seeks to further develop the theme of the Africa Synod held in April 1994, which dealt with evangelization on the continent. An integral evangelization will deal with all aspects of the life of the people.

In the preface to the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod, it is noted that reconciliation is not limited to relations between persons and peoples. It must be extended to include all of creation, as proclaimed by Saint Paul (cf. Rom. 8:19) (*Instrumentum Laboris*, p. 2). The document, therefore, indicates the essential link that exists between promotion of reconciliation, justice and peace, and the care of creation. It points out the importance of listening to, meditating on and heightening the experience of the Word of God, which is the privileged place where the wonderful plan of God is realized for individuals and for all creation (# 84). It calls for a highlighting of the values of African cultures as the riches of creation, and purifying them of all that is alien and base; such a process

would contribute to producing in Africa societies which are reconciled among themselves and living together in peace and harmony rather than in conflict and hate (# 143).

Although not formally developed in the document for the Synod, care for creation is seen as an essential element in an approach that looks to promote reconciliation, peace and justice for all. Ecological problems threaten the peace and wellbeing of the people in many areas of Africa. They threaten the stability of social institutions, and at times that of the state itself. Climate change, loss of biodiversity, mining, desertification, loss of soil fertility, use of transgenic (GMO) seeds and a host of other environmental problems present situations that must be dealt with to bring justice, peace and reconciliation to the African continent.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* also highlights problems related to agriculture, commenting that "proponents of Genetically Modified Food, which purports to give assurances for food safety, should not overlook the true problems of agriculture in Africa: the lack of cultivatable land, water, energy, access to credit, agricultural training, local markets, road infrastructures, etc." (# 58). The list of the world's hungry has grown by 100 million in the last year, according to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), bringing the number of hungry people to one billion worldwide; 265 million of them live in sub-Saharan Africa. Food security is one of the most critical peace and security issues of our time. Furthermore, Africa has been among the worst hit by climate change displacement. By 2050 there will probably be 700 million people in the world displaced by climate change.

Religious congregations are invited to address these interrelated issues, in light of our charisms. This short paper will deal more specifically with the question of ecology, of care for creation. In the documents of the Church and in the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the upcoming Africa Synod, as seen above, we are invited to reflect on:

- The impact of ecological problems on our life.
- Their implications and consequences in the area of social justice.
- The challenges that they pose for us as religious in the African context.
- The urgent measures we need to adopt to address these problems.

As religious we base our care for creation on its sacramental nature, that is, on the footprints of Christ in the created world. The world is full of God's presence: all created things are a sign and revelation of the Creator. Therefore, deliberate destruction of any part of creation by

human beings means a disfigurement of the image of Christ, present in all of creation.

As Africans we need to remember our traditional concern to preserve the sacredness of nature. We need to remember our oneness with nature, and the relationship of our ancestors with all the good things that God has created. Might not the "new values" of globalization be emptying nature of the sense of sacredness? Christ does not suffer only when the rights and dignity of people are violated, but also when the rights and dignity of nature are violated.

Once human beings perceive creation as a sacrament, that is, as the presence and manifestation of God, and as a means of coming to God, they will feel the need to change their relationship with all creatures from one of domination and power to one of respect and reverence. But when will we come to this realization? How long will we remain indifferent to and distant from these problems and challenges? John Paul II was optimistic in this regard. He declared that: "Christians, in particular, realize that their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith" (# 15, Message of John Paul II for World Day of Peace, 1 January 1990, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation*). In this context we religious need to ask to what extent we are challenged personally, communally and in our mission, to:

- 1) Promote not only relations of justice among people, but also relations of environmental justice.
- 2) Promote dialogue, collaboration and mutual understanding, since the integrity of creation is an essential part of all religious traditions.
- 3) Promote collaboration with Christian organizations that are dedicated to these issues.
- 4) Recognize that many of these organizations, along with many of civil society, are far more advanced in pressuring authorities to address issues of environmental justice.
- 5) Promote the awareness that addressing ecological issues is an essential part of our mission.

As religious we ought to become increasingly more committed to creation and aware of the challenges it constantly offers us:

- 1) Are we really people capable of reading the signs of the times and of being salt of the earth and light of the world?
- 2) Do we use the spirit of discernment developed in religious life in order to help bring about ecological peace?

- 3) Do we use our resources to make society aware of ecological issues and to warn people about ecological problems?
- 4) Are we aware that a commitment to reconciliation and restoring the harmony of creation is part of our charism and our spirituality?
- 5) Do we recognize the present time as a time of crisis and opportunity, which challenges us and calls us to have a more prophetic attitude?
- 6) Do we see the environmental question as a dimension of the common good, which our mission commits us to?

The first part of this short reflection has been dedicated to making us aware of our responsibility as Christians and religious to care for creation. In the spirit of the SEE-JUDGE-ACT methodology, however, we cannot be satisfied with merely raising consciousness of the problems. Rather we are, on seeing the issues to be dealt with, challenged to find concrete ways to address them in our personal, communal and ministerial lives. We must ask, personally and communally, how our lifestyle affects the environment, and what changes are demanded of us. In our ministries we need to find ways to raise consciousness of these issues and challenge those whom we serve and those with whom we work to find ways to effectively address such problems. The following is a partial listing of ways that we can become more committed to this cause.

- 1) Educate ourselves and others regarding the factors that are threatening the planet (ecological education), particularly through our preaching and teaching ministries.
- 2) Become involved politically in environmental questions; write pastoral letters or official pronouncements on ecological problems, such as the pillage of forest resources by multinational companies.
- 3) Promote interreligious collaboration on issues of the environment.
- 4) Pressure governments and authorities to commit themselves to the environment: to implement the various protocols that have been ratified for the benefit of the environment; to bolster Africa's rural economy in general by empowering and educating women, in particular through agricultural innovations such as water-wise irrigation and low/no-till farming practices²; to promote recycling and elimination of garbage, pesticides and toxins; to monitor potentially negative multinational investments.
- 5) Pressure business people to commit themselves to the environment in regard to waste, packaging, products, etc.
- 6) Coordinate our work with that of local and international environmentalists; take part in their projects and campaigns.

² A report by several UN agencies in collaboration with Columbia University, "In Search of Shelter: Mapping the Effects of Climate Change on Human Migration and Displacement," June 2009, at <http://www.preventionweb.net/english/professional/publications/v.php?id=9870>

- 7) Get environmentalists involved in our pastoral communities.
- 8) Support the groups that are fighting for the environment.
- 9) Adopt an individual and communal style of life that conserves resources.
- 10) Examine our habits that are modeled on consumerism.

Many resources can be found to help us in our work for the Integrity of Creation. One new resource, developed by a working group of the JPIC Commission of the Leadership of men's and women's religious institutes (USG/UISG) is a booklet called *The Earth Community: In Christ, Through the Integrity of Creation, Towards Justice and Peace for ALL*. It can be found on the following website at http://jpicformation.wikispaces.com/EN_creation