



## **The Catholic Church and advocacy for the common good in Africa**

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### **Abstract**

The right to vote is often guaranteed and respected in democratic nations of sub-Saharan Africa. However, there is a wanton disregard for the conditions and acceptable processes for free and fair elections. This is notable in the falsification of voters' registration, violent campaigns, absence of open debate, muzzling of opposition parties, arbitrary constitutional reforms, claims and counterclaims of rigging, litigations in court, declaration of the incumbent as the winner, and call for a government of national unity. The cycle is repeated in another election season. What is primarily obtained in sub-Saharan Africa resembles an apocryphal saying attributed to Josef Stalin: "It is enough that the people know there was an election. The people who cast the votes decide nothing. The people who count the votes decide everything." The Catholic Bishops of Africa have relentlessly condemned electoral fraud, manipulation of results, electoral violence, and the suppression of the truth of the ballot by powerful African sit-tight politicians. Under the umbrella of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), the bishops published a Pastoral Letter in 2013, *Governance, Common Good, and Democratic Transition in Africa*, which highlights Africa's checkered history of constitutional government. The document notes disapprovingly that violent confrontations often occur before, during, and after elections. Consequently, electoral disputes remain unresolved, preparing the ground for potential violence in another round of the electoral cycle. This paper demonstrates the advocacy of the Catholic Church and its mission of promoting the common good, with democracy and good governance as two indispensable components.

### **Keywords**

*Catholic Church, bishops, Africa, common good, social justice, democracy, development*

## Introduction

St. Augustine, in Book IV of *The City of God* (De Civitate Dei), poses this question: “What are kingdoms without justice but bands of robbers?” (St. Augustine 354[2003]: 139). The idea of justice features prominently in Augustine’s concept of a republic. As far as he was concerned, a republic is impossible without justice. Following the Augustinian paradigm and classical political thought, Catholic Social Teaching maintains that the highest purpose of the republic or political community is to promote the common good. Similarly, it conceives the common good of the political society as instrumental to the full good of the citizenry (Benestad 2011:81, 83). The notions of the common good and social justice are essential in the social teaching of the Catholic Church on body polity as the management of public affairs. It sees its defence of the common good and social justice as an intrinsic component of its prophetic mission. The Catholic Church equally holds itself responsible for contributing to society’s common good. Pope John Paul II writes in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*: “As a body organised within the community and the nation, the Church has both the right and the duty to participate fully in building a just and peaceful society with all the means at her disposal” (John Paul II 1995: #107). The exercise of that right and the performance of that duty are necessary on a continent like Africa that has persistently remained poor and subjugated by its leaders. He re-echoed with compassion his Angelus message of 20 March 1994 on the socio-economic and political misfortunes of the continent (John Paul II 1995: #51):

In Africa, the need to apply the Gospel to concrete life is felt strongly. How could one proclaim Christ on that immense Continent while forgetting that it is one of the world’s poorest regions? How could one fail to take into account the anguished history of a land where many nations are still in the grip of famine, war, racial and tribal tensions, political instability and the violation of human rights? This is all a challenge to evangelization.

The Catholic Church in Africa has not been indifferent or silent about the misfortunes of the continent. On the contrary, local hierarchies in different African countries have lent their voices, support, and encouragement to the African people in their determination for a better life amidst many

challenges. According to Cardinal John Onaiyekan (Emeritus Archbishop of Abuja), the Catholic Church has often tackled African issues. Two of those instances were the synods for Africa in 1994 and 2009 that did not concern themselves only with evangelisation and the proclamation of the Gospel but also treated the questions of good governance, reconciliation, and peace in Africa (Onaiyekan 2024:179). In the last ten years, the umbrella body of the continent's episcopal body, known as The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), has published two documents on Africa and the need for good governance. The first is a pastoral letter published in 2013 and appropriately titled *Governance, Common Good and Democratic Transitions in Africa*. The document draws inspiration from Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." The second document is a pastoral exhortation issued in 2019, with the title *Kampala Document*. Its inspiration is from John 17:3 and 10:10, "That they may know Christ and have life in abundance."

Both documents are built upon previous documents of SECAM that articulated the social consciousness of the Catholic Church and its responsibility to contribute to the common good, promote good governance, and help enshrine an enduring democratic culture in Africa. The bishops of SECAM do not speak as politicians or economists with vested interests. Rather, they approach their obligation as citizens, and beyond that, as pastors and watchmen. As Cardinal Basil Hume (1923–1999) admirably emphasised in 1996 while presenting *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching* by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (Hume 1996:2):

The Church in each country, under the pastoral guidance of the local bishops, has a continuing duty to apply the values of the Gospel to the problems of society, and so help all members of the church, lay, religious and ordained, to play an active part in striving to build a just and compassionate social order.

This research shows how the Catholic Church has been attentive to the many problems that beset Africa and demonstrates its social activism in safeguarding the dignity of Africans against ravenous governments. The dignity of the human person is a keystone in Catholic Social Teaching. For

this reason, the church sees itself as duty bound “to advocate a social order in which the human dignity of all is fostered, and to protest when it is in any way threatened” (Hume 1996:2). In other words, when the church raises its voice in opposition to a civil government and its policies, it does so primarily from the purview of the impacts of those policies on human dignity and the common good. Sadly, Africa has experienced prolonged dictatorship and bad governance, probably more than any other continent. It is a place where many of its politicians and thugs in power spend their entire political careers enriching themselves, intimidating opponents and civil society as well as truncating the democratic aspirations of the people (Calderisi 2013:58).

The research has three main parts: the Catholic concept of the common good, Sub-Saharan Africa and the failure of leadership, and Prophetic mission as advocacy for the common good. The scope is intentionally limited to sub-Saharan Africa. North Africa, due to its cultural and religious proximity to the Arab world, exudes peculiar characteristics that are often not in synergy with the rest of the continent. While occasional references may be made to some Christian leaders, the focus is on the Catholic Church and the need to make African governments commit to good governance and development. Advocacy is understood herein as the church’s tool to challenge the consciences of African political leaders and those responsible for the public domain (Kasongo 2004). The church’s advocacy may be interpreted as a reminder and a passionate plea to African political leaders not to betray the almost forgotten dream of a Pan-Africanist like Patrice Lumumba (1925–1961). He wanted for his country and Africa “the right to a worthy life, dignity without pretence, independence without restrictions” because “without justice there is no dignity” (Lumumba 1961).

## **The Catholic concept of the common good**

The principle of human dignity is at the heart of Catholic Social Teaching and constitutes the foundation of the other cornerstone principles, such as the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity. They imply “the possible paths for building a good, authentic, and renewed life.” They also point to “the truth of society by which every conscience is challenged and invited to interact with every other conscience in truth” (Compendium

## 160, 163). Through these principles, Catholic Social Teaching aims at the creation of the “right” social, economic, and political relationships as well as the construction of social structures and institutions that are based on justice and respect for human dignity (Gruijters 2016:16). The unique thread that links all the different relationships in society is the *bonum commune* (common good). The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* describes it as the principle “to which every aspect of social life must be related if it is to attain its fullest meaning” since it “stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people.” It is identified as “the social and community dimension of the moral good” (Compendium #164).

Dealing with the collective life of people as social beings, the common good is understood as “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily” (Catechism of the Catholic Church #1907). Besides the presupposition of respect for the human person as a constitutive requisite, the common good demands social well-being and development as the crowns of all social duties to be rendered by the state to its citizens. In terms of peace, another component of the common good, it is incumbent upon political authorities to guarantee the stability and security of a just social order within which people can work and achieve their potential (Catechism of the Catholic Church #1908–9). Accordingly, the common good focuses on the social dimension and the network of social conditions that are indispensable for human flourishing both as individuals and as groups. The privileging of integral human development, as it concerns the common good, means that no one should be excluded from the benefits of social development. As such, the common good cannot exist without option for the poor (Bishops of England and Wales 1996: #3, Gruijters 2016:20). As a standard to checkmate the self-interests and the good of the ruling elites, it indicates that “a society with insufficient regard for the common good would be unpleasant and dangerous to live in, as well as unjust to those it excluded” (Bishops of England and Wales 1996: #73).

Of note is the adjective “common,” which implies “all-inclusive”. Rightly so, the common good cannot exclude or exempt any section of the population without losing its intrinsic specificity. That is why the Catholic Church assesses institutions and policies on how they enhance or threaten human life and dignity. It insists that the common good is the primary

reason for the existence of any political authority that is worth its salt (GS 74). The essential services expected of political authority in service to the common good include food, healthcare, housing, work, education, and religious freedom (Compendium # 166). In its promotion of the common good, the Catholic Church does not see itself bound by ties to any political system or economic theory. Its interest is a politico–juridical cum socio–economic order in which human rights are protected both in public and in private (Obiefuna 1995:65). It does so with the understanding that the entire creation and human society are not beyond the scope of faith. From that perspective of faith, human society is a special part of God’s creative activity in the world (Bishops of England and Wales 1996: #10). Although the Second Vatican Council is clear that the domain of civil and partisan politics does not belong to the church, it nonetheless, points out that the church is obliged to raise its voice against policies that infringe upon human rights and to pass moral judgment when the well–being and salvation of human beings so demand it (GS 76):

The Church, by reason of her role and competence, is not identified in any way with the political community nor bound to any political system. She is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person ... It is only right, however, that at all times and in all places, the Church should have true freedom to preach the faith, to teach her social doctrine, to exercise her role freely among men ... and also to pass moral judgment in those matters which regard public order when the fundamental rights of a person or the salvation of souls require it.

The spectrum of advocacy for the common good by the Catholic Church in Africa finds its place within the broader and traditional context of Catholic Social Teaching. The same applies to its concerns for good, responsible, and accountable governance because most of the ills that have continued to plague sub–Saharan Africa are attributed to bad governance. They are also attributed to mismanagement of the continent’s resources in disregard of the common good, which Pope Benedict XVI describes in *Caritas in Veritate* as “the good of all of us, made up of individuals, families, and intermediate groups who together constitute society” (Benedict XVI 2009: #7). As citizens of the earthly city, it is an important aspect of general or social justice for Christians to contribute and benefit from the common

good of the temporal society (Hughson 2010:3). Generally, Catholic Social Teaching embraces two major features of contemporary political society: democracy and human rights. The understanding is that at the heart of any good democratic society, there ought to be a system of common values. In this light, the common good is not served when leaders are not democratically appointed, and worse still if the objectivity of merit is not considered in such appointments, especially when done to favour the political party in power (Bishops of England and Wales 1996: #10). The Catholic Church also defends the common good in consideration of its defence of the divine origin of human dignity. Within this optic, the church sees the ongoing efforts by citizens for good and democratic ordering of society as divinely sustained (Baum 2007:54).

Equally important is the church's role as *Defensor boni communis* (Defender of the common good), in which it does not so much see itself as part of the civil society, but as fundamental for civil society. The church's concern for the common good goes beyond mere advocacy for the common welfare of society because it intertwines with justice as one of the four cardinal moral virtues. According to Pope Benedict XVI, "Like all commitment to justice, it has a place within the testimony of divine charity that paves the way for eternity through temporal action" (Benedict XVI 2009: #7). Therein lies the church's understanding of its role in civil society. It is underscored by the spiritual dimension of God's will that guides the church's service to the people, and acts as a building block for social rules and conduct. Civil society itself is not beyond the scope of faith (Barbato 2013:37). Importantly, civil society is to understand that (Benedict XVI 2009: #7):

To desire the common good and strive towards it *is a requirement of justice and charity*. To take a stand for the common good is, on the one hand, to be solicitous for, and on the other hand to avail oneself of, that complex of institutions that give structure to the life of society, juridically, civilly, politically, and culturally, making it the *pólis*, or "city".

By its very nature, the common good demands reciprocity between duties and rights. It requires that citizens perform their civic duties, one of which is to hold those in government accountable. The Catholic Church envisages a social order that enables the attainment of the common good. This is

practically impossible if various institutions such as families, schools, universities, religious groups, other mediating institutions, and the state itself, do not perform their respective duties (Benestad 2011:87). Cardinal Onaiyekan laments that African lay Christian faithful is often politically absent where issues of economy, peace, justice, unity, and political harmony are discussed, and decisions are made. He admonishes that the Christian lay faithful need not necessarily wait for instructions from bishops regarding political engagement, good governance, and people-centred economic policies. He argues that they already know what the social doctrines of the church entail, especially the principles that guarantee the common good for everyone in a country (Onaiyekan 2024:180–181). In the thought of Benedict XVI, there exists an objective connection between the Eucharist and the political life of the faithful. That connection demands synergy and public witness from all the baptised, especially from those Christians who occupy social and political positions. They are bound by their faith and conscience to make decisions to protect fundamental values such as respect for life, and “the promotion of the common good in all its forms” (Benedict XVI 2007: #83). As for bishops, they “are bound to reaffirm constantly these values as part of their responsibility to the flock entrusted to them” (Benedict XVI 2007: #83). This injunction from Benedict XVI recalls the intervention of the late Bishop Joseph Ajomo of Lokoja (Nigeria) at the 1994 Synod of African Bishops in Rome. Given the deplorable situation of the continent, Bishop Ajomo drew the attention of his colleagues to their prophetic calling and responsibility in Africa: “As leaders of the Church in Africa, we must distance ourselves from unjust rulers, dictators, the corrupt civil authorities, and assume our rightful place as ‘the salt of the earth and light of the world’” (cited in Ogbonnaya 2011:76).

Considering the foregoing, as noted by Jozef Zalot, one of the discerning characteristics of the pronouncements of African bishops on politics and socio-economic development is the careful avoidance of secular ideologies. They prefer to keep their social teachings firmly within the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching (Zalot 2002:213). This is evident in the 1969 statement of SECAM, where the bishops held themselves to a high standard by emphasising that they would be failing in their mission and responsibility as shepherds if they ignored the poverty, hunger, and oppression of the people. That conviction was reiterated in their

declaration at the 1974 Synod of Bishops in Rome. It was stated that the prophetic message of the gospel was meaningless unless accompanied by practical action in the real-world economic, political, and social spheres. They interlaced the link between evangelisation and efforts towards human development by asserting in 1984 that the credibility of the Catholic Church in Africa depended on its response to the economic preoccupations and other challenges facing Africans (Zalot 2002:183). Like their counterparts elsewhere in the Catholic world, African bishops consider speaking out on political and socio-economic issues as their prophetic and magisterial duties par excellence (McGoldrick 1998:24). Their position mirrors the 1979 statement by the Latin American Catholic Bishops at Puebla (Mexico) on the interest and engagement of the church in social questions. They affirmed that the church cannot avoid politics because it has everything to do with the common good. The church sees its political engagement as “a way of paying worship to the one and only God by simultaneously desacralizing and consecrating the world to Him” as it “helps to foster the values that should inspire politics” (McGoldrick 1998:24). As once opined by Archbishop Rembert Weakland, Catholic Social Teaching has never remained in a standstill. On the contrary, it is “being refined because it is being applied” (McGoldrick 1998:23, 50). Again, like their fellow bishops elsewhere, the pronouncements and activities of the African bishops in the promotion of the common good, good governance, and justice in social structures are their applications of Church Social Teaching to the African cultural, economic, and political situations.

### **Sub-Saharan Africa and the failure of leadership**

In 1983, the late Nigerian literary icon Chinua Achebe published his provocative little book, *The Trouble with Nigeria*. It was an X-ray of his home country, which, despite the blessings and favours showered on it by Providence, has refused to develop and take up the challenge of providing exemplary leadership in Africa. Three chapters of *The Trouble with Nigeria* are relevant to the African quagmire. They bear certain similarities that can easily be extrapolated to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The first of Achebe's analyses of the Nigerian situation is the failure of leadership, which he captions “Where the Problem Lies.” There is absolutely nothing

wrong with the African “land or climate, or water or air or anything else.” The problem remains the “unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership” (Achebe 1983:1). The second ailment is the “False Image of Ourselves.” This ailment is as deadly as cancer. In the words of Achebe: “One of the commonest manifestations of under-development is a tendency among the ruling elite to live in a world of make-believe and unrealistic expectations” (Achebe 1983:10). As a “cargo cult mentality,” the false image is portrayed as wishful thinking. It is “a belief by backward people that someday, without any exertion whatsoever on their own part, a fairy ship will dock in their harbour laden with every good they have always dreamed of possessing” (Achebe 1983:10–11). But nature has ordained that human beings must live by their intelligence and sweat. Development does not fall from the sky because “it has always been the result of people’s toil and sweat, the fruit of their long search for order and justice under brave and enlightened leaders” (Achebe 1983:12).

The last of the gnawing ailments is corruption. It is a continental illness. Achebe notes with pain that most of the leaders in the Third World live in their own alternative universe where they are “harnessed to the trappings of protocol and blockaded by a buffer of grinning courtiers and sycophants” that make “forget them what the real world looks like” (Achebe 1983:46). Transparency International partnered with Afrobarometer in 2015 to produce the African edition of its Global Corruption Barometer, *People and Corruption: Africa Survey 2015*. It was authored by Coralie Pring on behalf of both organisations. In the executive summary, it was reported that in numerous instances, people were “forced to get access to the basic services that they desperately need.” While only citizens in Botswana, Lesotho, Senegal, and Burkina Faso were somewhat positive in their assessment of their governments’ anti-corruption efforts, many citizens in other countries painted a grim picture of the scale of corruption in their countries. The executive summary concludes, “corruption can be a major hindrance for development and economic growth,” and “weakens people’s trust in government and the accountability of public institutions” (Pring 2015:2). It is unfortunate that thirty-nine years after Achebe’s lament, corruption in the twentieth-first century is still described as “Africa’s undeclared pandemic” on account of its devastating effects on national

economies (Mihaka 2022). Like other previous African good-on-paper initiatives, the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and even the African Union have all established protocols on corruption. The reality in many countries makes a mockery of those good-on-paper protocols. The 2022 African Youth Survey recommended that creating well-paying jobs for young people and reducing government corruption should be two leading priorities for African countries (Mihaka 2022). Sadly, no substantial progress has been made regarding any meaningful determination to tackle corruption by many African governments. For its 2026 report on access to public service delivery and corruption in Africa, Afrobarometer reported that health care, education, infrastructure/roads, water supply, crime/security, and electricity rank as the ten major concerns of Africans. The authors of the report note with regret that, “Over the past decade, obtaining public services appears to have become more difficult.” While the problem naturally varies from country to country, based on the findings of the survey, the authors frowned at the fact that “In addition to widespread difficulties in using public services, substantial shares of citizens report having to “pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour” to obtain the services they needed” (Afrobarometer 2026a:3, 13, 17).

Corruption persists in Africa because it is the main incentive for power-grabbing. It provides the means to keep politicians in power. This is what Inge Amundsen and others identify as the two monstrous faces of political corruption: extractive and power-preserving (Amundsen 2019:10). They make up two sides of the same ugly coin and must be kept in mind when discussing corruption in Africa. It is different from “bureaucratic or administrative corruption” that “takes place at the implementation end of politics”, especially in “public service delivery” (Amundsen 2019:7). Political corruption is insidious. It not only “serves a function beyond greed and personal enrichment,” it ensures that a corrupt regime or government is kept together and afloat. It is at the heart of the problem since it destroys the political will to do anything meaningful for the eradication of bureaucratic corruption, and much less, political corruption itself since it gives political beneficiaries access to wealth and power (Amundsen 2019:1). When extractive and power-preserving forms of political corruption feed into each other as they often do, the result is the “evil circle of extraction and

reinvestment in power.” They produce “a kleptocratic form of government” that “renders itself immune to any process of democratisation” (Amundsen 2019:10–11). Kleptocracy recalls the opening citation of this research from St. Augustine: “What are kingdoms without justice but bands of robbers?” By a simple definition, kleptocracy is the government or rule by thieves. In a kleptocracy, the state is the official fiefdom of thugs in power and corrupt state officials whose primary motive is self-preservation in power and access to wealth. That is why Robert Calderisi argues against debt cancellation for Africa since it has never benefited the common people but those in government who make sure that financial aid and the generosity of debt cancellation disappear “through ‘leaks’ of public money into private pockets.” In the assertion of a Malawian political lecturer lies the truth about the effect of aid in Africa: “The tyrants love aid. Aid helps them stay in power and contributes to underdevelopment” (cited in Calderisi 2006:14). As for Calderisi, he opines that countries in other continents would be very pleased to receive the privileged assistance that Africa has received instead of lamenting about the way the rest of the world is treating them (Calderisi 2006:29).

Paul Collier (British development economist and former director of the Development Research Group of the World Bank) recounts a tragic experience of a landlocked country whose neighbours had poor economic and development prospects. In his book, *The Bottom Billion*, he recalls his visit to the Central African Republic. During one of his meetings with the country’s ministers, he asked them which country they wished their own country to be like in twenty years. To his amazement, after consulting among themselves, they told him: Burkina Faso! It did not matter to them that Burkina Faso was poor. Sir Collier uses that example to highlight the importance of geography in development because growth in neighbouring countries has a high chance of spilling over to the environs (Collier 2007:54–55). To buttress his point, he contrasts the experiences of Switzerland in Europe and Uganda in Africa as two landlocked countries that have been differently influenced by the economic growth or decline of their neighbours. Switzerland has capitalized on its geographical proximity to Germany, Italy, France, and Austria. Sadly (Collier 2007:55):

Uganda has Kenya, which has been stagnant for nearly three decades; Sudan, which has been embroiled in a civil war; Rwanda, which had

a genocide; Somalia, which completely collapsed; the Democratic Republic of Congo, the history of which was sufficiently catastrophic for it to change its name from Zaire; and finally, Tanzania, which invaded it.

The economic proposition that “geography matters for development” is meaningful in sub-Saharan Africa because it is difficult to identify a country that can be considered a shining example. Lamenting over his own country, Nigeria, Achebe regretted that it had betrayed its high destiny to serve as a beacon of light in Africa on account of its vast human and material wealth. Its huge national wealth has been ruthlessly “stolen and salted away by people in power and their accomplices” (Achebe 1983:3–4). During the apartheid era, many had fantasised about how South Africa was a big lion that was prevented by inhuman racial oppressions from roaring and unleashing its abundant potential. The turnout of events in the Rainbow Nation now seems to suggest that those hopes were mere fantasies. Even President Thabo Mbeki acknowledges that his beloved political party, the African National Congress (ANC), is full of “rotten apples and thieves” (cited in Williams 2024). Although it is still far better than most countries in the region, with its high fiscal deficits, compounded by ailing infrastructure as well as high inequality (see Fitch Ratings 2024), and of course, corruption, South Africa can hardly be said to be providing the ideal leadership that Africa desperately needs.

Sub-Saharan Africa has shown that democracy is neither a magic wand for good governance nor a recipe for socioeconomic development. As the Catholic bishops of Guinea pointedly stated in 1996: “There can be no democracy without work, justice and solidarity” (cited in McGoldrick 1998:49). Democracy and the democratisation process were the stock-in-trade from the late 1980s all through the 1990s and early 2000s. It is possible to assert in hindsight that those wares were oversold because the reality is neither a strong democratic culture nor good governance that benefits the people. The notable exceptions are South Africa, Botswana, and possibly Namibia, with a better democratic climate. In other parts, as the Catholic bishops painfully observed, “Regrettably, many elections degenerate into violent confrontations, before, during, and shortly after the time they are held. Furthermore, unresolved electoral disputes have planted the seeds for potential violence in subsequent electoral cycles”

(SECAM 2013: #1). The result has been that the abandonment of the one-party system and the supposed entrenchment of multi-party democracy have never been fully realised. Instead, “The experience ever since has been that elections have increasingly brought about dangerous moments in many parts of the continent due to lack of respect for due process and election results, especially when not in favour of the ruling party” (SECAM 2013: #11). In the mid-1990s, a crop of seemingly new leaders emerged who were hailed as possible statesmen to usher in the much-desired African Renaissance. They were in the likes of Yoweri Museveni (Uganda), Paul Kagame (Rwanda), Meles Zenawi (Ethiopia), Isaias Afwerki (the reclusive strongman of Eritrea), as well as Thabo Mbeki (South Africa). Apart from Zenawi almost turned into a dictator when died in 2012, and the respectable Mbeki, the others have picked up the old tactics of the inglorious past dictators (Calderisi 2006:59). For instance, in the explanation of Professor Claude Ake, “development” was used as an “ideological blind” by African totalitarian leaders to scare opposition and to maintain themselves in power through a monolithic politics (Ake 1991: 32).

Another tactic was the political manipulation of ethnic and tribal differences. Kenneth Kaunda once tried to dissuade Zambians from agitating for democracy with the warning that a multiparty system would unleash “chaos, bloodshed, and death” (Ake 1991:35). Paul Biya who has been ruling Cameroon since 1982 asserted that Cameroonians ought to be grateful to his party for creating “a united Cameroon devoid of ethnic, linguistic, and religious cleavages” (Ake 1991:35). Someone like Kagame has used the fear of genocide to perpetuate himself in power and made Rwanda his fiefdom without any real opposition. He has made it impossible for potential contenders to gain a strong political footing. Those who are headstrong are either made to disappear or barred from contesting (Ferragamo 2024). In neighbouring Burundi, Pierre Nkurunziza, who came to power in 2005, secured the prolongation of his tenure through a controversial referendum that would have kept him in office till 2034 (Al Jazeera 2018). He did not realise his ambition because of his sudden death in 2020. Faure Gnassingbé, who also ascended to power in 2005 after his father’s death, Gnassingbé Eyadéma (the long-time ruler of Togo), has since maintained a solid grip on power. In one form or another, they have perfected the dynamics of African personalistic politics, with

a self-perpetuating cycle of change that enables them to firmly maintain a monopoly of force over potential ethno-regional opposition forces and movements (Bratton 1989:408–9). The sit-tight syndrome of many African leaders is contrary to the wishes of Africans who “want elections but don’t trust electoral management bodies to ensure they’re free and fair” (Afrobarometer 2026b:1). Of the elections that were conducted in forty countries between 2024 and 2025, those that took place in Botswana, Ghana, Liberia, Mauritius, and Senegal produced peaceful transfers of power, while the sad contrasts were the cases in countries like Cameroon, Guinea, and Tanzania (Afrobarometer 2026b:1).

Regarding economic development as a by-product of governance, African experimentation has equally demonstrated that terrible governance and ill-conceived policies can effectively destroy once-thriving economies. This is not altogether surprising because governance and economic policies are mutually dependent. As such, they significantly affect a country’s economic performance. The continent is replete with examples of countries where governance intertwined with certain economic policies have adversely affected economic development and performance (Collier 2007:64). As has been the case in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, there have been for too long, strategies of accumulation by people in power which they direct not towards increasing resources and productivity but towards building up their power (Woods 1992:89). There may not be any need to recount in detail the scale of Africa’s misfortunes in terms of social, political, and economic development. Cardinal Onaiyekan calls Africa an “enigma” because many laid-out political plans and economic initiatives for the emancipation of the continent have remained futile efforts. Those projects have largely remained theoretical, or, at best, unrealised or yielding poor results (Onaiyekan 2024: 169, 171). Yet as Pope John Paul II rightly admonished in Johannesburg during his visit to South Africa in 1995: “Africans themselves must become the principal architects of a better life” (cited in Van Thuan 1995:18).

In its 1990 *Declaration on the Political and Socio-Economic Situation in Africa and the Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World*, the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU) referred to its previous *Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa up to the Year 2000 and the Final Act of Lagos*. It had been hoped that by the year 2000, all of Africa’s

socio-economic and political woes would be a thing of the past (OAU 1990). At the turn of the twenty-first century, after the OAU became the African Union (AU) in 2002, new initiatives were invented. Those were the years of NEPAD, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), Roll Back Malaria, the Minimum Integration Programme, the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa, etc. With bitter and ferocious conflicts still bedevilling the continents, Ernest B. Koroma (then President of Sierra Leone) unveiled the AU's "Silencing the Guns Initiative" amidst fanfare in 2017. The aim was to end violent conflicts in Africa by 2020. Seven years later, "the guns have not been silenced" (Marks 2024). The reason, according to Victor Mlambo, is that "in Africa, there is unity in identifying factors that contribute to the continent's destabilisation and woes, but such unity is lacking in terms of action" (Mlambo 2021:4). This view is corroborated by Martin Ziguélé (former Prime Minister of the Central African Republic) who poses a question and supplies the answer: "Why is the AU powerless? The answer is straightforward. They have no power. There is no political will among leaders for the AU to have a military force with the means to intervene" (cited in Marks 2024). The damning remark of Ziguélé is subtly acknowledged by Moussa Faki Mahamat (former AU Commission Chairman), who regrets that "the continuation of military coups, electoral violence and humanitarian crises linked to war, and climate change are great sources of worry for us. They seriously threaten the signs of emergence from Africa that we want to see" (cited in Marks 2024).

The goal post has been shifted to 2063 with *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*. For the initiators of this yet another good-on-paper project, 2063 appears somewhat distant. It is projected that by 2063, the entire continent, especially the sub-Saharan region, will have reached the fairyland of plenty that flows with milk and honey. The idea of inventing "a forward-looking 50-year continental framework" was first mused in 2003 as part of the grand celebrations of the golden jubilee anniversary of the foundation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). It was finally adopted in January 2015 at the 24th African Union Agenda (AU) Assembly of Heads of State and Government (AU Commission 2015a:10). The magical Agenda 2063 is supposedly based on seven key areas of progress vaguely subscribed as seven "aspirations." By the year 2063, Africa shall be a continent where

poverty is eradicated because everyone will have shared prosperity. It shall have world-class, integrative infrastructure that will crisscross the length and breadth of the continent. Democratic values, justice, and the rule of law will be entrenched to ensure that corruption and impunity no longer exist. There will be a culture of human rights, democracy, gender equality, inclusion, and peace. African languages will serve as the basis for administration and integration, as Pan-Africanism will become the primary guiding principle of “the African We Want.” When this happens, armed conflicts, terrorism, extremism, intolerance, and gender-based violence will be history. As an inclusive continent, no child, woman, or man will be left behind or excluded on account of gender, political affiliation, religion, ethnic affiliation, locality, or age. Finally, with all its people gainfully employed, Africa will emerge at last as an active and equal participant in global affairs, multilateral institutions, and even a driver for peaceful coexistence, and fully capable and with the means to finance its development (African Union Commission 2015b). Nobody can fault the fabricators of this pie in the sky. As the saying goes, the taste of the pudding is in the eating because the seven “aspirations” bear the marks of previous *déjà vu* dreams.

### **Prophetic mission as advocacy for the common good**

The Second Vatican Council shifted the Catholic Church’s public locus from the state or political society to civil society. That paradigm shift launched the church into the undifferentiated sphere of civil society, where it makes its voice heard not only on matters of morality and legality, but also on issues of social justice, democracy, human rights, and the affordable good life. Given this fact, the church’s engagement with politics falls under its social mission and not to establish a Catholic political party. Noticeably across the Catholic world is the willingness and desire of local bishops to work with others on issues that touch upon the common good in their countries (Casanova 1996:367; Himes 2006:22–23). Although individual bishops may not always have been outstanding, as a collective, the Catholic bishops in Africa have been vocal on many issues of the continent, particularly on poverty and debt cancellation, justice and peace, and good governance. Their active advocacy is not surprising because they live on

a continent where it has been established that bad governance is one of the major contributing factors to the continuous escalation of poverty. It is a continent where there exists almost zero framework to make leaders accountable to the citizenry (Oladipo 2000:148).

Peter Kanyandago has perceptibly observed that the political notion that places too much emphasis on the mere elections of leaders does not adequately secure the need to promote social and economic justice for all and sundry (Kanyandago 2007:83). This is where the church as a moral authority comes into play because politics is omnipresent in every human society. The actions of politicians affect the church and its members. This makes it almost impossible for the church to stay out of politics, although it restrains itself from partisan politics (Tapuka 2018). As once argued by former Archbishop Peter Sarpong of Kumasi, in the face of the “trinity of human evils”: poverty, hunger, and disease, “the rigid dichotomy between evangelization and human development, the sacred and the profane, spirit, and matter, becomes artificial” (cited in Zalot 2002:74). SECAM since its formal establishment in 1969, has continued to provide the platform for collaborative actions and initiatives among the African bishops to bridge the apparent gap between the sacred and the profane in consideration of the many problems of the continent. They have taken it upon themselves to defend and speak for those who cannot speak for themselves and to pay attention to many areas and issues where Africans are hurting (Zalot 2002:144). SECAM has made several pronouncements and issued pastoral letters on the African situation. The most recent ones are *Governance, Common Good and Democratic Transitions in Africa* (2013) and the *Kampala Document* (2019). Both are sequels to two previous landmark SECAM documents: *Justice and Evangelisation in Africa* (1981) and *The Church and Human Promotion in Africa* (1984). To be included in this array of documents are the various pastorals issued by the different regional and national episcopal conferences, as well as the propositions and apostolic exhortations that emerged from the two African Synods of Bishops held in Rome in 1994 and 2009, respectively. The dominant concern of these documents is the well-being of Africans who aspire to live in a peaceful and prosperous continent.

The expressed position of SECAM is in tandem with the social gospel of the post-Vatican II church. It posits that the flowering of the human person

in any part of the world must necessarily include human promotion in economic, political, cultural, and social realms (Zalot 2002:145). As has been shown by Terence McGoldrick, issues of human rights, poverty, economic development as well as education, and corruption have featured prominently in many of the pronouncements by the bishops of Africa (McGoldrick 1998:29). A look at the plethora of pastorals and statements issued in the decades of 1980s and 1990s by the bishops reveals how the bishops have painstakingly identified the causes of the economic difficulties of their respective countries. *Justice and Evangelisation in Africa* (1981) and *The Church and Human Promotion in Africa* (1984) set the tone and the pace for most other documents. Taking a clue from the 1971 Synod of Bishops that produced *Justice in the World*, the African bishops in *Justice and Evangelisation in Africa*, reaffirmed that their mission as bishops “demands that we should courageously denounce injustice with charity, prudence, and firmness, in sincere dialogue with all parties concerned” (SECAM 1981: #30). Although speaking out for the cause of justice may not always necessarily be a public act, the bishops considered it their duty to raise their voices in solidarity with the suffering people “whenever the law of silence is harshly imposed” (SECAM 1981: #30). Conceiving the local church as “an instrument of peace and justice” carries the obligation to denounce Africa’s internal politics, which was riddled with the oppression of the weakest, corruption, and embezzlement of public funds, leading to the non-provision of basic services to citizens (SECAM 1981: #15). The bishops considered it inexcusable for Christians to abdicate their right and obligation to participate in politics. African Christians have a grave responsibility in politics because the demands of the Gospel do not stop short at the threshold of social, political, and economic activities (SECAM 1981: #27).

A careful re-reading of *The Church and Human Promotion in Africa* (1984) and its in-depth analysis of the African situation forty-two years later makes one wonder if any meaningful progress has been made. At the time of its publication, Africa was widely regarded as economically, socially, politically, and culturally disadvantaged. Its political leaders were accused of waste and failures (SECAM 1984: ##10, 22). Their misrule caused unemployment through corruption and embezzlement of public funds, waste of national wealth, and poor administration of public

property. The document decried the proliferation of military coups, political instability, and economic disarray, which led politicians to invest heavily in their personal security to the detriment of their countries. Due to maladministration, Africa, especially in sub-Saharan regions, could not point to any significant growth rate or satisfactory index of general well-being (SECAM 1984: #28–29). As the “conscience of human society,” the church of which bishops are the leaders, must consider itself duty-bound “to condemn evil, denounce perverse projects and unjust structures” (SECAM 1984: #46). The inspiration for this bold statement came from the document of the 1971 Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World* (#6): “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.” The church and its members have an active role to play in the transformation of Africa since “to believe in God is to set oneself to work for a world that is habitable for everyone” with access to social amenities, and to live in security, peace, and joy (SECAM 1984: ##61–2). This transformation is connected to the mission of evangelisation, which seeks to convert individual and collective consciences so that, in turn, people might transform their daily activities in socio-political and economic environments (SECAM 1984: #87). Africans remain the principal agents for the development of the continent. It is an unavoidable responsibility since their dignity as human beings includes the right to take an active part in public life and contribute to the common good (SECAM 1984: ##92, 112).

The 2013 pastoral letter, *Governance, Common Good and Democratic Transitions in Africa*, is a critical evaluation of the democratic experience in Africa after the supposed end of one-party dictatorship in many parts of the continent. The pastoral letter is outlined as the church’s contribution to the promotion of good governance and democratic transitions. It presents a scorecard that is dotted with a lack of credible democratic practices and a good governance deficit while expressing the hope for the emergence of good politicians who would love their people to serve rather than be served (SECAM 2013: #8). The document reminisces about the role played by the church in some countries during the “wind of change and democracy” in the 1990s. It will be remembered that five of the eight transitional or national

conferences in Franco–African countries were chaired by Catholic bishops: Msgr. Isidore de Souza (Benin Republic), Msgr. Basile Mve (Gabon), Msgr. Ernest Kombo (Congo–Brazzaville), Msgr. Philippe Fanoko Kpodzro (Togo) and Msgr. Laurent Mosengwo (Zaire – now Democratic Republic of Congo), (SECAM 2013: #11). Those conferences took place between February 1990 and January 1993. Their success reinforces the notion that democracy and good governance in Africa are not attainable without an active civil society (Heilbrunn 1993:277; Nwajiaku 1994:429). Dwayne Woods, however, has argued that the emergence of civil society does not always guarantee the development of democracy, even though it remains an indispensable foundation for democracy. In praise of church leaders who had hitherto been somewhat absent from protests against the post-colonial state in Africa, Woods lauds them for the mobilisation of African public life, which received considerable support from religious leaders in the 1990s (Woods 1992:89, 94).

There appears to be a discernible convergence between Woods’s view and that of the Catholic bishops on the need for continuous vigilance by civil society to ensure the entrenchment and survival of democracy on the continent. Essentially, with the hindsight of history, the bishops regret that the entrenchment of multiparty democracy has largely failed to emerge after the discarding of the one-party system of post-independence Africa. Currently, the political landscape and the democratic space on the continent need another wind of change and new transitional opportunities for free and fair elections. It is almost universally held that a credible democratic transition is inconceivable without a free and fair electoral process and respect for democratic principles. Where these basic requirements are lacking, together with a missed opportunity to organise credible elections, the result in most cases has been a government that becomes ever more repressive in its draconian quest to contain protests and opposition (SECAM 2013: ##34–35). As Pope Benedict XVI accurately accentuates in *Africae Munus* (Benedict XVI 2011: #81):

... elections represent a platform for the expression of a people’s political decisions, and they are a sign of legitimacy for the exercise of power. They provide a privileged opportunity for healthy and serene public political debate, marked by respect for different opinions and different political groupings. If conducted well, elections call forth

and encourage real and active participation by citizens in political and social life. Failure to respect the national constitution, the law, or the outcome of the vote, when elections have been free, fair and transparent, would signal a grave failure in governance and a lack of competence in the administration of public affairs.

Africa's socioeconomic and political challenges are articulated in the *Kampala Document*, a pastoral exhortation. Its focus is the mission of the church—as-the-family of God in Africa. It is a mission that is not carried out in isolation but within the historical and geographical context of Africa, “presented on the international stage as an eternal beggar subjected to marginalization and chronic underdevelopment,” although it remains “endowed by God with immense natural resources” (SECAM 2019: #18). The analysis of the bishops reveals the following as obstacles to development and a viable democratic culture: gangrenous corruption often institutionalised as a mode of governance, absence of obligation for accountability, and the reign of impunity. What has been operative in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, according to the bishops, is “the transformation of single-party political regimes into “democratic autocracies.” They characterise them as ‘false democracies’ which are established “through several tricks and manoeuvres, of the confiscation and hijacking of political achievements in several countries. They manipulate and modify constitutions for selfish and clannish ends. The lack of effective good governance remains worrisome” (SECAM 2019: # 93). The African socioeconomic and political context poses a huge challenge for the church in its mission of evangelisation. Yet, amidst continental hopelessness and despair, the bishops conceive of the role of the church as a prophetic voice, a sign and witness of hope for Africans. This hope is not wishful thinking but a Christian hope that shields people from discouragement and acts as their anchor in times of abandonment (SECAM 2019: #173).

Against the background of the obvious and continuous declining African prospects, “the mission to witness to Christian hope, in a continent taken hostage by wars and miseries, obliges the church to be radically committed to justice and peace, and to the improvement of social structures” (SECAM 2019: #174). Since the church is also anxious to see the emergence of a new Africa as outlined in the “Africa We Want–Agenda 2063,” it must announce “the Gospel to arouse a change of heart, to work for social transformation,

and assist in the birth of the new Africa – *novus Africanus*” (SECAM 2019: #174). Again, like other previous documents, there is an acknowledgment that Christians ought to play an active role in the actualisation of the new Africa. The vocation and identity of Christians as the salt of the earth oblige them to assume political responsibilities for service and not for selfish gains. Aware of the fact that outstanding politicians and exemplary leaders are in short supply in many parts of Africa, the bishops recommit themselves to continue “to question those who plunder the resources of their countries for personal use” (SECAM 2019: # 207). To dispel the shadow of pessimism in Africa’s political arena, owing to the scarcity of credible statesmen, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania (1922–1999) is presented as a model of political rectitude for African politicians (SECAM 2019: # 211). Nyerere has already been declared “Servant of God.” The cause for his beatification and eventual canonisation is in progress. Politically, Mwalimu Nyerere is not alone in Africa’s Olympic height of men who have governed with integrity. He shares that high stature with Leopold Senghor of Senegal (1906–2001) and Nelson Mandela of South Africa (1918–2013). Although like other African leaders of their milieu, Senghor and Nyerere had difficulty relinquishing power, they eventually did so voluntarily and peacefully. All three set an example that it is still possible in Africa to hold the highest office without amassing wealth or enriching oneself and one’s family at the expense of the country (Calderisi 2006:65–67).

Besides SECAM’s pastoral letters and pronouncements, regional and national episcopal conferences have also been very active and concerned about Africa and its fortunes. Given the vastness of the continent, it is practically impossible to enumerate the many documents that have been published by various episcopal conferences. In that regard, the 1980s and 1990s seem to have been the golden period of advocacy by African Catholic bishops because of the quantity and quality of their pronouncements on the African condition. In the assessment of Jozef Zalot, the bishops were prolific in issuing pastoral letters in those decades. They were equally detailed and remarkably apt in the identification of the causes of the many ills of their respective societies, particularly the political and economic difficulties of the common people (Zalot 2002: 156). Within the Catholic world episcopate, the African bishops in those decades wrote more than any other region of the world about corruption, integral development,

education, health, welfare, economic goals, and social justice. Within the continent, the bishops of Zaïre (Democratic Republic of Congo) published the most extensive documents by the Catholic Church in Africa (McGoldrick 1998:29, 31). Again, because of the vastness of the continent and the wide range of issues treated in those documents, only a handful of them can be mentioned herein. The bishops of Sudan, in the pastoral letter of 1 October 1983, wrote that it was their duty to “denounce those who have acquired their riches and power through unscrupulous and dishonest means” (cited in Sumah 1994:106). There was a strong conviction among the bishops of Africa that since the church is close to the people who experience firsthand unjust situations and structures, it behooved the church to defend the poor against those structures of exploitation and injustice (Sumah 1994:107). These are some of the pastoral letters by the African bishops. From Zaïre came “Le chrétien et le développement de la nation” (1988) and “Les Événements actuels et l’avenir du Zaïre” (1997). From the Kenyan bishops came “A Society Built on Love and Peace” (1990) and “Looking Toward the Future with Hope” (1992). The Angolan bishops wrote “Politics, Democracy and Justice” (1992), while the Chadian bishops issued “Chacun doit prendre ses responsabilités de citoyen” (1993), and the Bishops of Nigeria in 1992 wrote “The People’s Responsibility to Themselves” (McGoldrick 1998:47). Peter Schineller has published a collection of pastoral letters and communiqués by Nigerian Catholic bishops from 1960 to 2022 with an indicative title, *The Voice of the Voiceless* (Schineller 2002).

Other episcopal conferences were no less active. For instance, there was the 1990 pastoral of the Cameroonian bishops, “Les causes de la crise économique” in which they lamented that thirty years of independence had produced neither true democracy nor real economic freedom for their country. The Zambian bishops published “You Shall Be My Witnesses” (1991), followed by “Hear the Cry of the Poor” (1993), on the human and economic costs of the structural adjustment programme of those decades (Zalot 2002:158–159). South African bishops, in view of the first-ever general elections in their country, published “Towards a Democratic Future” (1993). They opined that “pure democracy is an ideal and no society can claim that it has ever reached it ... Any attempt to block or slow down the transition to democracy is morally reprehensible because it will cause

increasing violence, social decay, and the destruction of the economy” (cited in McGoldrick 1998:47–48). Of course, not to be forgotten is that 1992 epochal pastoral letter of the Malawian bishops, *Living Our Faith*, which denounced the highhandedness and misrule of Kamuzu Banda and the corruption of his government. As Qeko Jere and Vhumani Magezi have rightly noted, rarely, in modern times, has “a church document had such an immediate explosive effect on the life of a nation” as *Living Our Faith* did in Malawi (Jere and Magezi 2018:1).

In 2022, the Malawian bishops published another pastoral letter to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of their 1992 document. They noted with disappointment that little had changed in the lives of ordinary Malawians (Episcopal Conference of Malawi 2022). The disappointment of the bishops was re-echoed in their 2024 pastoral letter, *The Sad Story of Malawi*. It has become a country where its “leaders have resorted to being salesmen of words,” and “people with high connections are unjustly turning into multimillionaires overnight to the detriment of the majority of the people who are being kept in grinding poverty” (Episcopal Conference of Malawi 2024: 2–3). There have been other noteworthy pastoral letters in recent times, such as the one issued in 2019 by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of South Sudan on the prolonged armed conflict in their country. The pastoral letter was issued after their 26–28 February 2019 meeting in Juba. They deplored the conflictual situation of South Sudan, where “funds are spent on the military and corruption continues amongst the elite; ordinary people face hardships as the economy continues to collapse around them.” The heavy expenditure on the military is a far cry from the daily realities of ordinary South Sudanese who “long for peace” but “there is no will or commitment for peace amongst many of our leaders” with “a thirst for revenge” (South Sudan Catholic Bishops 2019:2). For their part, the Zimbabwean Catholic bishops issued, “The March is not Ended” on 14 August 2020. As a post–Robert Mugabe pastoral letter, it was meant to alert Zimbabweans that the country had not automatically become the nation they had hoped, and for which many of their compatriots had died (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference 2020). Their 2024 Lenten Message, *Combating the Deficit of Hope*, was a lament about the hopelessness that many Zimbabweans continue to face due to harsh government policies and the economy’s failure to benefit Zimbabweans (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference 2024).

## Conclusion

The architectural structure of Catholic Social Teaching, among other principles, rests solidly upon the human person as *imago Dei* and on the common good. Politics and religion at the superficial level may seem strange bedfellows. Both share many features, particularly with respect to the welfare of human beings as citizens of the state. The common good is not an abstract philosophical or theological concept. It is highly concrete because it addresses the whole human person as a composite being and concerns his or her spiritual and temporal needs. The goal of the church's advocacy for the common good is to encourage and challenge those who govern the state, to ensure that everyone without exclusion is guaranteed the right "to be seated at the table of the common banquet" (Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" 1996:13). This research has sought to demonstrate the advocacy and preoccupations of the Catholic Church in Africa for the common good of all.

Undoubtedly, the Catholic Church has made significant efforts in national and continental discourse. It is painful to note that very little has been achieved in terms of improving economic prospects for ordinary Africans and in entrenching a democratic culture that respects the will of the people as expressed at the ballot box and treats it as sacred. The African quagmire is a challenge to the church and its mission of evangelisation. No matter how demoralising that may be, because not much has been concretely achieved, the alternative, which is silence, is not legitimately conceivable given the magnitude of the problem. It is *ad rem* to conclude with a quotation from a parallel assembly organised by some African theologians to the 1994 synod of bishops in Rome. The final proceedings of that parallel assembly were published as *Syn-Hodos: Africans Working and Walking Together*. It called on the Catholic Church in Africa and African theologians not to relent in calling "to accountability dictators and exploiters of their own people, the choking regimes of widespread corruption and incompetence, the criminal exclusion of competent African experts, [and] the denial of democratic participation in civic, social, and political life" (cited in Zalot 2002: 206–7).

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