

## **WOMEN IN THE CHURCH IN ZAMBIA**

1. This intervention is with reference to the Instrumentum Laboris numbers 20; 32; 59; 114 and 117 all of which touch on the dignity of women, their giftedness to humanity, their potential massive huge contribution to the Church but that their charisma not being adequately recognized, sufficiently utilized and celebrated. So, we as society and especially as Church are much less of what we might or ought to be. We are all familiar with the famous words of Pope Paul VI that “Development is another Word for Peace”, and again, “If you want peace, work for justice”! Surely these words ring for us when we reflect on reconciliation and the status of women in Africa.
2. In Zambia in particular and the Eastern African Region in general the greatest threat to justice and peace is the abject poverty of our people. In Zambia today at least two-thirds of our people are poor or live on less than 1 US Dollar a day. The gap between the rich and the poor is one of the biggest in the world.
3. There are many reasons for underdevelopment and poverty, chief among them being bad governance and political dribbling by those who hold the reins of power. This results in political exclusion of large portions of the populations and the feeling of helplessness and despair. Paragraph 1 of Vatican Council II’s “Gaudium et Spes” makes it clear that integrated approach to evangelization is not an option for the Church as Family of God in Africa. There is no meaningful and therefore sustainable social and economic development if at least 50% of the already marginalized population known as women is systematically excluded. Without true justice between men and women, development remains only a pipedream, simply a dangerous mirage.
4. Pope Paul VI tells us in “Populorum Progressio” that integral development is for each and for all a movement from less human conditions to those more human and that its objective is the enhancement of the human person and human dignity, not primarily or only material prosperity. Pope Benedict XVI adds that integral development demands respect for the truth and that without the involvement of the whole person and every person it is not true development. Hence it is our honour and privilege but also our duty and

responsibility to contribute positively to development because it is for the growth and well-being of everybody.

5. We are clearly told in Genesis 1:27 that God created humanity and male and female he created them in his own image and likeness. Full and equal participation of women in all spheres of life is therefore essential to social and economic development. Justice is about equal opportunity and equality while acknowledging the differences in function. Denial of equality to women is an affront to human dignity and denial of true development to humanity.
6. We sadly note and with shame admit that in Zambia women are too often the victims of abuse, domestic violence sometimes leading to death, discriminatory cultural or customary practices, and statutory laws clearly biased against them. We bishops must speak more clearly and insistently in defense of the dignity of women in the light of the Scriptures and the Social Doctrine of the Church.
7. Yes, it was a woman, Mary, who first brought Jesus to Africa. In the company of Joseph she carried the Child Jesus to this continent as a refugee [Mt. 2: 13-15]. Today in many ways it is the woman who brings Jesus to us in Zambia in loving care as a single parent household head, looking after orphaned babies and children, as chief caregiver to HIV and AIDS patients while herself more affected than males by HIV infection, looking after the elderly and neglected, in patient instruction, in emergencies and crisis events, in forgiving situations, in efficient collaboration.
8. In Zambia women religious and lay women help our Church truly to be at the service of reconciliation, justice and peace. Movements of women both church and secular promote justice and special concern for the poor. Women religious congregations, together in associations and/or as individual congregations are more active in pastoral care that is central to integral evangelization.
9. Yes, it is the same Woman who at the wedding at Cana said to Jesus, "They have no more wine" and "do whatever he tells you." In the African scene the mother is the heart of the family. Traditional wisdom says you come to a home, look at the children and you know how the mother of the house is and the state of the family! With her heart Mary saw the

great need at Cana and she gave it a voice trusting in the Lord. This is the charism of the woman in our African Church – to see with her heart what is needed for our faith to be alive and credible. We must facilitate structures that make the exercise of this charism possible, acceptable and effective so as to give to the Church and society at large a more humane face.

10. To promote respect for women and their integration into church structures of responsibility, decision making and planning we call upon the Synod to recommend to all dioceses establishment or consolidation of family apostolate and women affairs offices and to make them operational and fully effective. Without women receiving full attention, respect and involvement, the Church is trying in vain like a bird to fly with one wing!

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