

**JUSTICE, PEACE, RECONCILIATION, AND FORGIVENESS:  
THEOLOGICAL AND CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS AND LINKAGES**

by

**Peter J. Henriot, S.J.  
JCTR**

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through Justice and Peace”**

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**JESUIT CENTRE FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION**

**“Promoting Faith and Justice”**

**P.O. Box 37774  
tel: 260-211-290410  
e-mail: [jctr@jesuits.org.zm](mailto:jctr@jesuits.org.zm)**

**Lusaka, Zambia  
fax: 260-211-290759  
web [www.jctr.org.zm](http://www.jctr.org.zm)**

## **JUSTICE, PEACE, RECONCILIATION, AND FORGIVENESS: THEOLOGICAL AND CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS AND LINKAGES**

I have been asked to “set the stage” for this workshop by “establishing linkages between justice, peace, reconciliation and forgiveness within the evangelising mission of the Church.” Indeed, a formidable task!

Let me develop three concepts to help us all to understand the challenge facing you, our AMECEA delegates, as you prepare to participate in the Synod. I put this in the form of three questions:

- *First*, which comes first, reconciliation or justice and peace?
- *Second*, which comes first, justice or peace?
- *Third*, which comes first, words or deeds?

Well, you might say, that is just too many “firsts” to make sense of! But what we are talking about is priorities, main concerns, major steps, not only of understanding but of action.

### **COMMA OR PREPOSITION**

To begin with, then, *which comes first, reconciliation or justice and peace?*

Well, what is the exact title of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, or more simply, the Second African Synod? I ask that rather obvious question, or rather a question with a rather obvious answer, because in recent months I have been in many conversations about exactly how the Synod’s title, or central theme, is worded. Simply put, is there a *comma* or a *preposition* between the first key word “reconciliation” and the other key words, “justice and peace”?

Is the title “The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace” or is it “The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation *through* Justice and Peace”?

The text of the *Lineamenta* makes quite clear that there is a comma between the key words. But the AMECEA meeting last year in Zambia was quite explicit in placing a preposition, “through” between “reconciliation” and “justice and peace.” And I have also seen that in many other places, including the title of this present Workshop!

So I want to begin my presentation this morning by explaining why I think that the issue I raise now is not just about grammar or punctuation, but about substance and action. And I believe that this will have a lot to do about our understanding not only of the title of the Second Africa Synod but also about what you AMECEA delegates can bring to that gathering later this year in Rome.

First, if we keep the *comma* between the first key word and the second two key words, then we might consider all three of equal worth to achieve, of equal importance to pursue. The Church in Africa is called to serve the task of accomplishing reconciliation, justice and peace. Period. Which comes first in order of operation may best be left to the particular circumstances in which we find ourselves.

But if we put the *preposition* in place between the first key word and the second two key words, then we affirm that reconciliation is the necessary task, the essential instrument to

accomplish justice and peace. I repeat, reconciliation is the necessary task, the essential instrument to accomplish justice and peace. It has a priority place, and we cannot ignore giving it that priority place in our understanding and in our action if we want to be “salt of the earth and light of the world” in Africa today and tomorrow, especially here in the AMECEA region.

Obviously we cannot change the title of the Synod that the Vatican has given us, nor do we want to! But I want to think that we can play with its expression a bit in order to more deeply enter into the pastoral task that the Synod is all about. So I’m suggesting that as a start we pay a lot of attention to the meaning of “reconciliation.”

A simple search through the thesaurus embedded in Microsoft Word on my computer (a wonderful instrument to immediately enhance the image of my intelligence) gives several synonyms for “reconciliation.” For example:

- Settlement, forgiveness, understanding, resolution, compromise, reunion, agreement, consensus, peace
- Patch up, square off, cease fire, bring together

Clearly, it relates to relationships and attitudes, emotions and feelings, actions and structures. I want to suggest that reconciliation occurs at five levels:

- *Reconciliation with myself* – acceptance of who I am as I am, a creature beloved by God, a sinner forgiven by God.
- *Reconciliation with my neighbour* – expression of the fundamental sign of living as children of God, sisters and brothers, able to say fully the Lord’s Prayer
- *Reconciliation with my ancestors* -- recognition that my community embraces not only the living but the living dead, whom I remember with reverence (an African expression of the Communion of Saints?)
- *Reconciliation with my earth* – respect that I am a member of the community of creation, called to preserve, protect and care for the integrity of ecological relationships
- *Reconciliation with my God* – reverence of the One within whom I live and move and have my being (Acts 17:28)

These are my every-day set of relationships, relationships that if not acknowledged and lived out fully, I am less human. Could I be so presumptuous as to suggest that the African wisdom of *ubuntu* might be extended beyond the expression, “A person is a person through other persons,” to affirm, “A person is a person through reconciled relationships with self, neighbour, ancestors, earth and God.”

But what does this mean in the practical order of life in Africa today, in our AMECEA region? I obviously cannot speak of the whole AMECEA region. Let base my analysis upon my all-too-brief twenty year experience of Zambia (Zambia – what our Tourist Board proudly calls, “The Real Africa,” and the place you surely have happy memories of from your visit there last June and July for the 16<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly of AMECEA!)

Let me speak of seven areas, seven contexts, in which right and renewed relationships of reconciliation are called for. And as you listen, you give your own examples from your own experiences in your own countries.

- *Political context* – reconciliation after a highly contested and controverted by-election
- *Governance context* – reconciliation in the midst of rampant and destructive corruption
- *Economic context* – reconciliation in a new “prosperity” threatened by global economic crisis
- *Social context* -- reconciliation amidst the growing gap between rich and poor
- *Ecological context* – reconciliation with the community of creation
- *Cultural context* – reconciliation amidst globalisation challenges to African values
- *Ecclesial context* – reconciliation necessary for a “relevant and credible” church mission

For each of these contexts, let me ask some questions for us to reflect on regarding the right relationships that make up reconciliation.

*First*, there surely are challenges, very serious challenges, to establish reconciliation within the *political context* of our AMECEA countries. Do we have mature multi-partyism or is the Opposition seen as undesirable enemies? Have elections brought us “peace” or conflictual situations within a hidden background of continued injustice? Do we have a Constitution that can “stand the test of time”? In our countries, do we have what *Ecclesia in Africa* referred to as a necessity, the existence of “holy politicians– both men and women – ...saintly Heads of State, who profoundly love their own people and wish to serve rather than be served” (#111)?

*Second*, what is the character of the *governance context*? Is reconciliation possible because we have government of, by and for the people? Or is it blocked by government of, by, and for the individual, the family, the tribe, the region? Is public service really service of the public or service of the person behind the counter, the person with the keys and the rubber stamp? Is the cancer of corruption eating away the fairness and effectiveness of some of our governmental institutions (or even, God forbid, some of our church institutions?) (Please recall that in Zambia, bribes are simply not tolerated; however, “facilitation fees” are readily accepted!)

*Third*, within the *economic context*, the right relationships necessary for reconciliation are difficult when development is understood primarily as economic growth (for example increased GDP figures) without a social face (for example, increased literacy rates). In whose interests are foreign investors invited into our countries? (One radical Zambian politician impolitely called them “foreign infestors”!) What is even now the impact of the global financial crisis on our countries in terms of commodity prices, trade patterns, aid disbursements, and the prices of the essential three “Fs”: food, fuel, fertilisers? Are our visions and plans realistic, such as our commitments to meet the MDGs? And who gets left out, with only the left overs, in times of economic crisis?

*Fourth*, can we reconcile in our *social context* if we do not recognise, acknowledge, and reverse the growing gap between the rich and the poor, often seen in the gap between the

urban and the rural? Economists tell us that the countries within our region have serious inequalities as measured in the so-called Gini coefficient (e.g., Uganda 37, Tanzania 38, Ethiopia 40, Kenya 45, Sudan 51, Zambia 53, Malawi 62). (One represents absolute equality; 100 represents complete inequality.) Do we challenge an economic model that does not prioritise social indicators? How can we promote greater gender equity in our church as well as in our wider society? What about youth empowerment? And do we see HIV and AIDS not as a *medical-pharmaceutical* issue or a *behavioural change* issue but as a *development and justice* issue?

*Fifth*, what is the status of our reconciliation with the earth, as we face such serious challenges in our *ecological context*? We already know the impact of global warming in the mixed mess of recurrent droughts and floods. How high a priority are environmental issues for our governments, civil society groups and church institutions and agencies? What do we say to the trade off frequently promoted between economic growth promoted by foreign investors (e.g., mining) and ecological protection called for by local citizens (e.g., pollution restrictions)? Do our work places within the church promote a green culture (emulating the lead of Benedict XVI, our first “green pope”!)?

*Sixth*, the *Lineamenta* called our attention to the need for reconciliation within the *cultural context*, asking, for example, “In this era of globalisation, how can one best safeguard African cultures, while integrating the best of what comes from outside the continent?” (#20) In particular, it cautioned against our accepting everything offered by mass media, particularly the violence, consumerism, moral corruption – indeed, in my *masungu’s* view, the ridiculing and dismissal of such African cultural values as family, hospitality, sharing, respect for elders. Are our youth becoming “deculturated”? Within our church, is reconciliation often necessitated by “clashes” of culture?

*Seventh* and finally, there surely are reconciliation challenges within our *ecclesial context*. Simply put, is the church that most of the faithful experience really *relevant* and *credible*? (The phrase was used by a West African delegate to the First African Synod.) Relevant in dealing with the real issues facing our people, credible in actually living out what we preach? Do youth feel at home in our church? Are women recognised fully in our church administration and in our church ministries? And – a very sensitive issue for reconciliation -- are our clergy and women and men religious respected in their commitments and in their life styles?

Having briefly gone through the challenges of reconciliation in the contexts of our AMECEA region (leaving you to fill in what I’ve missed), let me then draw my first conclusion, perhaps overstated somewhat simplistically but nevertheless true. *We simply will not have reconciliation without justice and peace.* I repeat: *We simply will not have reconciliation without justice and peace.* So, what comes first? *Reconciliation!*

Reconciliation requires the right relationships essential to *justice*, the relationships both personal and structural that respect human dignity and promote human development in the fullness of society. And that true *peace* which is not simply the absence of conflict but the presence of justice is necessary for any lasting reconciliation.

For this reason, I would argue that the theme of the AMECEA 16<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly last year in Lusaka was an accurate expression of the underpinnings and linkages of the necessary task facing us in this region: the Church’s “evangelising mission...bringing reconciliation through justice and peace” (Final Statement, 06 July 2008, #2).

But before leaving this first part of my presentation, let me say a few words about the role of *forgiveness* in relationship to reconciliation. The *Lineamenta* emphasises the necessity of forgiveness as a “work within a person to regain peace and to heal the wound” caused by conflicts (#68). It goes beyond, goes deeper, than the structural and procedural responses called forth in answering the questions I raised earlier in looking at our contextual challenges.

Let me give an example that touched me when our JCTR was doing a study of reconciliation a few years ago. One of the members of our study task force was a magistrate, a judicial officer, who was daily charged with reconciling, according to the law, parties involved in disputes. She noted that sadly a juridical reconciliation might be achieved in many cases (e.g., family arguments, land differences) but no lasting personal reconciliation was possible because there had been no forgiveness, no change of heart. Interestingly, she felt that the values and practices in African cultures effect more strongly a desired lasting reconciliation than do imported juridical procedures.

But really, I can do no better in speaking about the link between reconciliation and forgiveness that call our attention to the *Lenten Pastoral Letter* released last week by Cardinal John Njue, Archbishop of Nairobi. His words reveal the struggle of both himself and the people of Kenya to deal with the contemporary crisis facing the nation that hosts our AMECEA offices and this session. He plainly states: “We are a nation in search of reconciliation and for those who hope for peaceful co-existence there is no other way than this: forgiveness given and received.”

The Cardinal argues that “In order to take the step of reconciliation, forgiveness must come first because it makes the true foundation.” His letter outlines practical elements in reconciliation, including:

- Practising face to face honesty
- Paying attention to an enemy’s needs
- Praying both for oneself and one’s enemies
- Moving beyond woundedness and glorying in being a victim

It is significant, I believe, that the *Lineamenta* links reconciliation and *healing* (#s 71-74), and emphasises healing not only on a spiritual or medicinal level but in its relation to politics, the economy and culture (#74). Would it be out of place to suggest that forgiveness is the balm, the ointment, of social healing?

## **JUSTICE AND PEACE KISS**

Let me now move on to some conceptual clarification of the second question I raised at the outset of my presentation, *which comes first, justice or peace?* The practical side of the role of the Church in peace and conflict resolution in this AMECEA region will be addressed in the second presentation this morning. And this topic of course is a focus of institutions such as Hekima College’s Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations here in Nairobi (an institutional affiliate of AMECEA’s Catholic University of Eastern Africa, CUEA).

So let me point only to some of the ways in which the precedence, the prominence, the positioning of one or the other of the realities of peace and justice has significance in the overall theme of the Second African Synod. In one sense, it may not seem fair or intelligent to raise the question, *which comes first, justice or peace.* Aren’t both realities so closely related, conceptually and practically, that an issue of priority is out of place? Haven’t we heard, especially from Paul VI (as well as many others cited in a google search!) that: “Peace is not simply the absence of conflict but the presence of justice.” Of course we all recall the

straightforward scriptural teaching that “Justice and peace shall kiss...” (Psalm 85:10). And listen to the beautiful expression of peace and its link to justice by the martyred Archbishop of El Salvador, Oscar Romero:

Peace is not the product of terror or fear.  
 Peace is not the silence of cemeteries.  
 Peace is not the silent result of violent repression.  
 Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all.  
 Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity.  
 It is right and it is duty.

Moreover, Paul VI is also frequently cited as saying “If you want peace, work for justice!” That statement would seem to give a priority to justice (right relationships of human dignity and community) over peace (harmonious living even amidst tensions). Well, that is a challenge!

In my brief time here this morning, I cannot go into all the arguments supporting one priority over another. Let me just point out that it is indeed a very practical challenge facing several AMECEA countries at this moment. Those of you from these countries know that better than I do. For the sake of highlighting the issues, let me sum up the challenges:

- In Sudan, is it true that the pursuit of justice in the indictment of President Omar al-Bashir by the International Court of Justice might inflame even more the already tragic violation of peace in Southern Sudan?
- In Uganda, should Lord’s Resistance Army leader Joseph Kony be arrested and brought to trial before some peaceful settlement of the conflict he inspires is obtained, especially as it spreads now into neighbouring countries?
- And here in Kenya, how widely and deeply can a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) probe human rights abuses since independence in 1963 through to the post-election violence of last year without causing some further violence between affected parties?

These situations are strong challenges to the Synod theme. Yes, is peace necessary to pursue justice and should it receive the priority of action? Or rather, should we say, “Fiat justitia, ruat caelum,” that is, “Let justice be done, though the heavens fall.” To be honest, I do not find an easy answer here to that simple question, *which comes first, justice or peace?* I suppose the answer varies from place to place across Africa, across our AMECEA region, and must be subjected to prayerful discernment as well as keen social analysis.

In examining this question, I’ve recently been helped by the October 2001 Pastoral Letter of SECAM entitled *Christ our Peace*. (The former Secretary General of SECAM and former Secretary General of AMECEA, Father Peter Lwaminda, introduced me to this Pastoral Letter a few weeks ago which I was lecturing at the new institution he currently directs, the Zambia Catholic University.) I had previously had no contact with this document, though its relevance to the theme of the Second African Synod is obvious from its sub-title: “The Church-as-Family of God, Place and Sacrament of Pardon, Reconciliation and Peace in Africa.” I believe its content surely influenced the composition of the *Lineamenta*.

In a particularly helpful section of the letter (#s 55-76), I find nine “obstacles to peace,” which merit mention here in our theological and analytical reflection. These obstacles are:

1. *Quality of relationship between the Human and God* – people who are not at peace with God surely cannot be at peace with one another.
2. *Failure to recognise human dignity* – lack of acceptance of equal dignity and rights of persons, groups and sexes gives rise to frustration, conflict and injustice which can boil over into bloody disruptions of civic peace.
3. *Deception* – failure to recognise the obligation to practice what one preaches undercuts efforts for peace-making, as today one of the greatest obstacles seriously hindering reconciliation is individual and collective hypocrisy.
4. *False irenicism* – we should avoid hastily contrived settlements, realising that we must accept that disagreement and opposition are sometimes an integrating part of the process of dialogue, discernment and reconciliation.
5. *Silence of complicity* – wrongdoers must not be protected by a distorted African sense of solidarity, of reluctance to follow the lead of conscience and the sacred duty to root out evil and to protect society.
6. *False tolerance* – to allow some (individuals or nations) a selfish peace and the space to behave however they like undermines the common good and the flourishing of all in our societies.
7. *State failure* – public authorities have responsibilities to fulfill their office and to build structures which promote cohesion, peace and solidarity.
8. *Excessive state power* – the state should respect the rights of individuals and communities, encouraging private initiatives and participation of all citizens in public affairs, since peace and reconciliation are everyone's business.
9. *Selective attention* – since reconciliation is the task for each and every one, commitment to the common good must be encouraged for all in society.

In hearing these nine “obstacles to peace” in the abstract, all of us, I'm sure, can find concrete examples in our own countries, in our own situations. And I for one see very clearly that overcoming the obstacles is greatly facilitated by application of the principles of our church's social teaching (CST), principles such as human dignity, community, special concern for the poor, transparency, participation, subsidiarity. That's why *formation* in this CST is so critically important for the success of the Synod, a point well-emphasised in the *Lineamenta* (#66). Listen to the challenge:

To contribute effectively to an authentic, dynamic rebirth of Africa, the Church needs to evaluate its programmes to see how to improve them, manage them and maintain them and thus strengthen its effectiveness and capability in forming a group of Catholics capable of exerting a strong influence in the transformation of Africa for the better.

Have we done that in any realistic and lasting fashion since the end of the First African Synod in 1994? Yes, I can name the Centre for Social Justice and Ethics at CUEA where CST guides the focus on development. And I can mention the African Forum for Catholic Social Teaching (AFCAST) with its emphasis on putting CST values into public policy discourse and decision. But surely much more should be done. *Will the Second African Synod help that?*

## RELEVANT AND CREDIBLE

And that provocative inquiry then can bring me to a few remarks in response to the third question I posed at the opening of my presentation, *which comes first, words or deeds?* It should be obvious that reconciliation, peace and justice can never be only words, concepts or theories -- even with all words used for the clarifications attempted in the presentation here this morning. They are lived realities, even if at times they are tragically incarnated by dead realities.

I believe that we can be helped by a brief theological reflection on the *ecclesiology* of the First African Synod. Yes, it was the theological naming of the Church in Africa as the *Family of God*. Much has been discussed, argued, written and published about this concept of Family of God. Personally I cannot add more than point out that basically the phrase embodies an understanding of Church in Africa as a community in which people become fully alive through mutual relationships. Relationships with their God and relationships with each other.

This is not an ecclesiology of structures, of hierarchy, of law, of sharp divisions. Above all, it is not an ecclesiology of words: declarations and documents, dogmas and doctrines. Surely these have their places, but not as primary shapers of the future Church as *Family of God* here in Africa. It is *deeds*, the deeds of reconciliation, justice and peace, reconciliation *through* justice and peace, that enables the Church to serve Africa. And in its service, to be a family that is relevant and credible.

I return to that phrase, "relevant and credible," because I think it sums up so much of what you AMECEA delegates should be bringing to Rome in late September of this year. The reports you will hear tomorrow of the issues emerging from responses to the *Lineamenta* coming from the respective Episcopal Conferences will tell of story of many joys and hopes, sorrows and anxieties over the past decade and a half, 15 years since the close of the First African Synod. Personally, I think that the AMECEA region has much to be proud of, even as it acknowledges that it has much more to work at.

But you know better than I do the magnitude of the task facing us, on this Continent, this AMECEA region, a place of such promises and potentials, of such paradoxes and problems. In the midst of our beauty and bounty, we even today have electoral conflicts in Kenya and Zambia and Malawi, genocidal atrocities in Sudan, warring parties in Eritrea and Ethiopia and Uganda. And everywhere, the less than human life endured by the impoverished majorities.

And so, the challenge is with us to be a relevant and credible Church, before, during and after the Second African Synod.

*Relevancy* for our Church will mean that the reconciliation we promote touches the sore spots of our local situations, that the peace we preach is willing to pay the price of dialogue and compromise, that the justice we advocate shakes the powerful while lifting up the lowly (a *Magnificat* moment!).

*Credibility* for our Church will mean that we reconcile divisions within our own body such as those between women and men, that we promote the peace in our local communities that comes from conversion not from convenience, and that we exemplify justice in the wages we pay our employees.

Yes, deeds do make a difference, and should come first in a Church that goes to Synod as a relevant and credible Church, and that will come from the Synod ever more relevant and ever more credible.

That is your challenge, you, the delegates of the AMECEA region. And that is our prayer, we, the faithful of the AMECEA region.

And may the God of reconciliation, justice, peace and forgiveness be with us all!

Thank you!

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Peter Henriot, S.J.  
JCTR, Lusaka  
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