

**African Bishops tell corrupt Catholic leaders in Africa to “repent or resign” in the name of common good.**

30 October 2009 **Bishops tell corrupt leaders: repent or resign**

**John Thavis – The Catholic Herald (Britain)**

More than 200 African bishops have urged corrupt Catholic leaders in Africa to "repent or resign" in the name of the common good.

They did not mention any leaders by name but Catholic leaders criticised in the past include Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Eduardo dos Santos, president of Angola.

The bishops' call came at the end of the three-week Africa Synod in Rome in an 11-page document summarising their conclusions.

The document, which contains 57 propositions, was passed on to Pope Benedict XVI to be used as the basis for a papal document on pastoral directions in Africa. The Pope thanked the bishops for doing "a good job".

The document called for a new spirituality to counter bad government, ethnic tensions, disease, exploitation by multinational companies and the cultural agenda of foreign aid organisations.

The Pope encouraged the bishops to return to their African dioceses and broadcast their message, which denounced moral and social ills while reminding Africans of their traditional values, particularly regarding the family.

The message said poverty, misery, war and chaos were most often caused by "a tragic complicity and criminal conspiracy of local leaders and foreign interests".

Africa needs "saintly politicians who will clean the continent of corruption, work for the good of the people and know how to galvanise other men and women of good will from outside the Church to join hands against the common evils that beset our nations," the message said.

The bishops called on international corporations operating in Africa to stop "their criminal devastation of the environment in their greedy exploitation of natural resources". They lamented that no international body or world leader has come forth to stop "these crimes against humanity" that "foment wars in order to make fast gains from chaos at the cost of human lives and blood".

The Synod's message noted the Church's valuable work in fighting HIV and Aids and caring for those affected, and expressed agreement with Pope Benedict that condoms would not beat the

pandemic. It asked people to recognise the success obtained by prevention programmes advocating abstinence and fidelity within marriage.

The Synod's propositions also spoke about Aids, calling for efforts against anything "that helps the spread of the disease, such as poverty, the breakdown of family life, marital unfaithfulness, promiscuity and a lifestyle that is devoid of human values and Gospel virtues".

One of the strongest Synod propositions condemned a section of the 2003 Maputo Protocol, adopted by the African Union in Maputo, Mozambique, on women's rights in Africa for encouraging governments to provide abortion services in cases of rape, incest or danger to a woman's physical or mental health.

While thanking international aid agencies for their assistance, the bishops also criticised aid programs that come with strings attached that violate the recipients' moral and cultural values. The propositions said the family in Africa was threatened today by the practice of abortion, the denigration of childbearing, "the distortion of the notion of marriage and the family itself", and divorce. The bishops called for better education of Catholics in the meaning of Christian marriage, improved marriage preparation programmes and better support for families.

The propositions condemned all acts of violence against women, including "the battering of wives, the disinheritance of daughters, the oppression of widows in the name of tradition, forced marriages, female genital mutilation, trafficking in women and several other abuses such as sex slavery and sex tourism".

Synod members promised to promote the education of girls and women, open shelters for those who are abused and bring women into Church decision-making structures.

Archbishop John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan of Abuja, Nigeria, president of the Synod's message-drafting committee, told reporters that the Church is "second to none" in helping people affected by HIV and Aids and that its contribution deserves more recognition.

He said at a press conference: "Many of those who go around distributing condoms will not go near anybody with HIV and Aids and there are many who need assistance.

"We hope that the whole question of HIV-Aids can be handled in such a way that it doesn't become always a battle over whether you believe in condoms or not," he said, adding that people's energies and resources are better spent on helping those suffering and urgently in need of care.

The Synod's final message hailed interreligious dialogue and co-operation with Muslims, saying such efforts had been successful and effective. It praised the predominantly Islamic governments that allow Catholics the freedom to worship, but said that was not enough.

"Freedom of religion includes also freedom to share one's faith, to propose, not impose it, to accept and welcome converts.

"We need to make room for every faith to contribute fully to the good of humanity," the bishops said.

The Synod said it saw hope for the future and was not discouraged by the huge scale of problems in Africa.