

ASSOCIATION PANAFRICAINNE
DES EXÉGÈTES CATHOLIQUES



PANAFRICAN ASSOCIATION
OF CATHOLIC EXEGETES

12th Congress

Human Wisdom and Divine Wisdom in the Bible: Biblical Readings in the Context of the Church as Family of God in Africa

FINAL STATEMENT

1. The 12th Congress of the Pan African Association of Catholic Exegetes (PACE) took place at the Centre Catholique Nganda, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, from September 4th to 10th 2005, with the theme, *Human Wisdom and Divine Wisdom in the Bible: Biblical Readings in the Context of the Church as Family of God in Africa*. The Congress was held in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of *Dei Verbum*, and in honour of His Excellency Monsignor Laurent MONSENGWO PASINYA, the Archbishop of Kisangani and founder member of PACE, on the occasion of the silver jubilee of his Episcopal ordination. There were a total of fifty participants drawn from nine countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, France, Nigeria, South Africa, Chad and United States of America.

2. The opening Mass was celebrated on Sunday, September 4th in St Albert Parish, under the presidency of Msgr Laurent MONSENGWO. The homily was delivered by Msgr Cornelius ESUA, Archbishop Coadjutor of Bamenda and president of PACE. The Nuntio, Archbishop Giovanni D'ANIELLO, Mr. Arthur Z'AHIDI NGOMA, Vice-President of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and other government members, as well Imam Abdallah of the Islamic Community of Kinshasa were present at this Mass. After this Eucharistic celebration, the Bishops' Conference (Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo [CENCO]) offered a festive dinner to some of her guests, of whom all the present members of the PACE, celebrating so the 25 years of episcopate of Msgr Laurent MONSENGWO, being also President of the CENCO.

3. The sessions began on Monday, September 5th, 2005. His Excellency Msgr Dominique BULAMATARI, auxiliary Bishop of Kinshasa, welcomed the assembly on behalf of Card. ETSOU. He presented the Archdiocese of Kinshasa and its programme in Biblical apostolate. Then, the president of PACE made the opening speech, and the Secretary General presented the theme. A total of twenty five papers followed with very constructive critical discussions.

3.1 Thus, Mgr Laurent MONSENGWO PASINYA, the Jubilarian of the Congress, spoke in the conference of honor about *Le SCEAM et l'apostolat biblique en Afrique*. He presented the historic of the PACE, by underlining double intention in the foundations of the Association; redrew the long and slow conquest of the scientific exegesis within the Roman Catholic Church until *Dei Verbum* of whom he expressed the main elements; and uttered a list of 20 propositions to widen the future of the PACE.

3.2 Paul DECOCK, OMI, *The Bible in the Life of the Church in the South African Context*, drew from his pastoral and academic experience in South Africa, to suggest that the 'trained reader' and the 'ordinary reader' must keep interacting with and learning from each other.

3.3 Paul Marie BUETUBELA, *Quelle Sagesse lui a été donnée? (Mc 6,2)*, presented the Jesus of Marc from this unique occurrence of the term *sophia* in this gospel. According to him, the reality of *sophia* establishes a demonstration of the deep identity of Jesus at this evangelist. His method moved from “contextualisation” to “dé-contextualisation” and ended with “re-contextualisation”, the latter intentionally remained an outline.

3.4 Marcel SIGRIST, OP, *Sagesse babylonienne*, first pointed out the lack of a term in Akkadian equivalent to ‘wisdom’, but not its reality. He then suggested a fourfold anthropological scheme for the analysis of texts: ethical, ethnical, technical and logical, where wisdom sends back in every case to a different reality.

3.5 Emmanuel O. NWAORU, *Image of the Woman of Substance in Proverbs 31:10-31 and African Context*, argued that the woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 is depicted as the perfect symbol of a wife, and thus she is similar to the perfect symbol of a wife in “odic” hymns in Nigeria, namely to the “oriki”.

3.6 Jean-Claude BANTU, *Le jugement de Salomon en 1 R 3,16-28*, argued that, from a narrative analysis point of view, the function of this passage is to show King Solomon as a wise king because of his favouring life and justice. And that is what his people recognised in him. This very recognition is interpreted as “plebiscite” whereby the new king is legitimized.

3.7 Moïse A. ADEKAMBI, *Paroles de révélation et paroles de Sagesse dans les cultures du Fa*, using the Yoruba community Fa myths, showed how ‘profane wisdom’ and ‘religious wisdom’ could be related. The latter being subsumed into the category of “words of revelation”, the author asked whether our wisdom patrimony could not be considered as natural revelation.

3.8 Albert MUNDELE NGENGI, *Abraham le sage: des implications théologico-anthropologiques de la fraternité en Gn 13*, argued that Loth's figure which accompanies the experience of Abraham weaves links of brotherhood which serve for revealing Abraham as a wise person. The latter will evoke indeed this brotherhood to avoid conflicts (Gen 13:8) and will come later, as such, to aid of Loth.

3.9 Grant LEMARQUAND, *The Queen of Sheba and Solomon's Wisdom: A Biblical Story in Ethiopian Tradition*, analysed the reception of the Queen of Sheba's narrative (1 Kg 10) in Ethiopian tradition. The study showed that this interpretation had been possible because of the ‘openings in the text’ that allowed the readers to use it for their own interests.

3.10 Mary Jerome OBIORAH, IHM, *“My Mouth Will Speak Words of Wisdom” : The Voice of Wisdom in Psalm 49*, studied Ps 49 in the Hebrew Bible as a wisdom psalm. She presented it as an address of the sage warning rich and poor not to forget God, for riches without wisdom which is the fear of God would be vanity.

3.11 Jean-Claude LOBA-MKOLE, *Sagesse du Fils de l'homme en Mc 2,10.28*, studied the figure of the sage. He began with two figures, Simon Kimbangu and Card. Malula, considered sages by the respective communities. Against this context then, the author proceeded with a literary and historical analysis of Mk 2:10,28, in order to show Jesus as a wisdom figure.

3.12 Anthony UMOREN, *Jesus the Sage : Elements of Ancient Rhetoric and Wisdom in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5 – 7)*, applied Rhetorical analysis to Matt 5 – 7. The reason for such an enterprise, said the author, was precisely the literary genre of the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ (a

discourse), and the fact that it had actually been historically performed in an oral context. The style and rhetorical figures used by Jesus showed that he was a sage who taught with authority.

3.13 Jean-Bosco MATAND BULEMBAT, *Ô profondeur de la Sagesse de Dieu! (Rm 11,33): Ô profondeur de la richesse d'une doxologie*, analysed Rm 11:33-36. He showed how this conclusion of Rm 9 – 11 put in evidence the sovereignty of divine wisdom in front of the finitude of human wisdom, in the conception, execution and consumption of the plan of salvation of the humanity.

3.14 Camillus UMOH, *God's Foolishness and the Paradox of Christian Vocation: Reading 1 Cor 1:26-31 from an African Context*, argued that divine wisdom could be deduced from the composition of the Corinthian Christian Assembly. This one was effectively made with various social levels and with varied cultures which manifests God's free choice, and so showed God's wisdom and power.

3.15 Teresa OKURE, *"Wisdom is Justified by her Deeds". The Challenge of Mt 11:19 for the Church in Africa*, claimed that "wisdom" had to do with conduct in relationship. She argued from Mt 11:19, read in its context, that "what wisdom does" makes clear "what wisdom is". Human wisdom is essentially a participation in divine wisdom.

3.16 Roger WAWA, *"Binso bizali se mpamba". Réception de Qo 1,2 en contexte africain*, studied the reception of Qohelet in Africa, from two instances : a popular song and the translation of Qo 1:2 into Lingala. He suggested that the Hebrew *Hevel havalim* be rendered in African languages by a concrete terminology in order to avoid a sceptical reading of Qohelet in Africa.

3.17 Sébastien SANGBAKO DJIMA, *Arrière-fond grec de 1 Co 9,1-18*, showed Paul's wisdom in responding to the 'strong' of Corinth. Based on their knowledge, they scandalized the weak brothers by eating sacrificial meals. Paul opposed to that his own example in material autonomy. In order not to create an obstacle to the Gospel in behaving like the Cynics and the Stoics, Paul earned his living by working with his hands. By so doing, he became a paradigm for the diocesan priests.

3.18 Wilfrid OKAMBAWA, *Le message de sagesse comme don de l'Esprit (1 Co 12,8)*, compared the 'word of wisdom' with the 'word of knowledge' in order to determine the nature of wisdom. Did it come from the Greek world or from the Jewish one? 'Wisdom' in 1 Cor 12:8 was different from Greek and Gnostic *Sophia*. It was Jewish with apocalyptic and eschatological aspects. And it subsumed a critical function vis-à-vis any human wisdom, because of its divine nature.

3.19 Kaobo AMISI, *Sagesse et guerres de libération. Quelle sagesse dans 1 Maccabées pour l'Afrique d'aujourd'hui ?*, read 1 M as a book on a Jewish war of cultural, religious and political independence. Africa must learn from this book to get rid of wars both by rhetorical and strategic ways as concrete expression of wisdoms, either by avoiding or winning wars.

3.20 Bernard FANSAKA, *Ps 1; 19; 119 comme relectures sapientielles de la Torah: Herméneutique et inculturation*, argued that the relation between Israel and Torah unfolded throughout history as a process of inculturation. Therefore, wisdom books are to be read as « sapientialization » of the Torah. They sealed the destiny of Torah on its way to becoming Love in Jesus Christ. This process opened for us the time of African Torah as it had been received by Black cultures and interpreted within the Church.

3.21 Margaret UMEAGUDOSU, *The Relevance of Wisdom Christology (1 Cor 1:10-4:21) for the Church as Family of God in Africa*, claims that Paul defended his own Christology as against the *Sophia* Christology known and believed by the Corinthians. The author then suggested that the

extended family system in Africa was a type of wisdom that should help the Africans resist disintegration and collapse, even though they received a divided church at the inception of Christianity in the continent.

3.22 Patrick ADESO, *Suffering in Job and in an African Perspective*, argued that Job's character could help us understand better sufferings in Africa. The suffering ones in Africa, like Job, are in search of meaning whose source is God. Suffering accepted generates love and works of love.

3.23 Ghislain TSHIKENDWA, SJ, *De l'épreuve à la Sagesse. Le livre de Job lu par un Africain*, read the book of Job as the drama of the God / Human relationship. Suffering becomes a transformative experience whereby people learn to listen to divine Wisdom. Job's experience could be used, said the author, as a pastoral example to deal with HIV/AIDS victims with wisdom.

3.24 Donatien TSHIDIBI BAMBILA, OP, *La Sagesse royale mise à l'épreuve. Lecture de 2 S 14*, presented the king David as wise character, even though this text is a part of dark pages of David's reign. This text shows that wisdom is not a static, but dynamic data, because sometimes one can oscillate between wisdom and madness, between madness and wisdom, and between wisdom, madness and wisdom. For the author, David's wisdom is situated between the human wisdom and the divine wisdom.

3.25 Ukachukwu C. MANUS, *Jesus, Prophet of the Sophia-God of the Downtrodden: Rereading the Q-Wisdom Sayings in the Context of HIV/AIDS Pandemic in Africa*, devoted his study on four selected texts from Q to show the characteristics of Jesus as the Prophet of *Sophia-God*, so recognised by 'Wisdom's children'. In the current context of the AIDS, the Church as Family of God has to show the spirit of family solidarity which is pulled with the studied texts.

3.26 Msgr. Bernard NSAYI and André KABASELE MUKENGE, both prevented, had sent to the secretariat of the congress their respectively entitled conferences *La sagesse selon 1 Co 1,17-31* and *La sagesse, où la trouver ? Jb 28 dans une herméneutique interculturelle*. Regrettably, these texts were not able to be read, for lack of time.

4. Moments of socialisation.

4.1 These intensive intellectual discussions were interrupted by pleasant breaks. On Wednesday, September 7th: first, a tour in the City of Kinshasa just before noon; then an outing to the « Lac de Ma Vallée », a restaurant out of the City, in the afternoon, where lunch was served; and finally, a cultural dance in honour of Archbishop Laurent MONSENGWO, in the evening.

4.2 On Friday, September 9th: The Nuntio invited us at his residence for diner. It was an experience of real fraternal communion.

5. Three business meetings were also organised to evaluate the life of the association : the first was held on Thursday, September 8th, in order to listen to the report on the 11th Congress which took place in Cairo ; on Friday, September 9th, the second gathered the active members to examine the statutes (namely article 5) and the candidates' applications; the third, called on the evening of the same Friday, was a general assembly: the admission of new members was announced, the various categories of membership in Art. 5 were redefined, and a new category was introduced, namely "associate members", in order to make space within the Association for exegetes belonging to other Christian denominations. It was asked the various speakers to improve their texts as quickly as possible and to send them to the secretariat with the aim of their publication. Deadline was fixed to January 2006.

6. The Assembly suggested the following theme for the next congress: ***Poverty and Richness in the Bible***. South-Africa was chosen as the next venue, with Uganda and Ethiopia as alternatives. Fr Paul DECOCK and Sr Teresa OKURE were called on to help the Secretary General, Fr. Jean-Bosco MATAND BULEMBAT, on the issue.

7. On Saturday, September 10th, the 12th PACE Congress concluded its activities under the Presidency of Archbishop ESUA. The draft of the final statement was read and corrected by the Assembly. Then, Archbishop Laurent MONSENGWO PASINYA, the Jubilarian of the Congress, shared a brief and incisive word of gratitude to the Participants, and promised his prayers. He invited them to keep climbing (*Duc in altum!*), for « tout ce qui s'élève converge », quoting P. Teilhard de Chardin. Finally, Archbishop Cornelius ESUA, President of PACE, expressed his great joy for what had been experienced all these days. He thanked again Archbishop Laurent MONSENGWO for his support, his spiritual, intellectual, and financial generosity towards PACE. Backing the Secretary General's suggestion, Archbishop ESUA said Archbishop Laurent MONSENGWO deserved the title of honour: « Sage » of PACE. The thanks of the president extended finally to all the participants, to H.E.M. Frédéric Cardinal ETSOU, to the staff of the Centre Catholique Nganda, to the CENCO and to all the benefactors who help every time the PACE meet its goals.

Signed at Kinshasa, September 10th 2005
Centre Catholique Nganda