



13th Congress

CONFERENCE REPORT

1. The 13th Congress of the Pan African Association of Catholic Exegetes (PACE) was held from September 2nd to 8th 2007 at Koinonia Centre (53 First Street, Judith's Paarl), in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Congress had as its theme, *Poverty and Riches in the Bible: Exegetical Readings in the Context of the Church as Family of God in Africa*. There were a total of 30 participants at the Congress, drawn from 11 countries: Belgium, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Italy, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, South Africa, and Zambia.

2. The opening Mass of the Congress took place in the *Koinonia* centre chapel on Sunday, September 2nd, 2007 at 9.30 am. The Mass was presided over by H. E. Mgr. L. Monsengwo Pasinya, the Archbishop of Kisangani and the co-founder of PACE.

3. The formal opening ceremonies of the Congress took place on the same Sunday, September 2nd, 2007 at 4.20pm, chaired by Rev. Sr. Prof. Teresa Okure, SHCJ. After the opening prayer led by His Eminence, Wilfrid Fox Cardinal Napier, OFM, the Archbishop of Durban, Rev. Fr. Prof. Paul B. Decock, the coordinator of the local committee, welcomed the participants, and introduced Cardinal Napier, OFM, and H. E. Mgr. Buti Joseph Tlhagale, OMI, the Archbishop of Johannesburg. Thereafter, the latter warmly welcomed all the participants, and wished that they would have a good and fruitful time in Johannesburg. He also invited the participants to a dinner. In his turn, Cardinal Napier, OFM, also warmly welcomed all the participants to South Africa and to Johannesburg. He assured the participants that Jesus was with them, accompanying them in their deliberations, and so they should find a variety of ways to explain the Scriptures, in a way that would be meaningful to the ordinary people who are searching for Jesus.

3.1 The President of PACE, H. E. Msgr. Cornelius F. Esua, the Archbishop of Bamenda, in his address to the Congress, also addressed special words of welcome to every one. He noted that this year marked twenty years since the association actually attained a legal status in July 1987. He reiterated the commitment of the association to its objectives, which is to promote biblical research of high scientific quality with an African perspective and to be at the service of the Biblical Pastoral Ministry in the Church, Family of God in Africa, so that its catechesis and work of evangelization in general may be solidly rooted and inspired by the Word of God. He urged the participants to regard this Congress as well as the next one to be held in 2009 as part of the

association's preparations for the forthcoming Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops scheduled for October 2009, and the 12th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops which will take place in October 2008. The President declared the Congress open.

3.2 Thereafter, the Secretary General of PACE, Rev. Fr. Dr. Jean-Bosco Matand Bulembat, formally presented the general theme of the Congress, *Poverty and Riches in the Bible: Exegetical Readings in the Context of the Church as Family of God in Africa*. He gave the reason for the choice of the theme at the 12th Congress. This was on account of the continuous conditions of poverty, injustice, misery, fratricidal and other wars in Africa, wherein the majority of Africans live, at this time of globalization despite the continent's enormous material wealth. He therefore called on all the exegetes to listen to the Word of God and to study it deeply, rigorously applying the scientific methods of exegesis oriented towards a pastoral end, in a way that would assist the Church, Family of God in Africa to better present the will of God to the people in their circumstances.

4. A total of twenty six papers were presented at the Congress. Out of these, twenty four papers were read by participants at the Congress, while two papers were received from non participants. The twenty four papers were discussed and debated upon, with questions asked, and suggestions given. The following is a summary of the papers, as they were progressively presented. The two first were social anthropological studies of the concepts of poverty and wealth in the African traditions and in the new religious movements respectively.

4.1 *Une ethnographie de la pauvreté et de la richesse dans les traditions africaines* by Rev. Fr. Dr. Ludovic Lado, S.J. In this paper the author disclosed that the concept of poverty and riches is a cultural construction of each society, based on the society's distinctive values. The study therefore analyzed the social and cultural implications of the typology of poverty in African traditions, in line with the notions of power, sorcery and modernity.

4.2 *Lectures africaines de la Bible et théologie de la prospérité au sein des Églises de réveil. Approche traductologique* by Rev. Sr. Prof. Josée Ngalula. Interested in the translations of the Bible, the author focused on the choice of language in the Biblical versions, and discovered that the word "prosperity" rather than the original word "riches" is more used in *La Bible Louis Segond*, the biblical version that is used in the "born-again" Churches. It is on this basis that the "born-again" Churches focus much on "prosperity theology".

4.3 *"S'enrichir en vue de Dieu" (Lc 12, 21)* by H. E. Mgr. Monsengwo Pasinya. The author noted that the gospel of Luke is known as the gospel for the poor, and that it exalts the poor, since it proclaims blessings for them, but woes for the rich. In this context therefore, what would the expression "*rich toward God*" in Luke 12:21 mean? In the Lucan context, this is an invitation to be rich in function of the coming kingdom of God and to avoid greed. Material abundance gives one no security, rather sharing with the poor and being confident in divine providence are the attitudes recommended by Jesus to his followers while awaiting the Lord's return.

4.4 *Jesus' Good News to the Poor (Luke 4:18-19) and Liberation of the Poor in Africa* by Rev. Fr. Dr. Anthony Iffen Umoren, MSP. Analyzing the text based on its LXX background and within its Lucan literary context, the author noted that the text serves the purpose of highlighting

Jesus' mission in the entire gospel of Luke. He therefore contended that an authentic liberation of the poor in Africa must start from an appreciation and sincere living out of the different liberative values of the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus.

4.5 *The Poor as Recipients of Divine Blessing in Luke 6:20 and its Relevance to the Church as a Family of God in Africa* by Rev. Fr. Dr. Cosmas Uzowulu, OFM Cap. For the author, Luke's first beatitude declares the poor blessed. This saying turns the world's standards upside down, such that the poor are to be seen only from God's perspective. Hence the truly poor are the fortunate ones, the blessed. The Church in Africa can help the poor benefit from the Lucan saying only if they see their situation from God's own perspective.

4.6 *The Poor and the Church's Royal Role: Luke 14:15-24 as a Parable for Africa* by Rev. Sr. Dr. Mary Sylvia Nwachukwu, DDL. Studying the literary characteristics, setting and vocabulary in the text the author revealed that it is the socio-economic relationship in the human community which engenders poverty. Yet, there is a human responsibility towards the poor. The text is therefore considered as a parable for the African Church to advocate and embrace a system of relationship that favors all and welcomes all into the human community.

4.7 *Pauvreté individuelle et richesse communautaire. Lecture de Luc 21, 1-4* by Rev. Fr. Dr. Amisi Kaobo. Observing that a poor widow gives all that she had to live on, while the rich give from their surplus, the author put the question: is this a call to poverty or an invitation to charity? According to him, a community, in which everyone gives, without exception, becomes an enriched community, while one in which certain members do not want to give becomes impoverished. Could this be the case of Africa? One must have faith in order to give everything like the widow.

4.8 *"So that there will not be a poor one among you..." (Deut 15:4): A Jubilee Year vision for Messianic Times* by H. Em. Peter Cardinal Turkson, the archbishop of Cape Coast. The author suggests that the reference to the *Jubilee Year* and its ethics of releasing the indebted, through the Prophet Isaiah, in Jesus' formulation of his mission (Luke 4:18ff), and the attribution of the latter to the overshadowing and anointing of the Holy Spirit, make the achievement and the successful living of the *Jubilee Year* program possible only in the power of the Holy Spirit, and, hence, an attribute of the era of the Messiah and his Church.

4.9 *"Cependant il n'y aura pas de nécessiteux chez toi" (Dt 15, 4a). Le Deutéronome et la lutte contre la pauvreté* by Rev. Fr. Prof. André Kabasele Mukenge. For the author, to live like a slave in the promised land represents a contradiction in terms. Therefore, the author uses to the full the assertion of Deut 15: 4a, which is rendered differently by translators and commentators. This he does by studying deeply the concept of debt relief (*shemittah*), examining in particular the argumentative strategy, and the other social laws of Deuteronomy used to make it work.

4.10 *Mišpat hammelek – le pouvoir comme facteur de paupérisation. Étude du discours de Samuel (1 S 8, 11-18)* by Rev. Fr. Paul Béré, S.J. The author suggests that it was in order to discourage the ancient Israelites who wanted a human king, that Samuel in I Sam 8: 11-18 presents the power of this king as a factor of pauperization and of social inequality, and above all of a cult of a human being. Thus, Israel would experience the poverty of losing its identity,

which was based on its unique relation with YHWH as its divine ruler. Is that not an echo of the “anthropological poverty” of the African person which Engelbert Mveng, SJ spoke about?

4.11 *La dynamique de l'avoir et du non avoir dans le cycle d'Abraham* by Rev. Fr. Moïse Adekambi. The author studies the relationship between faith and material well-being in the Cycle of Abraham, “our father in faith”, as found in the Pentateuch. Thereafter, he raises some questions of a pastoral nature.

4.12 *La richesse de Jacob. Lecture exégétique de Gn 30, 25-32, 1* by Rev. Fr. Dr. Donatien Tshidibi Bambila, OP. The theme of “blessing” dominates the Patriarchal history. In the Cycle of Abraham, this blessing refers above all to God’s gifts of land or a nation, and of many descendants. In the Cycle of Jacob on the other hand, it refers above all to material riches. How Jacob does get himself to become rich, and the moral and social consequences of this is the concern of the author.

4.13 “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...*” *Re-reading Luke 4:18-19 in the Nigerian Context* by Prof Ukachukwu Chris Manus. Luke “customizes” the traditional “Spirit of Yahweh” (Isa 61:1a) that addressed the concerns of the dismayed poor of Israel in Jerusalem (exiles) to fit his emphasis on the Spirit’s empowerment of Jesus. Invigorated, Jesus re-enacts the prophetic tradition by identifying himself and his mission with the beleaguered conditions of Gentile Christians of that era and today, the *wananchi* of Africa.

4.14 *Implications of Just Wages for the Poor and Poverty (James 5:1-6)* by Dr. Protus Kemdirim. For the author, the text of study presents the concern of James for social justice, and the emphasis he lays on the duty of the rich to empower the poor through rightful wages. The author also shows how two papal encyclicals (*Rerum Novarum* by Leo XII and *Laborem Exercens* by John Paul II) apply James’ exhortation to contemporary times.

4.15 *Generosity in Poverty among the Early Christians (2 Cor 8:1-7): A Challenge to the Church Family of God in Africa* by Dr. Margaret Umeagodosu. By praising the generosity of the Macedonians and emphasizing on a theology of generosity based on God’s *charis*, Paul used a strategy which stimulated the Corinthians to attend to their responsibility to be generous to the poor members of the Jerusalem Church. This strategy, the author believes, can be used too with success to help the members of the Church, family of God in Africa to share with one another, even in their poverty.

4.16 *The Rich and the Poor in the Sight of God (Luke 1:52-53)* by Rev. Fr. Dr. Henry Terwase Akaabiam. The author argues that the rich mentioned in the text may not be the economically buoyant but those who have closed their hearts to God’s redemptive work. On the other hand the poor are not the economically disadvantaged but those who open their hearts to the salvific work of God, and cooperate with him in its realization. In that sense, the rich on this earth are poor in the sight of God, while the poor are rich in his sight.

4.17 *The Wealth of Babylon and the Wealth of the New Jerusalem: Some Critical Questions about Robert Royalty’s The Streets of Heaven* by Rev. Fr. Prof B. Decock, OMI. The author questions Royalty’s assertion that the theme of wealth is used ideologically in Apocalypse in the

context of a power struggle. Rather, the theme is used in the context of a struggle to articulate the right understanding of, and attitude towards the Roman State, its claims and values. Thus, the gold and precious stones of the New Jerusalem are expressions of God's imperishable glory while the wealth of Babylon evokes idolatry and self-glorification.

4.18 *L'agneau, herméneutique de Ap 5, 6-13. En quoi consistent sa richesse et sa force? Une exégèse figurative dans le livre de l'Apocalypse* by Rev. Fr. Dr. Bernard Fansaka Biniama. Apocalypse 5 ends with a double doxology, mentioning the attributes of the lamb, one of which is "riches". How is the lamb wealthy? According to the author, this wealth consists in his capacity or worthiness to receive the book and to open its seals.

4.19 *The Unrighteous Mammon Motif in the Synoptic Gospels: The Case of the Story of Jesus and the Rich Young Man (Mark 10:17-31// Matt 19: 16-30// Luke 18:18-29)* by Rev. Fr. Dr. Ernest Munachi Ezeogu, CSSp. In the New Testament wealth is seen either as outright evil or a snare to evil. How did early Christianity arrive at the view of wealth as the "mammon of iniquity"? And how should African Christianity, with its commitment to eradicating African poverty, understand the poverty-glorifying and wealth vilifying texts of the New Testament?

4.20 *Jesus in Nazareth (Luke 4: 14-30): An Index to the Question of Poverty in Africa* by Rev. Sr. Prof Teresa Okure, SHCJ. The author proceeds to an exploration of the socio-cultural mindset responsible for Jesus' rejection by his own people, though he proclaimed the long awaited good news of their liberation. Then she contends that the existence of this "Nazareth syndrome" among many Africans is a major cause of enduring poverty in this exceptionally rich continent. Africans need to cultivate an attitude of "self appreciation", based on awareness of God's incalculable blessings to the continent.

4.21 *Lecture exégétique de 2 Co 9, 6-15. Richesses: don reçu pour la charité* by Rev. Fr. Dr. Sébastien Sangbako Djima. The historical-critical analysis of the text brings to light the intention of Paul, which is to make the Corinthians understand that worldly riches constitute a gift received from God for generosity. God, indeed, gives abundant gifts to those who give abundantly and joyfully, and pours out riches for great generosity, so that one may be able to supply the needs of the needy, with many thanksgivings to God.

4.22 *Pauvreté du Christ, Richesse des croyants. Examen exégétique de 2 Co 8, 9* by Rev. Fr. Dr. Wilfrid Okambawa, S.J. Beginning from a philological analysis of the words *charis*, *plousia*, *ptôcheia*, the author attempts to show, through a historical critical examination dating back to the historical Jesus, what Paul intended by the poverty and richness of Christ. These words are metaphors which express a Christology of the cross and of glory, and have immense implications for pastoral ministry and religious life.

4.23 *Jc 2, 1-13 et la question de l'option préférentielle pour les pauvres* by Rev. Fr. Dr. Jean-Bosco Matand Bulembat. For the author, the principal question discussed in the text would not be the option for the poor. As the principal thesis of the text (v. 1) reveals, James is against all types of discriminations which could exist among Christians, because every form of discrimination constitutes a kind of contradiction in the life of faith. The hypothetical case of Christians welcoming a rich and dishonoring a poor exemplifies how discriminations contradict

the content of faith, and exclude from final salvation: they are a violation and a negation of one or more fundamental human rights of the discriminated; they constitute a sin.

4.24 *Le statut de epideeis en Si 4, 1-10* by Rev. Fr. Roger Wawa, SSP. According to the author, theological reflections on the theme of social justice in the Bible usually focus on the writings of the prophets such as Amos, Isaiah, and Micah. Here, however, one finds a text that is very relevant to the theme of the rights and privileges of the poor in their community. Ben Sira describes not only one's duty at the material order, but also the moral attitude which the disciple must observe with respect to the poor, as one created by God and under God's special protection. Being poor and miserable, the Church, Family of God in Africa, should benefit materially and morally from the community.

4.25 *Pauvreté et richesses (Lc 11, 19-31)* by Mgr Bernard Nsayi. The author tries to show how Luke presents the teaching of Jesus on poverty and riches. He attempts to put into limelight the originality of the text under consideration, its reality and relevance to Africa today.

4.26 *Sharing in Love with the Poor according to 1 John 3:11-24* by Rev. Fr. Prof Johannes Beutler, SJ: Material wealth goes along in Western Europe with spiritual poverty, even as the established Churches increasingly lose their influence on the young generation. The great social utopias of the sixties of the last century have given way to a new individualism, which seeks happiness in personal experiences and private relations. The Letters of John, and the First Letter in particular, seem to betray a similar situation. The repeated invitations of John to love one's brother or sister become very concrete in chapter 3 of 1 John, through the exhortation to share one's bread with the hungry.

5. Besides the Papers Presentations, the Congress witnessed some extra-Congress activities. Thus, Wednesday, September 5th, 2007 was tagged Cultural and Socialization Day, directed by Rev. Fr. Prof. Paul B. Decock, OMI. On this day, the group visited and celebrated the Eucharist in the Regina Mundi Catholic Church in Soweto, a very historic Church, which hosted people during the period of intense resistance against Apartheid. The group next visited the Apartheid Museum, which holds a large collection of artifacts, writings, photographs and films. These historical documents concretely bring to awareness what life was in South Africa in the Apartheid era, during the struggle against apartheid, and after Apartheid, with the release of Nelson Mandela and the transition to democracy. Next, the group came to Victory Park Church, established after the Second World War. After that, they visited St. Augustine's College, a Catholic University committed to promoting value-based leadership. Lastly, they visited the Cathedral, where the group members had an opportunity to interact with some of the parishioners drawn from the different home countries of the participants.

6. Similarly, on Thursday, September 6th, 2007, a Memorial Mass was held in honor of two recently deceased members of PACE, Rev. Fr. Patrick Adeso and Rev. Fr. Peter Njoroge, who died in July 2006 and June 2007 respectively, and in honor of other members and/or the relatives of the members. In the evening of the same day, the participants at the Congress were treated to dinner by the Archbishop of Johannesburg, H. E. Mgr. Buti Joseph Tlhagale, OMI. At the dinner was formally presented to H. E. Mgr. L. Monsengwo Pasinya a copy of the Acts of last Congress

on *Human Wisdom and Divine Wisdom*, which the Association published as “Festschrift” in his honor, on the occasion of his silver jubilee in the episcopate, which took place in 2005.

7. There were three sessions of business meetings. Among the highlights of the meetings, the Acts of the 2005 Congress held in Kinshasa were launched; a general election, during which the President, H. E. Mgr Cornelius F. Esua, was formally elected into the office. Hitherto, he had been acting as President in his capacity as Vice President, when the former President resigned from office. H. Em. Peter Cardinal Turkson was asked by the Assembly to be the Vice President, while Rev. Fr. Dr. Jean-Bosco Matand Bulembat was re-elected as the Secretary General. Nine new members were admitted into the association and a new editorial board for the Acts of the Congress was constituted. The members chose *Reconciliation in the Bible* as the theme for the next Congress, scheduled to be held in Benin (or in Congo-Brazzaville in case it would be impossible there), within the two first weeks of September 2009.

8. The activities of the 13th Congress came to an end on Saturday, September 8th 2007, with the closing Eucharistic celebration by H. E. Mgr. L. Monsengwo Pasinya, and a closing session. During the closing session, this final statement of the Congress was read and corrected. After this, the President of PACE, H. E. Msgr. Cornelius F. Esua, addressed the participants, thanked all who contributed to the success of the Congress in Johannesburg, especially Rev. Fr. Prof. Paul B. Decock and his local organizing committee, and Rev. Fr. Dr. Jean-Bosco Matand Bulembat, the Secretary General of PACE. He thanked all the benefactors of the association, especially Missio Aachen, Kirche in Not, Mgr Monsengwo Pasinya and the benefactors of Rev. Jean-Bosco Matand, without whose help the present Congress would not have taken place. Commending the members to the maternal protection of Our Lady, whose birthday it was, he declared the Congress closed.

Signed

Rev. Fr. Dr. Anthony Iffen UMOREN, MSP

Chairman, Scientific Secretariat

September 10th 2007