The book “Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace. The Second African Synod” (Abgonkhianmeghe E. Oroborator, editor) contains an introduction and twenty different texts. All of them continue a discussion started by the Second African Synod in Nairobi in March 2010. As a book they were published first in USA, and later on Action Publisher released it in Nairobi in 2011.

In his The Introduction: The Synod as Ecclesial Conversation, Editor Abgonkhianmeghe E. Oroborator wrote that “In the understanding of the editor and contributors, the Second African Synod served primarily as a catalyst; that is, it launched a process of theological conversation”. Thus the articles are not intended merely to publicize the conclusions and positions of the Synod. Instead, the contributors identify multiple theological and ethical issues surfaced by the Synod but expand the focus of its concerns to a variety of areas, topics, and domains. The table of contents does not begin to exhaust the list of questions and problems that engaged the minds and energies of the Synod participants during their three weeks in Rome. The selection of items for analysis and reflection was guided by the interest, experience and expertise of the contributors in light of the issues that presently shape the nature and mission of the church in Africa” (p. 3-4). These texts are a kind of extension of the discussion picked up by the Second Synod before the Adhortation of Pope Benedict XVI, Africae minus, was published on November 19, 2011.

The book consists of five chapters, with each chapter containing several articles or essays. The first, and longest, chapter is titled Theology of the Church, Interreligious Dialogue, and the Challenge of Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace. In the first article, Church-Family of God: The Place of God’s Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace, Teresa Okure (a professor of New Testament and gender hermeneutics at the Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt, Nigeria) writes of the necessity of reflection on reconciliation, justice, and peace inside the Church. This reflection points to the faithfulness and truthfulness of the Church with the Synod representing the Family of God. This Family must examine its methods of administration, the cooperation between clergy and laity, its finances, and the role of women in the Church. According to Teresa Okure, an understanding of the importance of women should be an area of great concern for the Church because the system of the Church is based on an old, patriarchal and, very often, non-Christian system. Her argument, however, seems to be ill-prepared and not based on the Bible.

The second article, On Speaking Terms: African Religion and Christianity in Dialogue, by Laurenti Magesa (a priest of the Diocese of Musoma in Tanzania, Hekima College Jesuit School of Theology in Nairobi, Kenya) presents an argument for the necessity of interconnection between Christianity and the traditional African religions. Tradition is central to the dialogue, and it has been neglected in the past. Magesa argues that this dialogue between Christianity and Tradition will help to build reconciliation and peace in Africa.

In the third article, Language, Politics, and Religious Dialogue: The Case of Kiswahili in Eastern Africa, Festo Mkenda (a Tanzanian Jesuit priest) points out the importance of the traditional and old languages in the African dialogue. His article is based on the case of the Kiswahili region. This area became a focal point in the dialogue between Islam, tradition, and Christianity.

The next article, The Word of God as Transformative Power in Reconciling African Christians, was written by Paul Bére (a Jesuit priest from Burkina Faso, Institut de Theologie de la Compagnie de Jesus, Abidjan, Ivory Coast). He asks the question: “How can the Word of God be effective as a transformative power that operates on the wounded heart of an African Christian in particular?” According to him the answer should be based mainly on the Word of God.

The last article in this chapter discusses small communities and their importance in a process of building reconciliation, justice, and peace. It was written by Joseph G. Healey (an American Maryknoll missionary priest, Hekima College and Tangaza College in Nairobi, Kenya) and is called Small Christian Communities: Promoters of Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace in Eastern Africa.
The second chapter of the book is titled *The Mission of the Church in the Public Sphere*, and the articles in this chapter focus on this issue. In the chapter’s first article, *Inventing Creative Approaches to Complex Systems of Injustice: A New Call for a Vigilant and Engaged Church*, Elias Omondi Opongo (a Jesuit priest from Kenya) presents us with an overview of the complexities of the unjust systems in Africa. They represent a significant challenge for the Church.

We find a similar problem discussed in the next article written by Yvon Christian Elenga (Institut de Theologie de la Compagnie de Jesus, Abidjan, Ivory Coast) and called *Toward a New Social Configuration? The Role of the Catholic Church in the Public Sphere*. He explains the influence of the Church on secular society. Although the Church cannot take over the authority of the secular government, she cannot ignore the issue of injustice. The Church must work to help strengthen the economic, political and justice systems of the country. The prophetic mission of the Church calls us to be engaged in the life of society.


In his essay *Agent of Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace: The Church in Africa in an Era of Globalization*, Odomaro Mubangizi (a Ugandan Jesuit priest, Arrupe College, Harare, Zimbabwe) writes of globalization as being an opportunity for the Church to bring peace, justice, and reconciliation to Africa.

The third chapter, *Ecclesial Leadership and Gender Justice in Church and Society*, is focused on the subject of injustice as it relates to women in African society. In the first essay ‘Women, You Are Set Free!’ *Women and Discipleship in the Church*, Anne Arabomr (a Catholic woman religious and member of the Sisters of Social Service of Los Angeles, California) presents for us the difficult situation of the African woman. According to Arabomr, the Synod did not show enough concern for this topic. Women represent a large part of society with a great deal of potential. More consideration must be given to them; more space made for them in the Church’s life. They, too, are disciples of Jesus, the same as any man.

Ngozi Frances Uti (a religious of the Congregation of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus) in the essay *Come, Let Us Talk This Over: On the Condition of Women Religious in the Church* points to the Book of Genesis to illustrate the unjust treatment of women, even in the Church. By resolving this problem within the Church itself, the Church can become an advocate of women’s rights.

David Kaulem (a lecturer at Arrupe College School of Philosophy and the Humanities, Harare, Zimbabwe) in his essay *The African Synod for Those of Us Who Stayed at Home* focuses on secular authority, democracy, and the Church’s teaching in the context of the situation in Zimbabwe. He says, “The church and all Christians have a moral duty to contribute to the creation of social, economic, political, and cultural institutions, systems, structures, processes and personalities that facilitate the integral growth and fulfillment of every human person. This is what was expected by the Synod” (p. 154).

The fourth chapter is dedicated to ecology and is called *Integrity of the Earth – Ecology, Natural Resources, Poverty, and the Church*. In this chapter’s first essay *Theology, Ecology, and Africa: No Longer Strange Bedfellows*, Peter Knox (the Society of Jesus, Jesuit Institute-South Africa) presents to us the richness of Africa in light of her natural resources and the beauty of her natural world. Nature in Africa has been damaged, and Knox’s premise is that we must take both theological and scientific approaches to understanding this problem.

Peter Kanyandago (a priest of the Archdiocese of Mbarara in Uganda, School of Postgraduate Studies at Uganda Martyrs University) in the article ‘Let Us First Feed the Children’ (Mark 7:27): *The Church’s Response to the Inequitable Extraction of Resources and Related Violence* even describes the blessing and curse of the natural resources. Inequitable resource extraction is one source of poverty and suffering for local African communities. Similar topics are presented in the essay by Nathanael Yaovi Soede (a priest of the Diocese of Lokossa, Benin) “The Enduring
Scourge of Poverty and Evangelization in Africa.” He makes an analysis of the critical poverty in Africa.

The fifth chapter is titled *Theological and Ethical Issues and HIV/AIDS*. Its first essay *The Second African Synod and AIDS in Africa* by Michael Czerny (an English Canadian Jesuit who holds a doctorate from the University of Chicago) explains how the Synod approached the topic of HIV/AIDS. This pandemic is one of the biggest challenges for the Church. The Church is already very much involved, but there is still a great deal that needs to be done.

Paterne-Auxenge Mombé (a Jesuit from the Central African Republic) in the article *Moving beyond the Condom Debate* writes about the issue of condoms and contraception in the wake of previous discussions about HIV/AIDS and the speech given by Pope Benedict XVI in Cameroon 2010. Condoms are not the solution.

Paulinus I. Odozor (a Spiritan priest, University of Notre Dame, USA) in his essay *Africa and the Challenge of Foreign Religious/Ethical Ideologies, Viruses, and Pathologies* discusses the influence of toxic ideas on the people living in Africa. Such ideas damage the society. Africa cannot be silent about it. The Church must support Africa in her attempts to stay true to her own identity in this period of globalization.

In the article *The Scourge of Corruption: The Need for Transparency and Accountability*, Gabriel Mmassi (a rector of Hekima College) focuses on the problem of corruption and its consequences for African society. Africa needs institutional transparency and accountability based on religion and morality.

The last article *A Balancing Act: Facing the Challenge of Implementing the Directions of the Second African Synod* written by Peter J. Henriot (a member of Zambia-Malawi Province of the Society of Jesus) is about the interpretation of the Synod in different places and different times. He uses Zambia as an example. He says, “That fresh inspiration and encouragement of the Synod is evident in the efforts of the Zambian church to commit to reconciliation, justice, and peace. Being faithful to its pastoral identity (with a spiritual foundation), it can be courageous in its political mission (in a nonpartisan fashion). There is much to build on for the future in Zambia, in Africa, and in the wider world, within such a church!” (p. 244).

The First African Synod concentrated on divine prophecy, inculturation, dialogue with Islam, social justice, and mass media. It was mostly a pastoral Synod based on evangelization in the local culture. The Second African Synod was focused on justice and peace. It took the social aspects of the First Synod and expanded them so that they focused more directly on African society and the world today. The Church is not just looking at the political, religious, and social aspects of Africa but is attempting to help the people there deal with the very real, present-day problems of poverty, injustice, intolerance, violence, terrorism, war, etc. They are realities for millions of Africans, and the Church cannot be silent on these issues.

This book includes essays that address a wide variety of important topics, an indication of the need to continue to discuss the many different aspects of issues relating to the presence of the Church in Africa. - *Jarosław Różański*, OMI.