



SYMPOSIUM OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES OF AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR

ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF SECAM DAY 2020 (29TH JULY AND 2ND AUGUST 2020)

A MESSAGE FROM SECAM PRESIDENT

Introduction

The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, known by the acronym SECAM, was founded by African Bishops on 29th July 1969 and formally launched by Saint Pope Paul VI on 31st July 1969 in Rubaga Cathedral, Kampala, Uganda. To keep alive this historic and memorable event, 29th July of every year is commemorated as SECAM Day. The day is set aside for all members of the Church-Family of God in Africa and the surrounding Islands to thank God for the gift of mother Africa, for the gift of one another and for the gift of the Christian faith. It also provides an opportunity to pray for the well-being of SECAM, for the spirit of unity, communion and solidarity amongst the Bishops, the clergy, the religious and lay faithful.

In line with the decision taken at the Plenary Assembly of SECAM in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in July 2013, the Day is further an occasion to speak about the Symposium to enable Catholics throughout the Continent and the Islands become more informed about its existence, work and mission, and invite them to identify with, and support SECAM. To that end, the celebration of SECAM Day is shifted to the following Sunday when 29th July falls on a week day, and a special collection is taken to support the activities of the Symposium. Therefore, SECAM Day this year is to be celebrated on 2nd August 2020.

One Year after SECAM Golden Jubilee Celebration

This year 2020 marks one year since the impressive celebration of the Golden Jubilee of SECAM in Kampala, Uganda, the land of heroic African Martyrs. The Jubilee year (2019) of our Association coincided with the Silver Jubilee of the *First Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops*, held in 1994, during which the African Synod Fathers chose not only to define the Church as *God's Family* but also to be a guiding principle for the Evangelization of the Continent (*Ecclesia in Africa* no. 63).

During the study as well as the plenary sessions in Kampala last year, we SECAM members reflected on how far we had gone with our evangelizing mission, where we need to go and how to make the future even better. We also bemoaned the plight of the majority of our people. And challenged by the example of Ugandan martyrs, in particular, and other African saints and martyrs, in general, we all resolved, amongst other details, to:

- i. Make the Golden Jubilee a springboard for more profound Evangelization on the Continent and its Islands; seeking in the process, personal encounter with Jesus Christ that leads to true conversion and witness of life, enabling us not only to hold firm to our Catholic faith, doctrine and identity but concretely exhibit the spirit of Church-Family of God, solidarity, trust, acceptance, dialogue etc. everywhere in Africa and Madagascar;
- ii. Intensify our commitment to the vision of the founding Fathers of SECAM centred on promoting organic pastoral solidarity and communion amongst the members of

SECAM, which again typifies the image of Church as God's Family, where everyone is treated as a true brother and sister, his/her dignity as a child of God upheld;

- iii. Step up our obligation to SECAM (cf., *Ecclesia in Africa* no. 104);
- iv. Be more proactive in our prophetic mission

The Golden Jubilee celebration evidently raised hopes that SECAM would more visibly play its role and exert a positive influence on areas that touch the daily life of the people, both within and outside Africa. Indeed, exerting a positive impact is a major focus of the current SECAM leadership.

Unfortunately, one year after the Golden Jubilee, the situation in Africa and the surrounding Islands has remained the same, within and outside the Church. Indeed, it is compounded by the corona virus pandemic that has wreaked havoc everywhere. Covid-19 has so far killed millions around the world including Africans. It has affected the Clergy, religious and lay faithful alike.

Different measures have been adopted to contain the spread of the disease, and we have also been praying for an end to the pandemic but new cases continue to soar in many African countries as elsewhere. Moreover, a recent report from the Caritas International indicates that Africa is the worst affected of all continents in terms of Covid-19 effects. There are cases of food shortages, due to the lockdowns. "Thousands have lost jobs, small businesses destroyed. The diversity of pre-existing disasters such as floods, drought, locust invasion, poor harvest are real and constitute a serious challenge"¹.

This situation has given rise to several questions and agitations. For those in the grip of anguish and misery, it is easy to conclude that God has abandoned us and the pandemic is punishment for our sins, individual and communal. But as we already said in our Pentecost Message: "If, we experience pain or if we suffer, [God] participates in it in order to overcome it". St. Augustine said long ago: "Being supremely good, God would not allow any evil in his works, unless in his omnipotence and goodness, he is able to bring forth good out of evil" (*Enchiridion* 11, 3; PL 40, 236)², which is why he allowed his beloved Son to die a criminal's death on the Cross. And the death of the Son changed the meaning of every kind of suffering and pain, physical and moral; not only of those who have faith but of every human person³.

Amidst the current situation, we say 'courage' brothers and sisters; do not give in to despair; continue to pray and wait for God's time. Like the Lord's vision in Habakkuk, "if it comes slowly, wait, for come it will, without fail" (Hab 2:3). Be assured of our continued closeness to you and our daily prayers for you, especially, those of you who are sick or experiencing different challenges in your daily life.

COVID-19 has exposed how vulnerable we are, irrespective of colour or status, and what happens in one country affects people in the other. Indeed, it has shown that we are one people and we need to be each other's' keeper. As mentioned in the Pentecost Message, this is a time for all African peoples to reactivate the value of solidarity that has shaped our worldview and traditional society. It is doing so that we will be better placed to "face the impact of the pandemic and to turn our economies around, while relying on the power of the Holy

1 Paul Samasumo, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en>, 22nd May 2020.

2 Cf. Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, Homily during the Celebration of the Passion of the Lord St. Peter's Basilica Friday 10th April 2020, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en>.

3 Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, Homily during the Celebration of the Passion of the Lord, April 2020.

Spirit, who gives us the grace to love and to be compassionate. In this time when many are in dire need, let us help them to experience the love of God”.

It is shameful and regretful that not even the deadly Covid-19 has deterred violence and terrorism in some countries in Africa; we continue to kill ourselves on a daily basis. We join our voice with the Holy Father, Pope Francis and other world leaders to call for an immediate end to violence everywhere in Africa and elsewhere in the world.

Appreciation

We certainly have had moments of sorrow but there were also joyful moments in the last one year. We, therefore, thank God for his blessings and magnanimity. We are also profoundly grateful to our Bishops, clergy, religious and lay members of the Church-Family of God throughout Africa and Islands for their commitment to Evangelization in spite of the current challenges.

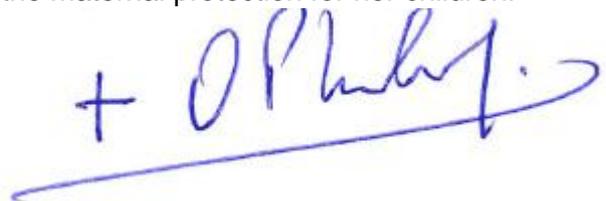
We appreciate the efforts that have been made by respective governments to contain the vicious spread of corona virus in the Continent and we encourage the leaders to continue protecting the health of the population. We also thank all the health professionals, including religious nuns who have shown extraordinary dedication to alleviating the suffering of the sick.

We thank everyone within and outside Africa and Madagascar who has journeyed with, and supported SECAM in the past year. We are equally grateful to all those involved in the immediate affairs of SECAM (Presidency, Treasurer, Standing Committee members, Comitheol members and secretarial staff members) for their dedication, hard work and sacrifices for SECAM.

To all Africans and Malagasy we say, your generous support expands SECAM mission, increases its out-reach, and helps us to serve the Church and the society better.

SECAM day is an important event for the Church-Family of God in Africa and Madagascar. We earnestly urge you to pray for SECAM on Wednesday 29th July and 2nd August 2020. Following the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic at the moment, we have opted to defer the special SECAM collection for this year. But if any person or group of people are moved by the Holy Spirit to support SECAM financially or materially, you are welcome do so.

May the Virgin Mary, Queen of Africa, ensure the maternal protection for her children!



Philippe Cardinal OUÉDRAOGO
President of SECAM