



---

*"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)*

---

item 320

## the 'African moment' in global Catholicism gathers steam

Just like assembling a jigsaw puzzle, it's easier to sort through items in the news when you know what the big picture is supposed to look like. It's already clear that one of the Catholic megatrends of our time is the coming of age of the Church in Africa, which gives three recent storylines special importance.

- In late February, the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), the continent-wide assembly of African bishops, announced the appointment of a liaison with the African Union as a first step towards permanent observer status.
- Following a meeting in Namibia in mid-March, heads of national and regional Peace and Justice Commissions across Africa announced plans to create a "Continental Reconciliation Committee," the idea of which is to address the causes of conflict and also to dispatch skilled mediators when new conflicts break out.
- Drawing on the example of Catholic leaders in Latin America who created the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network in 2014 to fight deforestation, African Catholic activists have announced plans to launch an "African Church Network" to combat the negative impact of climate change and to resist assaults on African rainforests.

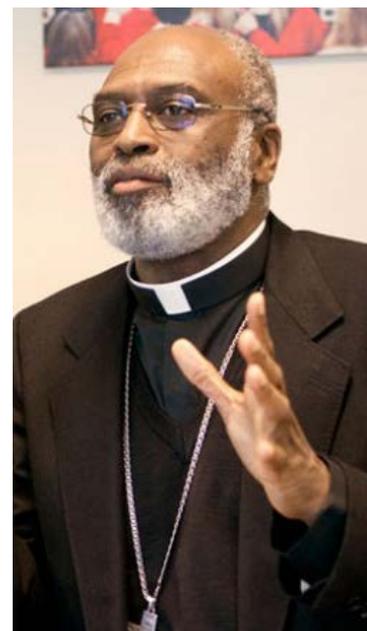
Taken together, what these steps illustrate is a Catholic Church in Africa that aspires to a leadership role across the continent, in politics, in conflict resolution, in environmental protection – basically in everything. The drive to observer status at the African Union is especially telling, because it suggests that the African bishops want to replicate on their continent the role the Vatican plays on the global stage as a voice of conscience, arguably the world's most important source of what political scientist Joseph Nye calls "soft power."



It's not just in their own backyard where African Catholics are emerging as protagonists, but also in the global Church. For proof, one need look no further than last fall's Synod of Bishops on the Family, where African prelates played a starring role in debates over outreach to gays and lesbians and whether divorced and civilly remarried Catholics ought to be able to receive Communion, generally upholding traditional positions.

There's every reason to believe the Africans intend to be at the heart of things again this fall, when a second Synod of Bishops on the family takes place in Rome.

"Africa has matured, and is gradually taking its place as a full equal in both the international arena and the international Catholic Church," said **Archbishop Charles Palmer-Buckle** [right] of Accra, Ghana, in a mid-February interview with Crux. Palmer-Buckle was elected in January by his fellow bishops in Africa as one of their representatives to the synod.



It's not difficult to understand this mounting self-confidence. During the 20th century, the Catholic population of sub-Saharan Africa went from 1.9 million to more than 130 million — a staggering growth rate of 6,708 percent. Africans started the century as less than 1 percent of the global Catholic population, and finished it at around 16 percent.

Vocations are also booming. Bigard Memorial Seminary in southeastern Nigeria, with an enrollment of 1,225, is the largest Catholic seminary in the world. Its student population is roughly one-quarter the total number of seminarians in the entire United States, and many of its graduates go on to serve as foreign missionaries. Catholicism around the world may still need material resources from Europe and North America, but today it's also increasingly dependent upon the human capital that flows from places such as various Africa nations and the Philippines.

One might actually argue that Africans today are the new Germans, in that German Catholics for many years have been able to influence which pastoral projects in the developing world flourish and which don't through their sizeable overseas assistance funds such as Misereor and Adveniat. (The Catholic Church in Germany benefits from a state-run "church tax" system, which gives them significant resources to dole out.)



Today, African bishops can sometimes influence which parishes and missions in the West are able to keep going based on the choice of whether to release a priest to serve there. That's despite the fact that the priest shortage is actually much more acute in Africa than in Europe or the United States, because a growing Church is able to baptize people much more rapidly than it can ordain them.....

Africans both at the top and the bottom of the Church do seem increasingly determined to assert themselves. By itself, that probably means we're in for a more interesting, and also more unpredictable, ride.

**John L. Allen Jr.**  
**Associate editor - CRUX**  
**27.03.15**

## African SAC Continental Meeting raises hopes

Recently the *Mother of Divine Love* Province [Ireland] hosted an important meeting here in its Delegation of East Africa. It was conducted at Arusha in Tanzania and, although only just a Deacon, I had the good fortune to attend – a somewhat daunting experience but I thank God for the opportunity.

Our Leaders came not just from Africa but from other parts of the world, Asia, Europe and Latin America – a very vibrant team of 16 who sat down to discuss issues concerning the Society as a whole but Africa in particular. In the serene environment of the Canossa Spirituality Centre no one could doubt that a new Pentecost was happening as they brought their wisdom, care and concern to focus on each of the SAC entities across the continent. As a young member I felt strengthened in my vocation, spiritually enriched and filled with hope.



Despite the many problems affecting us here the meeting reaffirmed that Africa can and must stand up with dignity. And, through its many vocations, this dignity will be affirmed when we prophetically proclaim our Pallottine charism giving hope to people through our commitment to health, dialogue, the building up of a just society, peace and reconciliation, interreligious dialogue, education, pastoral care for families and youth.

I was so happy to hear that formation is an issue at the heart of our superiors. Our houses of formation here are full of zealous and resourceful students at all levels, a blessing that provided great consolation to them.

Fr. Jacob stressed the need to rediscover and strengthen our missionary tradition and spirit. Our Society, from the outset, was marked with a missionary outlook. With this heritage all our Pallottine entities here should never fear to undertake missionary ventures. Peru, Chile, Cuba, Taiwan, the Philippines, Burkina Faso, and Malawi were mentioned, among others. St. Vincent, from his place in heaven, must have been happy!

In East Africa Uganda has become a Land of Martyrs. It has a high number of Catholics but, with deep



political, social and cultural problems, she finds herself at a crossroad. Because of her brokenness there is a crisis in faith, hope and charity creating a disintegrated society. It was recognised that our charism can be relevant in re-igniting that glowing flame of faith and charity, and in bringing hope. We can and must respond in very concrete ways,

especially encouraged by the ordination of three Ugandan Deacons last February.

There was recognition that, if we are to support the countries of Africa to 'stand up and walk with dignity' then a high degree of involvement on the ground is required of all those responsible, as well a determined spirit of collaboration. Other emphases mentioned were an increased spirit of transparency and accountability, a constant commitment to the protection of minors and vulnerable persons and, above all, spiritual renewal. The latter was very much stressed and a call to not only to be people with a social conscience but also rooted in prayer and adoration of Jesus in the Eucharist, especially during this *Year of Consecrated Life*, but right throughout our lives.

The visitors did not lock themselves inside the Canossian walls. They moved out and experienced the beauty of Africa in the wildlife with a visit to Manyara National Park. At Esso, Arusha, they witnessed a vibrant church with many, young and old, who worship God at St Vincent Pallotti parish. They saw how Pallottines work with people in transforming society, in caring for the handicapped, the sick, and all those in distress. The work at Esso and in the international houses of formation in both Arusha and Nairobi were both admired for their spirit of cooperation and collaboration.



My hope and prayer is that the decisions and recommendations they made will help us all to move a step further in our commitment to loving God and our neighbour, after the example of St Vincent, and with the intercession of Mary Queen of Apostles.

**Deacon Allan Bukenya SAC [IR] – Arusha – TANZANIA**  
**16.03.15**  
**[bukeallan2006@gmail.com](mailto:bukeallan2006@gmail.com)**

---

## **sac asia oceania e-bulletin**

**you commented...**

**on #167**