

Summary of Parallel Session:

Africa: Between Heaven and Hell

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Panelists' Presentations

Rym Ayadi emphasized several key points regarding Africa's current challenges and global position:

- Africa remains largely excluded from international discourse.
- Its abundant natural resources are mostly exploited by external actors—"Africa has riches, but these are not making them rich."
- The continent bears an outsized burden from climate change.
- Africa's future is deeply interconnected with that of Europe.
- Conflicts such as the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, along with global inflation, have had significant repercussions across the continent.
- A large share of national budgets is devoted to debt servicing, leaving limited room for investment in development, healthcare, and education.

Ayadi underscored the urgent need for both regional and global solidarity, as well as a shift in financial systems toward people-centered priorities. She cautioned that Africa's growing reliance on non-traditional lenders, including China, has created a cycle of unsustainable debt and reduced investor confidence. Breaking this cycle will require transparent debt restructuring and a strong focus on human capital development.

To respond to these pressing issues, Ms. Ayadi offered three core recommendations:

1. **Economic Structural Reform** – including comprehensive debt restructuring, support for public-private financial models, capacity building, and the strategic use of technology.
2. **Regional Integration** – as a foundational pillar for Africa's development, with the pursuit of models tailored to the continent's unique context.
3. **Natural Resource Governance** – ensuring that resource concessions generate tangible benefits for local economies and broader public welfare.

Domenico Fanizza expressed a deep affection for Africa and underscored that Europe's future is closely intertwined with that of the African continent. He emphasized the primacy of ethics in development, cautioning that the end does not justify the means. Fanizza highlighted ethical concerns surrounding debt relief, noting that while resources are

consumed, they too rarely yield reinvestment that could foster income growth and ultimately support debt repayment. He stressed the importance of economic and financial integration, along with investment in power and rail infrastructure. Fanizza urged that Africa pursue self-reliance and avoid repeating the mistakes of the industrialized world, arguing that the European Union model is not suitable for African development. He was critical of the inefficacy of external aid, pointing out that it often lacks proper oversight and is prone to diversion—unlike domestic systems where voters can hold wasteful governments accountable. He concluded by calling for multilateral cooperation over confrontation, emphasizing the need to find common ground to move forward.

David Chaboryot emphasized that Africa is a continent rich with opportunity yet marked by the paradox of deep spiritual wealth alongside persistent material poverty. Drawing on Catholic Social Teaching (CST), he highlighted the primacy of human dignity, rooted in the belief that each person is *Imago Dei*—made in the image of God. He contrasted Africa’s communal ethos, encapsulated in the Ubuntu philosophy, “I am because we are,” with the corrosive effects of Western individualism.

Chaboryot described his work supporting programs that promote entrepreneurship and empower local leaders as “missionaries for development,” noting that CST offers a moral framework for authentic, human-centered growth. He also pointed to the environmental injustice facing the continent: though Africa contributes the least to global pollution, it suffers disproportionately from the consequences of climate change—an existential threat requiring urgent attention.

He concluded with a message of profound hope, affirming that CST calls us to help build a civilization of love, grounded in justice, dignity, and fraternity.

Giuseppe Papaleo reflected on the importance of learning from failure, emphasizing that setbacks often offer the richest lessons. Central to his message was the need to cultivate meaningful relationships, particularly through what he called “cultural diplomacy from below”—grassroots efforts to rebuild trust and understanding. He stressed that healing fractured relationships must begin by placing the human person at the center of all activity. Papaleo argued that before engaging with issues or agendas, we must first establish authentic human connection. While challenges persist, he affirmed that opportunities far outweigh deficiencies. Moving forward requires genuine cooperation—grounded in recognition of the other as brother and sister.

Discussion Highlights

Security and Development:

Security was identified as a foundational requirement for sustainable economic development. Insecurity not only hinders investment but also discourages reinvestment.

Participants emphasized the need to act on early warning signs of instability and encouraged local communities to take greater ownership of security, rather than relying solely on external forces. A challenge raised was how to proceed with development efforts when transitioning from dictatorship to democracy. A statistic from Paul Collier's *The Bottom Billion* was cited, noting that 60% of the world's poorest populations are in that condition due to war and insecurity.

Multilateral Banking Opportunities:

There was recognition of emerging opportunities for expanding multilateral banking across Africa, offering a framework for cooperative economic growth and development financing.

Youth and Education:

Given Africa's large and growing youth population, participants stressed the urgent need to invest in education—particularly at the secondary, higher, and professional levels—to equip young people with the skills required for meaningful employment. However, concern was raised about the gap between education and job availability, noting that skills without opportunities can lead to frustration and disillusionment.

Debt Management and Innovation:

Innovative approaches to debt servicing were discussed, including the example of Cape Verde and Portugal's "nature swap," where \$140 million in debt was exchanged for climate-related initiatives. Such creative solutions were seen as promising models.

Debt Relief and the Role of the Holy See:

The importance of debt forgiveness for heavily indebted developing countries was highlighted, with the Holy See identified as a potential moral and diplomatic voice in supporting such efforts.

Overall Summary

Several recurring themes emerged throughout the session, offering both challenge and encouragement:

- **A deep love and enduring hope for Africa** were expressed. The continent is rich in resources, culture, and human potential, with immense promise for the future.
- **Africa's interdependence with Europe and the broader world** was emphasized. The destinies of these regions are intertwined, requiring mutual responsibility and partnership.
- **Debt servicing continues to place a heavy burden on Africa**, diverting resources away from essential services like education and healthcare. This strain also limits the ability to invest in sustainable development. Creative and ethical solutions are needed to ensure greater capital retention and reinvestment in the well-being of people.

- **The importance of self-reliance and subsidiarity** was highlighted. While international cooperation is essential, Africa must shape its own development models, rather than replicate frameworks like the EU. Local decision-making and culturally appropriate strategies are vital.
- **Education remains a critical lever for development**, particularly in equipping young people with job-ready skills and professional formation.
- **Catholic Social Teaching (CST)** offers a guiding framework for development efforts. Its principles—human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, and the common good—can help ensure that Africa’s growth is human-centered, ethical, and globally engaged.

In conclusion, participants affirmed the importance of continuing this conversation in a **synodal spirit of dialogue and discernment**, seeking shared paths forward marked by justice, compassion, and fraternity.