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## A World For Everybody

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# **A World for Everybody – Communicating Faith in the Diversity of Culture**

**Inter-Religious Dialogue and Co-existence**

**Obiora F. Ike**

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## Chapter One

### Towards a World for Everybody - Communicating Faith in the Diversity of Cultures: Context Nigeria<sup>1</sup>

#### I. The challenge: A world for everybody?

There is no shortage of pronouncements that a world for everybody is an ambitious project, at best an illusion for it is set between the realms of the ideal and the excruciating reality of daily life. In simple language and in the view of many people, a world for everybody is clearly not realisable. Besides two world wars which was history's bloodiest within the last 100 years, regional and local wars have continued in virtually all the continents of the world till date, claiming in a brutal manner, the lives of millions of innocent peoples, creating refugees, migrants and displaced persons. Terrorism has set in to destroy humanity's many achievements, anytime, anywhere and anyhow. No country is safe and everywhere could be turned into a war front. This is not to mention the destruction of the environment, goods and property with its consequences and the trauma on people's psychology, morality and social harmony. For people of faith however, a world for everybody is not only a realisable project, it is one that is achievable within time, that is, here on earth, with the concept of the "*adumbratio*", the "*already, but no yet*" fulfilled understanding of the kingdom of heaven.

To achieve this however, we do owe ourselves some reckoning as humanity enters a key stage in human history with its apparent claims of civilisation. We are witness to the manifold achievements that humanity was able to make in the past 100 years in the areas of the *sciences, art, technology, humanities, literature, economy, political and social life, spacecraft, medicine, agriculture, education, information and communications technology*. The list is endless. The concept of '*space*' and '*time*' which in ancient philosophy were beyond thought and speculation, have been given some practical solutions by virtue of recent developments in science and technology. Consequently,

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<sup>1</sup> Ike, O.F.; Paper presented at the International Symposium "Theologie Interkulturell" of the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt/M, Germany

distances previously believed to be 'beyond space' and issues thought to be 'beyond time' have been conquered, at least in the sphere of the phenomena.

Mankind is able to master the external universe. But can mankind also show goodwill and acceptance of the universal and basic principle that all human beings are fundamentally equal with dignity, freedom and integrity; that truth exists and that all are able to know and reach this truth, despite the attempts at relativism; that faith and tolerance are virtues possible for human beings within the multiplicity and diversity of cultures; and that imbued with an immortal soul, given freely by a supreme Being who is generous, kind, almighty and the universal judge of all that is created, all human beings have rights and duties imposed upon them by their conscience and would obtain salvation in their circumstances? These are questions which repeat themselves even as the project of intercultural dialogue considers the principles of 'coherent pluralism' as basis for being human in an interdependent world.

The achievements of mankind in our times have led to a greater integration of peoples, economic exchanges, cultural influences and technological advances, leading to the present understanding that the whole world has become a '**global village**'. It is presumed to be a world for all, even though only a privileged few have the key to the door of this global village. Others must wait outside, treated as aliens, without rights and basic human dignity. This is the reality, increasingly so understood and practiced. What does this mean for the African peoples and cultures, for humanity at large, both in the northern and southern hemispheres, and especially for vulnerable groups and the poor everywhere? This is the challenge to the project: *A world for everybody*. An attempt to find answers to these questions leads to a reflection on the critical stages of today's world which has several defining characteristics:

- **The political climate** which shows that the winds of change (perestroika) triggered off in the late 1980's, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its effects blowing through countries of Eastern Europe, was not an exercise in isolation. In very remote villages of Africa, Asia and Latin America, these winds have come to blow with potential for radical changes at all levels of human endeavour. It has brought with it some instability in systems and assumptions previously held as sacrosanct. Military dictatorships and monarchies have changed into democratic governments. Political configurations have been broken up, sometimes peacefully, often by violence, of some states into smaller nations and countries (e.g. Serbia, Montenegro,

Croatia, Czech, Slovakia). Countries like Rwanda and Burundi lost over 800,000 people in communal clashes in 1994, caused to some extent, by the inability to break away peacefully from Belgian colonial structures imposed on various African peoples binding them to political configurations that took no cognisance of cultural originality, social expressions and authenticity. On the other hand, there is development of the merging of some groups of nations and interest groups into unions, such as the European Union and the Africa Union for the purposes of regional integration for peaceful existence, market linkages, political strategies and collaboration for mutual benefit.

- **Economic exchanges** include cross-border trade on goods and services, capital flows and financial investments. Today, almost two trillion dollars move around the world every day, seeking not the best production but the best return on speculation. Of the hundred largest economic entities in the world, fifty of them are trans-national corporations (Figures cited in “The Rough to Globalization”, a CAFOD paper, December 2000). This is contrasted with the fact that poverty is on the increase all over the world, not just in the developing countries, but also, for countries until now regarded as wealthy, highly industrialised and developed. With rising poverty are the rise in homelessness, hunger and lack of jobs especially of the youth. Poverty has assumed not only the forms of physical deprivation but has become worse in its spiritual manifestations as found in loneliness, emptiness, meaninglessness and escape from reality. Many people abandon their homes in forced or induced migrations, searching for a better state of life. They find instead in their new countries of migration, much of legal barriers, non-acceptance, prejudices and xenophobia that they are often cut between their desire for their original homes despite its problems, and the challenges of their new migrant addresses with its unfulfilled hopes, disappointments and exile spirit.

- **Cultural influences** are obvious in the “westernisation” of so much of popular culture in music, clothes, lifestyles, etc. Today, the single largest export industry for the United States of America is not aircrafts, automobiles, computers, but entertainment- found in Hollywood Films and Television Programmes. The globalisation of films has eroded the originality of self determination for simple peoples in their cultural milieu, making the American dream and way of life a measure for civilisation worldwide. Money has become a world formula, a new value and the mighty author of all things. This culture exposes many flaws and weaknesses. It is often based on a materialistic conception of the world, devoid of any spiritual meaning, thus the meaninglessness of the present time. Individualism is on the increase,

leading to a “*global crisis of values*”. There is apparent lack of ethical and cultural ingredients in determining the global social and economic systems in the formulation of policies that guide peoples and nations as businesses carry on as usual, negating and neglecting people’s traditional ways of life, their history, indigenous rationality, social development and cultural values.

- **Environmental issues** emerge showing defects in the recognised control mechanisms adopted among various societies, particularly by dominant western nations. Consumption patterns have increased. Specifically, one has to observe the horrendous waste of non-renewable resources; the dramatic and excessive burden on the environment’s capacity to absorb pollution, and manifest damage caused the global ecological balance. People are having more than they are becoming persons with integrity. Furthermore, there is the debateable matter of population growth in agricultural regions of the developing world. This is a source of strength but could threaten the already delicate balance of resources in these regions. According to Daniel Lynch of Notre dame University, Indiana: “there is no technology to support 12 billion people at the current aggregate consumption rate; and there is no vision of a planetary ecosystem in equilibrium with this level of industrial metabolism”.

- **Technological advances and industrialisation** have left their consequences on modern societies and systems which include the rapidly growing utilization of electronic communications, (internet, informatics, gsm telephones, telematics, e-mail) and the increasing ease of transportation. We live in an information age, a “*borderless age*” and a *very fast age*. With its many advantages, the explosion in scientific knowledge and technical knowledge and the availability of knowledge, capital and manpower shudders the imagination and questions the sustainability of the human family, for it makes it easier for people to manufacture bombs in their sleeping rooms or in private libraries by just opening the relevant pages on the search engine of their personal computers. If this is conceivable, then we are living in a dream. Yet it does seem in the present circumstances that industrialisation will continue unabated worldwide. It is desirable. But can we have industrialisation based on some values? It has been said that sustainability demands of an integral vision of the universe which respects the integrity of creation. If this is not done, it does seem that what we are building worldwide may not work without a strong value orientation. Value disorientation and a missing emphasis on the common good is a critical factor which humanity cannot overlook without consequences for the soul of humanity. And this is the crux of the matter.

## **2. Communicating Faith in the Diversity of Cultures:**

To communicate faith within the diversity of cultures, prejudices and until now received and perceived attitudes of one people or group against another must give way for a “*dialogue of cultures and civilisations*” to emerge. The opposite is a “*clash of cultures*” which does no one good, continues the intolerance. The clash of cultures promotes the fight for dominance and does not give room for intercultural dialogue which is the basis for peace and progress in the world of today. *The condition for achieving this starting point towards a communication of faith is tolerance, mutual respect and the assumption that no one has the monopoly of the truth.* After several centuries of inter human contacts, it is sad to witness how wars are carried out in the name of religion and martyrs are made to die for their beliefs even in the 21st century. One lesson that humanity must learn is that we cannot communicate faith from the point of view of missionary superiority and the top down method of a group who knows it all, have all the answers and are better than the others. The Christian principle of the “*incarnation*” is that the “*Word assumed Flesh and lived among us*”, a best example of how to communicate faith, namely, **DIALOGUE**, which is the principle of God communicating with humankind in understandable language and manner, “*down to earth*”.

Within the context of the on-going and ever growing meeting of peoples of the world on several levels (political, cultural, social, economic, religious, academia, art) in what is termed a ‘global village’, one is somehow amazed that ‘*global neighbourliness*’ has not been achieved. In fact, the tendency that is increasing in the world is towards ‘*global distance*’ both in thought and in action. With technological and telecommunication possibilities increasing in an ever expanding economic globalisation process, conflicts seem on the rise also, thus making differences noticeable and more explicit. Especially on the forum of faith and cultural diversities with its attendant international debates, is this factor of differences more fundamentalist and aggressive. The search for balance between “*particularisms*” and “*universalisms*” continues, leading to the mentioned conflicts, often culminating in wars. Examples abound worldwide and history books are filled with such examples.

These conflicts are escalated by latent prejudices, complexes of superiority and inferiority art, fixations, attitudinal inhibitions, exotic sentimentalisms, negative patriotisms all of which make the need for a deeper reflection and research in inter human and intercultural dialogue necessary. Besides football where football fans and their nations side their favourite teams, in a general patriotism that is acceptable (which is a lighter matter), the dialectic between “US” and THEM” seems on the increase. The dialectic and scope of conflict

is sometimes widened in ideological categories based on rationalised dichotomies and contrary positions on either side, without giving way to each other's point of view, so that an antinomy is placed between the categories of "US and THEM"; "the individual and the community", "faith versus life", "knowledge versus experience", "religion versus disbelief", "relativism versus ethics", "the employer versus the employee", "the particular versus the universals", to mention but a few areas of such dualistic extremes. These dualisms increase when legitimate instruments of survival and communication are placed under the excruciating pressure of hegemonies and dominant claims, thus the "might is right philosophy".

Thus language, myth, religion, political lifestyles and social institutions, the economy, education, identity, family, ethnicity, race, or nation among others which are modes of expression of and by a particular people are challenged to either disappear by force or get integrated into a universal categorisation for which, resistance by the group is met by annihilation, force or conflicts, sometimes, on scales of massive destruction, wars, acrimony, conquest and complete dehumanization. Examples abound in history for this postulation, thus the slogan: "I AM BLACK AND PROUD" is expressed as a rational and positive justification in the attempt of the Black American to establish legitimate difference against a society where being black was considered "second class".

We may immediately assert at this stage that conflicts could be avoided if rational positions held sway and the principle of legitimate acceptance of differences even in universalistic categories were determinant. The modus would thus be unity in diversity, identity in plurality, individuality in communality, divergence and plurality in monolithic ideologies and dialogue as the fair platform for intercultural and interfaith relationships. There is no alternative to dialogue if humanity would survive on interdependence, not just independence.

### **3. Context Nigeria:**

Nigeria is Africa's largest populated country, with a population based on the recent year 2006 census results showing over 150 million inhabitants. Nigeria is a good example of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, with over 350 ethnic tribes, over 400 different languages, and inhabited by people of Bantu stock, Arabic nomads and traders, Europeans and indigenous African peoples. Having obtained political independence in 1960 from imperial British Empire, Nigeria showcases a country of contradictions, able to contain its heritage or destroy its potentials through tensions of the nature under discussion in this

lecture. With the largest number of Muslims in any one African country and the largest number of Christians in the same country, Nigeria is bound by a still large percentage of traditional African and indigenous religions. There is both a variety of cultures, music, art, wisdom, religiosity and climatic integration.

Nigeria has the great extremes of wealth and poverty, all, living side by side. Nigeria's philosophy is founded in one of its major tribes, the Igbo people of southern Nigeria who like the other tribes have rich cultural wisdoms and thought patterns showing a very deep cosmo-vision and wisdom.

The Igbo proverb expresses best the need and understanding for intercultural dialogue and exchange for the survival of all. "*Onye anwuna ma ibe ya efuna*" is a way of life, a proverb which literally translated, means: "*Live and let live*". This is the basis of tolerance, much needed in communicating faith in the diversity of cultures. Yet, in the last five years (2000 – 2005), over 10,000 people have been killed in Nigeria in clashes that have both cultural social, political and religious bias as its cause. The tragedy of it all is that these clashes have nothing to do with the wisdom thoughts of these people, but is linked to the newly imported ideological differences from other countries, both in the west and in the Islamic countries which continues to trigger off the conflicts Nigeria currently goes through. One would even assert that if Nigerians lived according to their original and indigenous beliefs and practices, communicating faith would be much more a matter of life than of doctrine. Nigerians like many African peoples believe that "*actions speak louder than words*".

Faith is communicated more through a convincing lifestyle than through preaching. In this society, orthopraxis is more cherished than orthodoxy. In one Nigerian family, one finds a Christian, a Muslim, a traditional worshipper and liberal thinkers, all living harmoniously in one family. The Nigerian context thus, is a situation where tolerance and acceptance of the other is basic, not because of what one believes on the level of faith, but on how this faith is lived out in real life. The proverb: "*Onye na chi ya*" which means "*Each with his or her own destiny*" made any ideological fight on whose god is superior a principle of life. There was never a war over religion.

In conclusion, Nigerian traditional values which are indeed African values show the importance of integrating cultural values into real life through pedagogy of practice which is lived faith than just a theoretical didactic method. The global outlook has shown a tendency to ideological socio-

technological and economic paradigms which is a western contribution to development. African values are non ideological, they are life, thus the Igbo saying that “*Ezi Okwu bu ndu*”, literally meaning that “*Truth is life*”.

Africa’s traditional value systems provide a basis for a dialogue of life, not just a superiority of ideas, making communal living together possible. Through its communal philosophy which is the principle of the family, the large family and the clan consciousness made sure that all had a place and “*no one is an island*”. It encourages consensus building instead of individualism, promotes social responsibility, entrepreneurship, justice and fair play. “*Egbe belu Ugo belu*”, which means Co-existence became a key principle of life: “*Let the Kite perch and let the Eagle perch*”.

To conclude, communicating faith in the diversity of cultures is possible based on the African context where humanity’s most authentic and distinctive features nurture a cultural soil which makes for a fruitful and constructive dialogue. In this context, religion and its beliefs is not the point of departure. What counts is life and people’s behaviour. As in the letter of St James in the New Testament, the African would say to the theme under discussion concerning communicating faith in the diversity of cultures:

*“Show me your faith and I will show you my works.  
For faith without works is dead.”*

Thus, universal values of solidarity are expressed in the promotion of justice; the value of peace which is the primary objective of every society; the value of life itself as the most sacred and inviolable earthly reality, for it is not possible to invoke peace and despise life; the value of education which enables regard for one’s own identity with an understanding of others and respect for diversity; the values of forgiveness and reconciliation necessary for building bridges over the barriers caused by non-communication and misunderstandings, thereby, nurturing the path which leads to peace.

## Chapter Two

### Religion, Culture and Civilization – The Need for Dialogue<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Our wisdom and experience show that culture matters in human and international affairs, and the world of human civilization is nothing but a world made up of the historicity of interaction of immigrants and migrants; tourists and landowners; indigenes and non-indigenes; inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue for collaboration, coexistence and communication.

Thus interdependence of cultures, religions and thought patterns make up the content of what we call civilization which is but the cross-pollination of ideas, sieved through generations and peoples in history, whose thought patterns challenge each other to revival, re-evaluation and re-establishment. It is this search for language affinities and cultural artefacts, knowledge transfers of cultures across boundaries, the preservation and the adaptation (*aggiornamento*) of heritage, which belongs to the one human family, born free and created equal by an almighty creator and father of all that justifies this coming together of citizens and friends to Enugu for this week of Cultural Fiesta.

The topic chosen for this Symposium, namely; *Culture, Religion and Civilization – a Need for Dialogue* is apt and corresponds to the spirit of the times and adequately fills the vacuum for the much sought for qualitative and transformational response to the current needs for integral development, economic integration, human progress through civilization, a multicultural society within Nigeria promoting nation building, the ideals of peace, wealth generation and the alleviation of the prejudice of ignorance (*iti bolibo*), discrimination, various forms of 'hocus-pocus' and deceitful religious syncretism based on the voodoo abracadabra methodology of man-made intellectual deprivation and spiritual poverty based on intimidation, the fear of the unknown spirit-world beyond, and the lack of experience which fuels the imagination with weird possibilities of the killing yonder even whilst alive.

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<sup>1</sup> Ike, O.F.; Paper delivered at the Symposium to Unveil the Maiden Edition of Enugu Cultural and Tourism Fiesta at Nike Lake Hotel Resort on 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2011.

An innovation of an Igbo cultural week with programmed events of this sort bears the promise to showcase the positive cultural values of the people to the larger universe of the ICT, the audio-visual and print media, the television and radio houses, participants, indigenes, nationals, tourists and the African Diaspora as a whole. This exercise can assist the purification of the ‘odious’ in ancient practices, remove what transgresses human rights and dignity; move the past to the present where it has meaning and relevance; modernize culture in contemporary society and re-establish, for example, the grandiose and multifaceted *Mmanwu* (masquerade) phenomenon, already chased out from the theatre of Igbo village squares and festivities by Western philosophical thought patterns, modernism, Pentecostal Christian attitudes and born again religious evangelism which saw the masquerade as “*a merely women flogging institution and fear instigating male dominated and pagan originated group.*”

The attempt is to rejuvenate authentic cultural values, establish the philosophical and ethical foundations that are suitable and relevant for the proper enculturation of ancient values into modern concepts that is dignifying for human beings in a modern world. My attempt is to insist on the promotion of cultural values as human values by bringing both the old and the new to an acceptable and mutually agreeable level of spiritual conviviality, based on the principles of social entertainment, educational content, *Omenala* preservation and continuity of the good in culture, the metaphysics of bonding the past, the present and the future in an *Igbology* mixed with Natives and Moderns who must integrate the philosophy of “*live and let live*” (*onye anwuna ma ibe ya efula*) for the common good of all and for a sustainable future.

### **In Fidelity to Truth Lies Human Dignity**

“PEOPLE WHO DO NOT LOOK BACK TO HISTORY AND THEIR ANCESTORS  
CANNOT COMFORTABLY LOOK FORWARD TO POSTERITY AND THEIR  
CHILDREN’S FUTURE”  
(OZOR NEIFE OZOIKE FROM UMANA NDIAGU).

There is a lot of confusion in the present times in our society because of the lack of orientation and certainty as to what constitutes the ‘Common Good’. This situation mirrors the lack of a definite and sure guide for people’s lives, lifestyles and social destiny as to what is useful, correct, ethically imperative, humanly elevating, culturally acceptable and socially unifying, not divisive. There were times, understood as ‘in those days’ when people were sure of

their beliefs and the customs of their ancestors and motherland. The traditional answers in the present times seem redundant. Thorny questions occur with ever increasing frequency. Somehow in many societies, the vocabulary of 'Right and Wrong'; of 'Duty and Neglect of Duty'; of 'Sin and Shame'; of 'Good and Bad' has become difficult to use.

Our age is confronted with decisions which previous generations did not really have to face. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many people have rejected the traditional sources of ethical illumination. Today, the old certainties are virtually gone. Shame is seemingly gone. Truth is somehow not fashionable. Integrity and credibility are strange words for some. Dignity and decency are no more very clear and living in deceit and debauchery happen to be relatively fashionable, albeit for just a short period because truth and its search is unquenchable in the human soul and psyche, no matter what pretence any person may try to make of it.

History records show that **Culture matters** and the relationship and interaction of the world of human beings to transcendence, translates to the search for meaning and happiness which all people seek. It also translates to lasting values which concern God and the metaphysical beyond the physical; the noumenon beyond the phenomenon; the 'Kairos' beyond the 'Kronos'. In an earlier work I wrote on the theme of "Development is People; Business is Ethics" (Ike/Nnoli 2003, p. 95), I stated that a source of complication is the new global and pluralistic environment. We live in a meeting point and global village environment. Several questions emerge and some people say: Culture is a thing of the past. Yet the question needs to be asked and it is this:

*"In the light of the moral diversity and the proliferation of moral languages issuing from our plural and global world, what must remain central to humanity after the fact of relativity is acknowledged. Nothing? Something? What could it be? Could legislation cover these ambiguities in life? Are any ethical principles universally applicable and what are they? How do we cope with the contending characteristics of our age? its ethical pluralisms; its rapid social change, its linguistic distrust of centralistic claims? This is the challenge young people face as they leave home for the first time from their parents in one week or semester in school. They imbibe the new slogans, lose their roots and end yup neither being European nor being authentically African, like the bird called 'Usu', (Bat). Some join bad company and lose direction."*

There is no such thing as truth; they teach even the little children at school. Truth is bondage. Believe what seems right to you. There are many truths as

there are individuals. Follow your feelings. Do as you please. Get in touch with yourself. Do what feel comfortable. This is the language of the times and they speak thus who prepare the jails for the young. To undermine the truth is to perform the work of tyrants, as Henry Novak wrote in his *Templeton Address*. Even under conditions of nihilism, fidelity to Truth is better than cowardice. If we remain faithful to the truth, inner liberty is obtained. Vulgar relativism and its subjective culture so undermines the culture of liberty and knowledge that it is preferable to take a position on an issue than to remain neutral. Even for those unsure whether there is a God or not, a truth is different from a lie. Torturers can twist your mind, even reduce you to a vegetable, but as long as you retain the ability to say yes or no as truth aloe commands, they cannot own you. To obey truth is to be free, and in certain extremities, nothing is dearer to the tormented mind, nothing more vital to the survival of self-respect, nothing so important to one's sense of remaining a worthy human being, of being no one's log, part of no one's machine, and register to death against the kingdom of lies – nothing is so dear as to hold to the truth.

Today we cannot remain unconcerned by the debate that is going on around us on culture, on our cultural heritage; on the Church and culture and the adaptation of Christianity to indigenous cultures; on the relationship between religions, cultures and civilizations; on whether or not Christianity as we got it from Europe is trans-culturally viable; on whether or not missionary work as we have known it is still justifiable.

### **The Philosophical Concept of Culture**

Let me begin with some analysis and interpretation of the philosophical hermeneutics concerning the concept of culture. In his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, the Nobel-prize-winning poet and literary critic T.S. Eliot asserts that the term culture has three different associations according to whether we have in mind the development of an individual, of a group of class or of a whole society. As my teacher Prof. Monsignor Theophilus Okere has written in his book *"Culture and Religion"* (1974; pp. 9 ff.), *"when we talk of culture here, we mean it first and foremost, but not exclusively, in the sense it is understood by cultural anthropologists."*

In this meaning, culture is the way of life of a people. It includes the sum total of their mannerisms, beliefs, music, clothing, religions, language, behavioural patterns, food, housing, agricultural methods including their traditional behaviour in a broad sense, including their ideas, arts and artefacts. It is the social heritage which an individual acquires from his or her group and which

heritage classifies a people as belonging to a group. Culture makes it possible for us to distinguish between a Chinese, a Briton, Swede, Russian, American, German, Frenchman, Igbo, Yoruba and Idoma to mention but a few.

*“It denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about an attitude towards life”* (‘Religion as a Cultural System’, C. Geertz in ‘Anthropological approach to the Study of Religion’, p. 3).

Culture in contra-distinction from nature is that part of his milieu which man himself created.

Why we must eat in order to survive, is a question of nature. Why the Igbo fulfils this duty with ‘*Ukwa*’ and ‘*Okwuru*’ and the English with “Bread and Tea”, is a matter of culture.

“That man must enter into marriage with woman is altogether natural. But that an Englishman thinks monogamy the only reasonable and normal type of marriage whereas an Igbo man thinks polygamy just as reasonable and normal, if not more so this is a matter of culture, which always means: this is the way they have been brought up.

Culture is a way of thinking, feeling, believing. It is the accumulated experience, knowledge and lore of social group stored, for future use, in the memories of men, in books, in objects” (Okere, T; *Ibid*).

Since culture is a way of life, the form in which culture is expressed; its symbols are the objectivities of the life of a people. Though incarnate in symbols and the various elements of culture the very heterogeneous character of these element-social organization, art, religion, ideas, etc, show that the idea of culture is an abstraction, a working hypothesis like evolution or relativity. No one can see them but they help explain observable facts. Culture is therefore a theory designed to yoke together these heterogeneous elements into one common system, purposely vaguely described as a people’s way of life.

Culture is distinct from society. It is society’s way of life. Hence society can remain when its culture has changed. Culture is specifically human. It is learned and not instinctive. It varies from group to group and from one

period of time to another within a single group. Customs, beliefs, social structures and institutions can change.

In the functionalist view, all these elements of culture are closely integrated and any change will involve a dislocation of their delicate equilibrium, a modification of the entire culture.

Though cultures are continuously changing, they are essentially conservative. There is no change except on continuity. No African culture has remained totally unaffected by European contact (Bascom and Herskovits: '**Continuity and Change in African Culture**') but there is none which has entirely given way before it. Here in Igbo land we have incorporated foreign elements like tobacco, cassava and maize, the school, the motor car; but native law and custom exists side with European law, just as European medical practice exists parallel to indigenous medicine. Polygamy is still competing with monogamy and traditional religion coexist with Christianity, often in the same individual but especially in society at large where religious pluralism has emerged as a social norm. These examples show not only that all change is in continuity, but also that most changes are selective.

And rather than substitute a new item for an old one, cultures often prefer to add the new one to the old. 'Akwete' cloth has not been chased out of the market by European made cloths, nor have 'Awka blacksmith' gone out of market because of the influx of European made ironware. Our people reckon their week according to both the European and native calendars (Afor, Nkwo, Eke, Oye) and many of us have learnt to enjoy the music of Beethoven without growing any less enthusiastic of 'Atilogwu', 'Ijele dance', 'Egwu Ukwu' and 'Nwokedibia'.

### **Culture and Development**

Culture change is a principle of cultural development. For culture, the law also holds that "*unless a grain of seed dies, itself remaineth alone, but if it dies, it generates new life*" (Wisdom words of Jesus Christ in the Bible).

Development means self-unfolding of what is contained in germ, and who would deny that some cultures need this development? For too long, African cultures remained alone and isolated, merely identical with themselves, and cut off from the main stream of world cultural development. They could be called culture only in the most general sense of the term, the way of life of a people. Thus, invited though without justifying it, the terrible indictment of

Hegel on Africa, the continent, he said, where the spirit has not yet become conscious of itself.

Of Africa, Hegel writes “It has no historical interest of its own except that we see man here living in barbarism, in savagery and where he does not yet furnish any ingredient of culture. Africa is, as far back as history goes, separated from the rest of the world. It is El Dorado closed in upon itself, the land of children, which lying on the antipodes of the daylight of conscious history is hidden in the black colour of the night” (*Vernunft in der Geschichte* P. 214). Here Hegel is of course a philosophical racist but I used this rather brutal example to introduce another meaning of the concept of culture. Here we associate it with conscious development.

But to think of culture in terms of development is to think of culture with a richer meaning; beyond the merely descriptive and qualitative neutral “way of life of a people”. It is culture in the original sense of culture, **colo-colere-colui-cultum** to cultivate, to till; to tend from where we have agriculture and horticulture. Culture here involves a conscious effort, a common pursuit, a forward march towards higher values, towards more refinement. It is in this sense that Herbert Marcuse defines culture as “A humanizing process, characterized by the collective effort to preserve human life, pacify the struggle for existence, hold it down to controllable limits, secure a productive organization of society, develop the spiritual capabilities of man and minimize and sublimate aggression, brute force and misery” (**H. Marcuse: Kultur Und Gesellschaft II p. 148**).

Here culture comes very near to being synonymous with civilization. In this sense, culture is guided by development, a conscious collective effort, a productive appropriation of one’s social heritage, with a view to refining, to humanizing it. Culture is a project and as such is not merely what it actually is, a people’s way of life, but also what it can become, the level it can attain, its potentialities yet to be developed. To pursue the vocation to culture is to heed the injunction of Goethe: “**Mensch werde was Du schon bist.**”

Man become what you already are! (quoted in M. Heidegger: ‘*Sein und Zeit*’, p. 145). It is in the light of such cultural development that cultural change is understandable and desirable. If it were so understood, there would be less lamentation and wailing as “*things fall apart*”, since this can be prelude to a stronger and higher synthesis. Having thus sketched our concept of culture, we come now to that of religion. We shall later indicate how both are related.

### **Critique of Religion in Society**

It is no longer unusual to read open criticism of religion in our local newspapers. Religion and the churches are blamed for sowing discord in the country through the denominational schools, even held responsible for the so called educational imbalance between one part of the country and another. They are accused of dogmatic indoctrination, of intolerance and bigotry. On another level, the Christian religion is labelled as foreign and condemned as a colonial remnant responsible for the cultural alienation of the African and the banishment of its gods. Thinly veiled or even overt anti-religion or anti-clericalism has not been unknown in the pronouncements and administrative policies of some of our leaders. In general, there is a tendency to make religion a scape goat for a lot of our societal ills and the impression is given that society would certainly be better-off without religion.

### **Leftist Criticism of Religion**

Beyond our National frontiers the criticism of religion and of its role in society has even gained in intensity. It is taunted that religion has not succeeded in making the world better; that in fact, on the contrary, it has made it worse.

Left-Wing critics point out that religion as institution- fixed belief has become an ideology in the service of the bourgeoisie with whose world-view and life style it is identified. It has, therefore, become an instrument for the maintenance, of a conservative *status quo*, that is to say an instrument of oppression. Christianity, it has been urged, has lost its initial evangelical impulse which was essentially humanitarian and has now deteriorated into a system of cold dogmas, empty ritual and intellectual mystification.

### **‘God Is Dead’ Philosophy of the German Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche**

In the history of the criticism of religion a few names stand out very clearly. I will just recall some of them briefly.

Nietzsche, the man who announced to the world that God was dead, has a very negative view of the function of religion, more especially of Christianity. According to him “it is a demoralizing, emasculating force since it preaches humility and thereby robs men of pride and damps that enthusiasm, élan and hubris necessary for achieving great things.” Nietzsche was of course dreaming for the advent of the new man, who would be beyond good and evil, a race of supermen in a brave, new world.

But Christianity says Nietzsche, has declared a war unto death against this higher type of man banned by all his fundamental instincts; from these instincts it has distilled out evil, the evil one: the strong man as the typical damnable, the damned man. Christianity has taken the side of the weak, the lowly, the failures; it has made an ideal from the contradiction of the instinct of preservation of the strong life; it has even ruined the understanding of the intellectually strongest natures by teaching people to regard the highest intellectual values as sinful, misleading, as temptations (Nietzsche 'Antichrist', 5).

### **The Italian Maverick Prince Niccolo Machiavelli**

Before Nietzsche, Niccolo Machiavelli at the Renaissance castigated Christianity for inducing meekness and the patient acceptance of injuries and because, as he put it "it causes us to attach less value to the honours and possessions of this world." But Machiavelli would not for that reason advocate the abrogation of religion. Like Plato long ago he wanted religious practice pressed into the service of the State. For this cold, calculating technician of naked power, religion, because it was useful for keeping the masses submissive and for training the army to discipline and obedience, was indeed a vital item in the complicated calculus of a prince hungry for power and intent on keeping it.

### **The Communist Philosophy of Karl Marx**

Nearer our own times, we meet the formidable figure of Karl Marx whose criticism of religion determined official policy in more than half of the world until the crumble of Soviet Union in 1989. For Marx "Religion is nothing but a world of phantastic unreality, made by man for his own illusion." Religion, says Marx in a famous phrase, "is the opium of the people". "The abolition of Religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the necessary condition for their real happiness." (Marx- 'Engels Studienausgabe Band I Philosophie Fischer Buche'- rei p... 17-18).

### **The Need for the Criticism of Religion**

Nietzsche, Machiavelli, Karl Marx: are these negative appraisals of the role of religion in society justified by the facts?

Not only on account of this anti-religious tradition which we have rather illustrated than exhausted by the names just mentioned, an examination of the role of religion in public life is positively necessary for the sake of those of us who happen to be professionals in matters of religion. What is our role in society? What use is this role at present? What possible use will it be in

the future? What expectations are our people entitled to have from the fact that Christianity is about 100 years old here, has touched the majority of our elite and has therefore become a factor in our public life? The answer to such existential questions may not be easy, but a hard look at the objective, historical relations between religion and public life is necessary for our own understanding of our position and perhaps useful for revalidating this position.

Finally, at this period of our social history when serious thinking is going on, on the future of this country and how to secure lasting peace and well-being for its people, it is proper to cast a glance at an area that tends to be either neglected or beclouded with prejudice. To the great debate on the country's future let our reflections be a modest contribution.

### **Two Vital Distinctions of Religion**

A useful distinction to bear in mind during this discussion is that between religion as man's relation with the supernatural and the organization promoting this relation, between, for instance, Christianity as a message and the Christian church or churches as institutions for spreading this message, it may happen, it does happen, that some of the criticisms aimed at religion should be more properly directed against the institutions.

Another no less important distinction is that between the states and the body-politic. The body politic is the people politically organized and this is the fundamental political reality. The state on the other hand, is strictly speaking, the machinery of government - legislature, executive and judiciary. As such, it is part of; it is an agency of the body politic. Although it may be superior, by reason of the extent of its responsibility, to any other part of this body, it cannot validly claim equality, much less identity with the whole. (Cf. Jacques Maritain: 'Man and the State' pp. 10-11).

That religion has merited the criticism of Machiavelli, Nietzsche and Karl Marx as we have noted earlier is already an indication that it is a factor that is reckoned with in social life. It is not in vain that religion appears not only as a private affair of the individual but as a public and socially relevant phenomenon in all human societies.

### **Religion as a Factor of Reaction**

The assessment of these thinkers is however negative. And indeed it does appear that there are some aspects of religion which can be socially dysfunctional if not detrimental.

Religion though a response to the problems of the individual in the face of the human condition, has very distinct functions for society at large; it is both an intimately private and also an eminently public affair.

Religion, on account of its transcendental dimension - at any rate in the functionalist view - sacralizes the norms and values of the established order, maintaining the dominance of group goals over individual wishes, and of group disciplines over individual impulses. It is, therefore, a means of social control, a stabilizing factor. It imposes a frame-work of ultimate reference, that is, it determines the value system of society.

In the functionalist view all elements of a society perform a positive function which is necessary and sufficient to maintain the social equilibrium. By conferring finality and ultimacy to established values, religion becomes a powerful means of social control and therefore of maintaining the established order, whatever this may be. This is the reason why Machiavelli whose interest is in the ruler recommends the use or rather the abuse of religion as an effective means of repression, while Karl Marx whose sympathies are populist recommends its abrogation. Religion in this view is conservative, reactionary, opposed to salutary change.

Some biblical passages quoted in support of this view of religion are duly famous:

*“For the sake of the Lord accept the authority of every social institution.”* (1 Peter 2,13).

*“Remind them that it is their duty to be obedient to the officials and representatives of the government.”* (Titus 3:1).

But the *locus classicus* is the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. There St. Paul says:

*“You must all obey the governing authorities. Since all government comes from God, the civil authorities were appointed by God, .and so anyone who resists authority is rebelling against God’s decision, and such an act is bound to be punished.”*

The State is there to serve God for your benefit, if you break the law, however, you may well have fear; the bearing of the sword has its significance. The authorities are there to serve God: they carry out God’s revenge by punishing wrong doers. You must obey, therefore, not only because you are afraid of being punished, but also for conscience sake. This is also the reason why you must pay taxes, since all government officials are

God's officers they serve God by collecting taxes. Pay every government official what he has a right to ask - whether it be direct tax or indirect, fear or honour. How to carry out this function in an era of function where government functionaries have become practical thieves is a matter that is baffling and needs another forum for discussion.

"All government comes from God." Even the government of a dictator? Of the person who comes to power through a bloody *coup d'état*? "Anyone who resists authority is rebelling against God's decision." Does he rebel against God's decision who resists apartheid? Protests against genocide or takes up arms as a guerrilla against a regime of organised injustice or legalised brigandage?

At any rate one can see a number of crucial problems raised by this passage and understand why our age would tend to be embarrassed by it. But this is the manifesto of all advocates of the *status quo*, of the law and order school of thought; it is the *Magna Charta* of all those fascist and dictatorial regimes, from Nazi Germany to Apartheid South Africa, which have learnt to press religion into the service of institutionalized oppression.

Now this phenomenon is not peculiar to Christianity alone but is a tendency inherent in the structure of religion itself and its ambivalent relation to society. The conservatism of Islam together with its fatalistic defeatism in face of social questions is well-nigh proverbial.

Our traditional religion too, did not only dominate every aspect of life by the imposition of a particular world view... It is well known that the most effective sanctions backing the laws and customs of the land were provided by religion by way of taboos, oath, 'Mmanwu' etc.

Religion tends then to become an ideology, at the service of the ruling class. But when the basis of government is unjust or the ruling class becomes corrupt, religion continues to serve its ends and its perpetuation. This is why religion must constantly purify its intentions and guard itself by frequent auto-criticism "*ecclesia semper reformanda*" from too much identification with the *status quo*.

Happily, this is not the only role of religion in society. In fact, the functional explanation of religion is only a partial explanation and is calculated to emphasize the pacific, conservative, stabilising role of religion in society.

**Religion as a Revolutionary Factor**

Some people call this the priestly function of religion. But there is another, and today more relevant one, the prophetic function. To understand what is meant here one has only to recall the case of King David who sinned and lived in sin with Bathsheba the wife of Uriah. Protected both by the secrecy of the crime and by royal immunity and privilege, he thought he was above reproach. Then came the prophet Nathan who rebuked him and brought him to confess and repent. Religion plays such a role in the society. It makes pale the cheeks of rulers by its frozen admonition. In the first place, religion has a transcendental reference. It has a system of values, and values are ideals rather than facts; they say how men should live rather than how they actually live. Now, this concentration on what should be rather than on what actually is the case, gives religion a great moral advantage, a moral superiority over the goings-on in society. Through it, men are in possession of a higher court of appeal standing above the established institutions of society. The individual is enabled to challenge and criticize policies, personalities and events by comparing them with ideals, deals provided by religion, ideals to which they are necessarily inferior. The prophetic function of religion enables us, if need be, to say no to the given, to escape from the tyranny of the facts and from the tyranny of public opinion.

That the individual can, as it were, appeal to Caesar, that he has direct access to the transcendent, that is to say, to God or to his conscience, enhances his dignity and emphasizes his autonomy. To that extent he is independent of society and can not only take his distance from it and criticize it, but also assert his rights *vis-a-vis* its demands. What we are saying is that religion makes room for protest, for non-conformity, for rebellion. Through its prophetic role religion encourages revolt in certain circumstances.

If the facts of society compare too unfavourably with the ideals on which religion ever focuses our critical view, then we can and we should improve them, which always means change them. Here the revolutionary character of religion is too obvious to need further commentary.

The prophetic function is, therefore, both vital for the survival of freedom and the individual in society, and, through constant criticism, and instrumental to the raising of standards in the society itself.

What we have established so far shows the ambivalent or dialectical relationship between religion and society. From one point of view religion can be seen as a stabilizing factor, from another as a factor of disintegration a catalyst in society.

These two functions, though opposed to each other are indispensable to the society. A society without stable values, institutions and traditions would be no less inhuman than one where progress is totally arrested and change impossible.

These functions are fulfilled to a greater or less extent and there is more emphasis on one rather than the other according to the particular religion and in varying degrees during the course of its history. If we consider Christianity, it is relatively easy to see that: -

- (a) *Initially the two impulses were present*
- (b) *From Christ himself, through the apostolic times and the age of the martyrs and catacombs the prophetic function dominated.*
- (c) *From Constantine, through the Middle Ages, till perhaps the Second Vatican Council the Priestly function dominated. This is the period when the Church itself became more and more institutionalized*
- (d) *Today a movement towards the prophetic role is distinctly noticeable.*

But in whichever role, priestly or prophetic, ultimately Christianity has been a great benefactor of human society not least because the Christian religion has given to the world a good number of those political ideas and ideals which have moved and are still moving the world.

### **Christian Contribution to Social History**

Liberte, Egalite Fraternite—Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood: These were the powerful, magic slogans of the French Revolution, that movement which not only swept through Europe but was destined to have a profound influence on human history.

A cursory glance at the history of these ideas will show how much they owe, perhaps not their origin, but certainly their reinforced validity and world-wide expansion to the Christian religion.

Historically, the idea of freedom existed and was cherished already in antiquity. But both in theories—one can think of Plato and Aristotle and in practice say in the Athenian democracy of Pericles - liberty remained the attribute of a privileged few. Christianity preached the idea of redemption

and liberation for both the individual and humanity at large. Christ came to proclaim liberty to captives. We all are enjoying the liberty of the children of God. This idea of freedom, of liberation, of redemption, occupies such a strategic place in the whole economy of Christianity that it was bound to have, by the very fact of the growth of Christianity, a universal and revolutionary mission for the history of mankind.

Equality before the law was also known to antiquity. This much is certain at least from the famous definition of the Natural Law by Cicero. But it remained a mere idea and a wish until Christianity, which abolished the difference between Jew and Gentile, circumcision and non-circumcision, preached the-ultimate character of the individual destiny, the intangibility of the individual conscience, individual responsibility and therefore also men's equality before God and the Law.

The idea of fraternity, of the universal brotherhood of men, probably still more than that of liberty and equality, owes its origin and spread to the Christian religion. What brotherhood could there have been between the Greek and the Barbarian before the Christian religion announced to the world that we were all children of one Father? Christianity was the first religion to make a commandment of love, a love that embraced all mankind, love that bound men to God and to one another and welded all into one divine-human commonwealth.

**Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite** —these three magic words of the French Revolution which seemed then as anti-establishment as they were anti-religious were ideas lifted out of the gospel itself.

*Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite* we have chosen quite at random. What we said of them is valid for other world historical ideas such as welfare and happiness, democracy, the sanctity of the human person and more especially the idea of progress. We leave out of account of contributions Christianity has made to the world in the fields of agriculture, education and learning, in the preservation of culture, in the cultivation of the arts. So much that has positively influenced human society has been due to religion, above all, the Christian religion.

### **Give Religion a Chance**

One wholesome lesson one can draw from this is that religion which has done so much good elsewhere and for humanity at large should be given a chance in our own society. I am hereby appealing to our rulers to give

religion a chance. I am praying that they hide their petty, personal, anti-religious prejudices. I am asking that nothing be done that should kill the religious instinct, muzzle the voice of religion or hamper its exercise.

One can understand a certain uneasiness on the part of rulers especially when faced with religion in its prophetic role. The great temptation is to resort to all sorts of persecution and harassment, both subtle and crude in order to get rid of an uncomfortable voice of conscience.

### **Religion and Civil Authority are Compatible**

But an honourable co-existence is perfectly possible. Christianity itself recognises and has made ample room for the authority of the State in its own sphere. The passage from the letter to the Romans comes easily to mind. Now, elsewhere in the New Testament, at the trial of Jesus before Pilate, there was question of Christ's competence and authority. "My Kingdom is not of this world," he said. But Pilate, in asking the famous question "What is the truth?" refuses to commit himself on this matter. He admits ignorance and incompetence in this area. The State represented by Pilate has its own proper sphere, a limited mission from God. But beside it, above it, and with Jesus there arises another power, not of this world. This is the power of the truth, the voice of the truth demanding to be heard by the State.

### **The State is not Omnipotent**

*"Give then to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."*

The permanent, totalitarian temptation however is to claim everything for Caesar. But Caesar's things are not everything. The State, therefore, is not omnipotent. Just as the State itself represents only a part of the body politic, certain areas of life—the area of truth for instance—are beyond its control and competence. This is why we must check all inordinate claims by the state to be the be all and end all. We must resist such claims by state agents or more importantly those parasitical sycophants whose only passport to the favour of the state is the vociferous denigration of religion and religious institutions.

### **Better Recognition of the Role of Religion**

In our country we must press for more and more recognition of the role of religion. Perhaps there could be no better guarantee for the success of the new civilian era.

This is not a plaidoyer for a latter-day theocracy, nor a plea for a return to the theory of the two sovereignties as in post-Constantine Europe. For its own good and for that of the people the state must tolerate, even encourage religion.

Its role as critic or on occasion as non-parliamentary opposition is necessary for the good health of the State. An unexamined life is not worth living. Even for a state— Plato’s saying is still valid.

We need the voice of religion to purify our private and public lives and to keep us in mind of higher, nobler things.

The restraint and self-control in prosperity, the courage and patience in adversity, the fear of God and respect for man which every sane religion promotes, in particular the selfless and altruistic love which Christianity inculcates in the individual, all these may not eliminate evil, but they can only have a healthy effect on the body politic.

Conversely where individual egoism is unbridled by the discipline that religion imposes, the task of governing is certainly not the easier.

The bond of Christian love established by Christianity which melted the barriers of race and tongue in Europe can yet perhaps provide a potent against the poison of tribalism which threatens to neutralize all our efforts at nation building.

We have tried to look at the relationship between religion and the society mainly from a sociological standpoint. We have seen that this relationship is a kind of double-edged sword with a negative and a positive side; both of which are necessary and function together for the welfare of the society.

We have also traced the historical achievements of a particular religion, Christianity, showing the enormous contributions some of its principles and teaching have made to the history of ideas and to human society. It now remains for us here in Nigeria, if we want to profit by these contributions to give religion a chance in our society

Recently someone defined religion as “*the set of phenomena which men call Religion*” (Paul W. Pruyser: ‘**Die Wurzeln des Glaubens**’). No doubt in reference to the complexity of the problem and the difficulty of getting a

definition to satisfy all the varieties of religious experience actually existing in the world.

But in general, we can safely say that *'religion is that element of culture which expresses man's relationship with transcendence or with the supernatural'*.

David Hume traces the origin of religious belief to a concern with *"the various contrary events of human life"* (D. Hume: 'The Natural History of Religion', p. 39).

In other words, it has its concern with the giving of meaning to life. The question of religion, the question of transcendence, is essentially a question of meaning. Several thinkers have pointed out how religious conceptions bring order at three points where chaos threatens to break in upon man -

- at the limits of his analytic capacities,
- at the limit of his power of endurance,
- at the limit of his moral insight.

Religion has to do with these limiting situations. Religious conceptions order and give meaning to such situations.

'The problem of meaning' says Norberck, *"is a matter of affirming, or at least recognizing the inescapability of ignorance, pain and injustice on the human plane while simultaneously denying that these irrationalities are characteristic of the world as a whole."*

And it is in religious symbolism, a symbolism relating man's sphere of existence to a wider sphere within which it is conceived to rest (transcendence) that both the affirmation and the denial are made (**Norberck, E.: 'Religion in Primitive Society', 1964, p. 24**).

Max Weber, the great German thinker expressed that in the face of the basic facts of the human condition - existence and suffering, death, contingency, powerlessness and scarcity, man needed not only emotional adjustment, (which religion also gave), but also cognitive assurance. There is an innate human need to understand the discrepancy between ideal and facts in life. In other words, men require answers to questions on human destiny, the demands of morality and the evils of injustice, suffering and death.

Each religion offers a different but rationally integrated solution to these questions. Looking at it psychologically, visible reality on the one hand and transcendence on the other, correspond to the **two different human attitudes; that of knowledge and that of belief.**

Belief is a fundamental form of behaviour which refuses to accept that man's universe is coterminous with the visible, but which regards the invisible (the Transcendent) as not only real, but indeed as the key to the meaning, the true explanation of the visible reality

Thus, religion provides an ultimate answer to the problem of meaning. This meaning is sought outside of man; in transcendence religion becomes the institutionalized avowal of human finitude. And it is from the great Marxist and Founding Father of the Frankfurt critical school, Max Horkheimer, that we have the following appraisal: Religion "makes it clear to man that he is a finite being and that he must suffer and die; but that beyond suffering and death, there is a long-time that this earthly existence be not the absolute and the last ... Dissatisfaction with our earthly lot is the greatest source of our recognition of a transcendent being.

Horkheimer calls religion "*a longing for the altogether other*" **le tout autre, the totaliter aliter.** Thus, man is unable to bear the chaos or meaninglessness. He is congenitally, incurably a meaning-giver. Religion serves the purpose of giving meaning, ultimate meaning to human life. With this explanation of the nature of religion, we have already indicted its main relationship to culture and society.

But religion performs other functions in the society. Durkheim has shown how religion socializes the norms and values of society and thus, functions as an efficacious means of social control. It also performs a prophetic-critical function by providing values and ideals against which social reality can be critically viewed and if possible improved. This implies that, religion has a dialectical relationship to society; acting now as an element of social control and stability and now as a disturbing and revolutionary element.

These are some of the functions of religion in the society. But what role does it play in the development and maintenance of the culture of a society? What is its relation to culture? This is where the theme of civilization comes in.

### **Civilization**

Elliot says that no great culture has ever been developed without religion. He even goes so far as to say that culture and religion are two aspects of the

same thing, culture being the incarnation of religion. C. Dawson, that indefatigable student of European Christian civilization, maintains that every living culture must possess some spiritual dynamic which provides the energy necessary for that sustained social effort which is civilization. Normally, this dynamic is supplied by a religion, but in exceptional circumstances religious impulse may disguise itself under philosophical or political form.

Dawson is thinking here of religion surrogates like communism, nationalism or even ideas like progress. Religion is the active, the creative element of culture, the *entelechy* informing its matter. Dawson tests out this assertion by a study of the well-known historical cultures.

A culture is not merely a material unity – it implies also a common conception of reality, a view of life which even in the most primitive societies express itself through magical practices and religious beliefs, and which in the higher cultures appears in a fuller and more conscious form in religion, science and philosophy. In this way, the intellectual factor conditions the development of every society. This is the active and creative element in culture.

Dawson demonstrates sufficiently convincingly how this principle is historically borne out in what he calls primitive societies (among which he mentions the barbarous Igbo people of South Nigeria in connection with the long juju.) in archaic ritual culture of Egypt, Babylon, Maya, in the world religions of the *Near* and *Far* East, Greece, India, China; in Christianity and Western culture.

The great hesitation. The Christian Church has felt in adopting important elements of Igbo culture is precisely due to the fact our traditional culture was inspired almost in every detail by the traditional religion.

The Hebrew culture provides another clear example: in the *Torah*, the unity of religion, ethics, laws, rites and ceremonies is peculiarly clear and we see how this sacred law is also regarded as the condition for the national cultures and the very essence if the people's being.

In Islam, a new attitude to life arising in Arabia – has transformed the lives and social organization of peoples so far apart as the Middle East, Malaysia, Indonesia, Persia, the Indian sub-continent and tropical Africa. In other words, the religious factors are responsible for imposing cultural unity on

religions so materially different, so geographically disparate, so racially heterogeneous. Finally, we come to the problem as it touches us ourselves.

### **The Invasion of Igbo Culture and Society by Europe**

In Igbo land, we have both a changing culture and a changed religion. Our culture has been changing at a near-revolutionary pace since our first contact with the white man, almost 500 years ago.

The Slave Trade, commerce in oil, colonization and Christian Evangelization, urbanization and industrialization has followed one another in uninterrupted succession.

Moreover, colonial history has tied the political fortunes of our people to those of our neighbours in a way that seems irreversible. Subjected to this volume and tempo of change, identity of Igbo culture has become highly problematic. On the other hand, for a good percentage of our people, religion has not only been influenced and modified, it has been completely replaced by a totally new religion. Christianity or rather its innumerable variations exist side by side with the traditional religion, and within the Nigerian context, with Islam.

Putting it bluntly, we live in a totally pluralistic atmosphere, a pluralism which applies both to religion and to culture itself. Pluralism means not only *the de facto* existence of other cultures and other religions, but also their right to exist and the fact that this right is based on human finitude itself.

### **The Fact of Pluralism**

Pluralism is a fact of life to which we must adjust ourselves. Pluralism as defined by K. Rahner means the fact that man and his sphere of existence is made up of so different and so many realities, that man's experience itself springs from several original sources whose interplay does not already have a unified structure, and he cannot either theoretically or practically bring this manifold to a common denominator, from which alone this manifold could be deductible, understandable or controllable. The absolutely transparent and concrete unity of reality exists for man only as a metaphysical postulate and an eschatological hope, but not as a disposable quantity. This pluralism is the index of creature-hood; it is only in God that all is one. In finite being, the antagonism of realities is not resolvable.

Though a fundamental trait of human nature, pluralism is one of the great discoveries of modern thinking. No doubt impressed on the modern mind

both by the enormous vogue of Einstein's theory of relativity and by the great progress made by cultural anthropology.

Now, granted the premise of cultural and religious pluralism, it would seem that religion and culture cannot again entertain the same relations as in traditional society or even in modern but more religiously homogenous society, for if religion and culture were so closely connected, it was because within the culture, the religion was homogenous.

This is heart of our dilemma. We are not sure which religion is to inform which stage of our cultural evolution. We cannot go in here to establish the claims of Christianity *vis-à-vis* our traditional religions. For us Christians, the question of the choice of religion does not arise since it is already resolved.

I think the complexity of the problem is often lost sight of when we talk of our cultural heritage in terms suggestive of a revivalism that would restore everything to its pristine State. **'Laudat ores temporis acti!'** Let us remember that *'mgba ala wuru ala'* is only a figure of speech. There is no calling back yesterday, what has not survived will not survive.

But even if our people all become Christians, we are not even sure that our culture, the Igbo culture, subjected to constant and permanent erosion within the political context of a multinational country like Nigeria, has not lost the will to exist, content to dissolve its identity in a melting pot where another culture, a Pan-Nigerian / African culture is being concocted.

It is this indecision, the hesitation in the will to be, this permanent schizophrenia which is responsible for the floating of all our personal and societal values, moral, religious, and aesthetic. Pluralism has as it were stolen the soul out of our culture.

In this, Europe has had enormous advantages over us. Christianity, more precisely Catholicism was a continental religion for centuries, the various nationalities with their subcultures emerging much later in history. For us it is too late to be ambitious. The great mutations of the world are acted. or are they not?

## **The Poverty of Secularism**

Someone might see a way out of the secularization of Western cultures not open up for us the alternative of building a culture without a religion, a secular culture? I think one could not rule out this possibility, but one should add immediately that in this case, what takes the place and fulfils the function of religion- an ideology like communism in the East of the passionate belief in progress in the West- become itself a quasi-religion, a religion surrogate.

Secularization is not so much a rejection of religion as a change of gods. It is a form of idolatry, in other words still a form of religion, albeit a false one. In fact, these quasi religions are often distorted, earthly version of true religious themes.

The communism of Karl Max is essentially the idea of the kingdom of God brought down from heaven to earth and the Western pseudo-religion of progress combines the doctrines of providence and salvation.

According to Tillich, they can still inspire and sustain a culture, but not in the long run. For the more secularized they become, the greater the rift between them and their ultimate source of meaning. The finite cannot in the long run substitute for the infinite. The result is a spiritual emptiness which ends in destroying the culture. This is how things went at the secularization of the Greek culture.

The same pattern is about to repeat itself in the West. The poverty of secularism is the reason for the spiritual malaise and profound pessimism felt today in the West in spite of the unprecedented material boom, in spite of their having achieved the highest technical progress mankind has ever known.

Like Reverend Prof. Okere has said;

“The pathetic Jeremiah’s and Cassandra warnings coming from the intellectual *avant-garde* of Europe, from Novelties to existentialist philosophers is an indictment on secularism which we can only ignore to our own detriment.”



## *Chapter Three*

### **Islam and Social Change in Africa: Approaches to and Perspectives of Social Transformation Processes in Africa<sup>1</sup>**

I am going to limit the scope of my reflection on the above topic to Nigeria, a country into which I was born and on which I can claim competence to speak. By religion I am a Catholic Christian, by profession I am a Catholic Priest, yet at birth I was born into the caliphate Islamic Headquarters of Sokoto State in a little Muslim City called Gusau in Northern Nigeria. Until my 12<sup>th</sup> year, I lived in this Muslim North of Nigeria, moving with my parents as they moved around on occupational grounds to Kano, Gombe, Nguru, Bauchi, Jos — all cities located in the Islamic “Hochburg” of Nigeria. Permit me, therefore, to share my reflections with you as one who is concerned about the Islamic presence in Nigeria and its consequences on the scene of society.

#### **The Problem:**

It is virtually impossible to discuss exhaustively within these few pages the theme of Islam in Africa and the problems it poses in recent times to various countries and various programmes of development. Islam is a world religion with history, culture, mission and authority behind it.

First of all, Africa is a vast continent of 53 independent States as we write. On the geographical surface alone, Africa is larger than the entire United States of America plus the whole of Western Europe and the sub-continent of India and Japan.

Secondly, the historical, cultural and political development of Islam in Africa has lasted for over 1300 years in some parts while it is not yet a century in other parts, so generalizations about Islam in Africa must be avoided.

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<sup>1</sup> Presented at the International Symposium on Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa, organized by Konrad Adanauer Foundation, Germany on 27<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> July, 1992 in Dakar, Senegal.

For example, a once nourishing Christianity in North Africa (Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Morocco) gave way in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century to an expanding Islamic and Arabic Conquest to the extent that today over 90% of the entire North African Region is Islamised.

This is not the case in regions around South Africa where the populations are mostly Christian and have traditional religions which are gradually waning. In countries like Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa itself, etc., Islamic incursions have been minimal in contrast to North Africa.

The situation in East Africa is completely different. There is a sizeable number of both Muslims and Christians among other religions in Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Malawi, etc. Yet Islamic – Christian tension was not seen to be a decisive polarizing factor in their historical—political development, at least not until recently. Thus, the teacher (Mwalimu) the former President of Tanzania Julius Nyerere, himself a strong, believing and practicing Catholic, would voluntarily resign from power and chose as his successor President Mwinyi, a Muslim believer.

In West Africa, the story is partly tension-free in such countries as Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and tension-packed in countries like Nigeria and perhaps Senegal.

#### **Nigeria, A Case Study:**

The most populous black nation in the world is Nigeria, with about 100 million people. Divided into so many (30) states Nigeria is a pluralistic society with over 400 ethnic tribes, languages and several religious groups. Besides a British Colonial history, Nigeria has had several economic, ethnic and party political problems including constant military governments to cope with. In recent years, however, religious tension is rising and has caused violence and bloodshed on many occasions between the Muslims on the one hand, and against the rest on the other.

No doubt it has been proven that where Islam is only a tiny minority, peaceful co-existence with Christians and others is possible. Troubles begin when both religions meet in a missionary situation and have sizeable numbers.

With 38% Muslims, 45% Christians, 17% traditional African religions (general statistics of the National Population Bureau and the CBCN of Nigeria), Nigeria was in 1986 smuggled into the Organization of Islamic Conference single-handedly and without public consultation, apologies or qualms by

President Ibrahim B. Babangida, himself a Muslim, who took over power in 1985 by a Military Coup. Of course, the majority of the country would not hear of this and war on religious lines was threatened. The quarrel is still going on.

The Nigerian Federal Government Constitution, which is the supreme law of the country, decrees that a country like Nigeria with its multiplicity of religions cannot have one state religion: "The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as the State religion. Nigeria is a secular State so says the Constitution.

In recent times, however, the impression is being created that Islam is the religion of the Government of Nigeria. Mosques are built in State Government Headquarters. Appointments and promotions not only in the Civil Service but also within the military provide the psychological impression that we are an Islamic State as these favour mainly Muslims. The army for example, it is said, does not observe any more the rule of seniority and religious bias is used for promotions.

Thus, today policy-making positions are reserved for Muslims. The following posts show the manipulated power structure in Nigeria. It might be an accident, but this accident represents the factual situation, as it was in the period 1989-1992:

Head of State	Muslim
Chief of Army Staff	Muslim
Chief of Defence	Muslim
Chief of Air Force	Muslim
State Security Service	Muslim
Military Intelligence	Muslim
Inspector General of Police	Muslim
National Intelligence Agency	Muslim
Governor of the Central Bank	Muslim
Chief of Immigration	Muslim
Internal Affairs Minister	Muslim
Director of Customs	Muslim

2. The rights to plots of land to build places of worship is denied to Christians in some states.

The right to religious education of Christian children is denied in States like Kano, Sokoto, Borno, etc. There is a preferred status and government support for Islamic pilgrimages to Mecca. The right to freedom of ownership of schools by religious and voluntary institutions is denied while Islamic schools are opened. In fact, Government took over the missionary schools and expelled expatriate missionaries in the 1970's. However Muslim institutions or missionaries were not affected directly.

The law does not seem to ensure protection for Christians in many Northern States of Nigeria. Reports have been submitted about this to Federal Government Panels and Tribunals of Judicial enquiry over the years. Several documents and publications refer to this situation.

Extreme statements of religious fanaticism have been made by Muslims. The Secretary General of the Jamatu Nasril Islam in Zaria has said: "*There shall be no peace in Nigeria until Sharia is fully established*" (p.46 'Kaduna Religious Riot '87 a catalogue of events'. Publ. by CAN - Christian Association of Nigeria).

There have been several religious crises in cities populated by Muslims: 1980, 1982, 1987, 1990, 1991 (Oct), 1992 (Apr), 154 churches burnt, lives lost, property worth endless billions of naira destroyed. In most of them such as Kano, Bauchi, Katsina, Kaduna, Kafanchan, Sokoto, Lafia Gongola, among others, there have been troubles spanning over 10 years. The Government did nothing more than appoint an administrative panel of enquiry into the religious disturbances, one of which was headed by Mrs. H. Donli, The Ag. of Kaduna State. Not much has happened since then, not even the compensation for those whose entire life earnings were destroyed.

There is tension now in Nigeria as there is actual war and/or tension in Iraq, Algeria and elsewhere in the world. At present there is a push towards the return to the origins of Islam and towards a purification of the law. Today, Islam has many prophets preaching fundamentalist themes. Now that hard core Islamic teachers preach a return to the Sharia, there are those who brand as infidel any fellow Muslim who seeks compromise. Listen to a Nigerian Shiite. Zakzaky in the weekend Concord of 20<sup>th</sup> April, 1991.

**Question: Are you saying the Islamic religion as it is being practiced today in Nigeria is not right?**

**Zakzaky:** Yes, that is what we are fighting against. People are not practicing the Islamic religion according to the Holy Quran. Our sect stands for calling people to practice Islam according to the Holy Quran and the injunctions of Prophet Mohammed. We want people to understand that the practice of Islam does not only involve praying five times daily, fasting and Zakat. Islam is not confined only to these things. We are Muslim brothers who try to practice the Islamic religion according to the injunctions of the Holy Quran, we try to look at society through the Islamic focus, yet people are calling us fanatics, extremists and so on. We don't know why.

**Question: Why are you condemning other Muslims?**

**Zakzaky:** We are calling on people to practice Islam fully. People are only practicing Islam in part. This is contrary to the injunctions of prophet Mohammed. Muslims today are far apart from the actual message of Holy Quran. In this kind of mentality, of course, there is no room for other laws, for other religions, or for civic leaders who are not Muslims. Muslims, according to this view, form an *Umma*, a Community, that comes before anything else and uniformity in everything including dress is essential.

Listen to Zakzaky again in the said interview:

**Question: Why did you insist that you do not recognize Government?**

**Zakzaky:** We do not recognize Government: The Holy Quran is our only constitution as Muslims. We have the injunctions of the holy prophet Mohammed which is the jurisprudence of the *Ulama*... I say it again that all my followers do not recognize the Government whether Federal State or Local.

**Question: What exactly is the goal of your sect?**

**Zakzaky:** It is simple. We want Nigeria to become an Islamic country.

**Question: Do you think this is possible in view of the secular nature of this country?**

**Zakzaky:** *Inshah Allah*. If you are alive you will see, Nigerians must worship Allah. Our own task is to rebel against the system and Allah will complete the rest... Our own duty is to call people to rebel and struggle to the last drop of our blood. Anybody who dies in the course of pursuing Allah's cause

has not lost anything. We as Muslims realize this and that is why we give ourselves to Allah. Whether we survive it or not, ours is to carry out the will of Allah.

A library of books would not do justice to the topic, showing the century—old love/hate relationship between Christians and Muslims which has its origins already in the right or wrong interpretation of the Holy Book, Koran. Islam stands for peace! But many of her preachers and adherents have vetoed peace, in fact, the Nigerian and Sudanese situations stand out clearly as points of factual reference.

The Crusades is a case in point, a war of almost 200 years in the Middle Ages. Today's internal war of Lebanon is another example, amidst a world of religious fanatical turmoil as in Iran, Pakistan, India, Sudan, Burundi, Chad, Egypt, Algeria, among others. *Time Magazine*, the widespread American weekly of June 15, 1992 devoted the lead article to Islam: "Who is afraid of Islam?" We read opposing statements in one chapter in the Koran attributed to Mohammed himself saying:

"You will find out that the worst enemies of the believers are the Jews and the pagans, while the most cordial neighbours of the believers are the Christians. This is also because among them there are priests and monks and these are not proud."

How can we reconcile this statement with another saying?

"Believers do not ally yourselves with Jews and Christians. They work together and those among you who will become their allies will become like them. Truly Allah does not guide unjust people."

#### **"THE CHRISTIAN IS TERMED INFIDEL"**

The imposition of the Muslim law in many countries has seriously affected the lives of Christian communities.

The fact remains that while Islam professes to aim at the conversion of the world, it does not concede such rights to any other religion. Do we call this intolerance?

On a visit to Rwanda, Colonel Gadhafi of Libya accused the Christian churches of being "false, infidel and irreligious. Africa must be Muslim", he declared. Christians are intruders in Africa and agents of colonialism. We

must wage a holy war so that Islam will spread in Africa" (Published in Sunday Punch January 26, 1986).

### **Islam World-wide:**

Islam has been in turmoil in many countries of the world. There is a growing religious fundamentalism and political extremism within this world religion which tries to reshape the Muslim faith. The phenomenon is the same in most cases: spread the Islamic faith to non-believers, purify syncretism within Islam itself, use political legal (sharia) and economic tools including violence to achieve Islamic power on a world plane, identify Arabism with Islam on a cultural symbiosis, confront Christianity and modernism.

Today there are nearly 908 million Muslims more than 17% of the world's population versus 1.7 billion Christians. It is projected that by the year 2000 there will be 1,200 billion Muslims world-wide versus 2.1 billion Christians or 1.1 billion Catholics. (David Barrett in the International Bulletin of Missionary Research 1989).

### **The position of the Christian Churches:**

During his third trip to Africa in August 1985, Pope John Paul II stopped in Morocco and met with King Hassan II who is considered by many Muslims to be a direct descendant of the prophet Mohammed. The two men embraced, publicly proclaiming their belief in the many similarities between these two great religions. Before 80,000 Muslim youths gathered in a football field in Casablanca, the Pope said:

"Christians and Muslims, in general we have badly misunderstood each other, and sometimes in the past, we have opposed each other in polemics and in wars. I believe that today God invites us to change our old ways. We must respect each other, and we must encourage each other in good works on the path of God." (Pope John Paul II: 'Address to Young Muslims' in: The Pope Teaches, CTS London, 1985/89, p. 270).

The position of Association of Episcopal Conferences of Anglophone West Africa (AECAWA) Bishops on Christian – Muslim dialogue in Africa:

### **WE ACCEPT**

"We respect Muslims and their religion. We appreciate the good aspects of Islam. We admire the prayerfulness of Muslims. We are edified by their ascetic fasting. We are inspired by their almsgiving and pilgrimage to Mecca. We want to be friends with Muslims. We Christians should have no enemies,

so the Lord commanded us (Matt.5:43)” (In Christianity and Islam in Dialogue communique. AECAWA meeting, 4<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly 20—27; 10.86).

### **WE REJECT**

“However, in faithfulness to our own traditions we must reject many tendencies in Islam: the treatment of non – Muslims as second – rate citizens, the identification of religion with culture and politics, the classification of non – Muslims as infidels, the discriminatory nature of Islamic laws, the heavy penalties meted out to Christian converts from Islam or Muslim women who marry Christians. We cannot accept any situation where our rights as citizens of our nations are denied us because we are not Muslims. We believe in the unity and solidarity of mankind but this does not make us forget our duty to preach the gospel, welcome or unwelcome, in obedience to the Lord’s own injunction (Matt.28:19-20)” I.8 op. cit.

“In our African tradition a cherished value is that of religious tolerance. The gospel and the Koran have spread in our midst due to this openness and tolerance. God made us free. Our freedom, however, obliges us to accept the Good News when we hear it. We can and should invite others to hear the Good News but we may not oblige them to accept it.” (WAKO).

### **Islam and Social Change:**

The debate facing Islam today is to ascertain how a law written 1400 years ago can be understood and applied in a complex, modern and ever-changing society. In other words, how can the prescriptions written for desert nomads, rule the life of people who profess Islam in America, Russia, Nigeria, oil-rich Kuwait, etc.? Can there be 00 - existence and adoption?

How can one translate the disparity between Muslim men and women which decrees that only adult males enjoy full religious and social rights? How can a multi – religious and multi – ethnic society inhabited both by Muslims, Christians, non-believers, traditional worshippers, atheists, etc. manage to live in religious harmony where Muslims believe the law that insists on their living only under an Islamic State? These questions among others summarize the struggle of Islam in this century in Africa. There are many answers to the problem. Whereas some new Muslim inhabited nations accept constitutions that would respect the demand of the Koran for Muslim citizens on the one hand and of the modern age on the other, others insist on a more radical idea which sees Islam as a total political-religious entity. In fact, the policy states:

“Open an ever-growing number of centres so as to offer an alternative to the false promises handed out by Christian missionaries aiming especially at the children who are often seduced by Christian missionaries with gifts.” (1990. Jan. New People No.4, p. 16).

Another policy statement reads:

“Official and popular organizations should be encouraged to subsidize Muslim associations in Africa, helping them to buy such things as vehicles and duplicating and printing machinery...” (New People, Jan-Feb. 1990, p.16, Pub. in Kenya [Dossiers Islam-Christianity in Africa]).

### **Sharia:**

According to Muslims, the Islamic Law (Sharia) guarantees their religious rights and promotes their welfare as well as creating law and order in an Islamic ambient. This means that pluralistic societies must bend to the introduction of Sharia laws into the nation. A clash/conflict ensues and the constitution is undermined. This is the situation right now in Sudan, Nigeria (still boiling) etc. Sharia law is being gradually introduced and forced through, to the extent that non-Muslims are tried by it.

### **Approaches to Social Transformation process in Africa: The Tripod stand**

Upon an original traditional African set-up and world-view there has developed over the past centuries a tripod spectrum of Islam. Christianity and nationalism. These three major ‘belief systems’ with their related ‘new identities’ have spread from small elites’ literate in Arabic or European languages, to the rural masses of Nigeria as well as other sub—Saharan African countries at an accelerated rate during this century. These three inputs have not only altered traditional world views in rural as well as urban areas, but have interacted extensively among themselves in the process. The complexity of this interaction and its relationship with underlying socio-economic Changes, urbanization and industrialization are sufficiently complex to defy generalization. In place of analysis and understanding, too often, the term modernization with many inappropriate positivistic intrusions has been used. (Linden, L. and Clarke, B. ‘Islam in Modern Nigeria’: Kaiser—Grunewald 1986. p. 7).

In analysing the three elements competing for the African soul in today’s Africa, Clarke and Linden have this to say:

“Christians note the triumphal progress of Islam: Muslims oppose the growth of Christian, Western ways of life and states. Secular nationalist sees in Islam and Christianity the seeds of a nation divided. But it is clear that Islam has used Christian Institutions as a model in recent approaches to education and evangelization. And despite their claims to universalistic mission, both Christianity and Islam have been obliged to come to terms with the new nation-state in Africa.” (op. cit. p.7).

To a great extent the nature of Nigerian nationalism has been adequately studied since it has proven a major problem in nation building. Similarly, the history of Nigerian Christianity is amply attested to in a number of scholarly monographs. The same is not true of Islam in Nigeria, least of all Islam since Nigerian Independence (Linden and Clark, p. 8).

There is unfortunately a focus on Islam in the Middle East with West Africa strangely neglected as something of a side-show in Islamic history. This of course is remarkably short-sighted.

In Nigeria, for example, Islam has provided a language of political discourse in many areas, a language in which issues of social justice have been articulated. Much fundamental discussion about the future of Nigerian society has been a religious discourse drawing on Islamic thought patterns, even before other languages took it up.

The major civil upheavals, insurrections and riots in the North of Nigeria in the last ten years have drawn sustenance from Islam. Islam has come to occupy a central part in Nigerian belief and thought; unfortunately, Islam has yet to learn to co-exist with others in a pluralistic society.

Similarly, the one major national debate which draws the attention of many educated Nigerians about the federal legal system was sponsored by Muslims. The major popular and elite demands in the last years have to a large extent been articulated in the language and belief-system of Islam. Islam is willing to debate what kind of Nigeria will emerge in the 1990s. That these debates have crisis-crossed political party boundaries shows that even in the future, deplorable as it may seem, any future discourse of class, law, political sharing of power among others, is likely to occur in the guise of religious ideology and be expressed organizationally in Christian and Islamic groups. Once politics calls upon religious factionalism, party membership becomes subordinate.

Here, the Nigerian Muslim power broker does not see any compromise with nationalists of the secular or Christian schools, as Islam occupies an important and growing part of their spectrum of beliefs. It is important at this stage to state that Islam is used here as an abstract concept. Muslim on the other hand is the "bearer" of Islamic world view while the term "Islamisation" is the process and the external expression of the Islamic practicing Muslim.

### **Perspectives of the Social Transformation Process in Africa: The Demographic Challenge**

Economic realities are controlling the size of families in Africa today. Whereas pre-colonial African families were large in size, there is a noticeable departure from this practice in recent times.

In Islam, polygamy is allowed, a difference from Christian religions. Africans generally have a love for children and Muslim polygamous families definitely are large sized. This does not mean that the quality of education or life is higher than in small families. With the present trend in 'economic belt-tightening', some Muslims might have to rethink their policy of polygamy including a forced reduction of the size of their families.

In fact, the whole of Africa is distinguished by an extraordinary demographic growth. In 1992, the United Nations population projection for Africa was 600 million people. By the year 2010, eighteen years from hence, Africa's population is projected to about 1.2 billion people. Africa is the only world region which has not decreased its growth speed. If this continues, the continent might face consequences which are disastrous from a multi-dimensional perspective:

The desert living nomads who are mainly Muslims might be forced by unfavourable living conditions to rethink their population growth and reduce the size of their families. In fact, they are being forced to do so now. What do you do when you cannot feed all? You reduce, or you stay on and face the severe consequences including death! The reality is there today for all to see and world opinion is aware of it.

The polygamous practice of one man many wives in Islamic societies in Nigeria is already being affected and will continue to be affected, thus a trend to monogamy? Seen from the ecological point of View, characterized by a progressive degradation of the soil, desert advancement decline in food production, migrations might occur. (Examples abound of Sahel inhabitants en route to greener pastures e.g. Chad, Niger, Mali, Northern Cameroun,

Northern Nigeria Cow herds etc.) moving to the Southern parts. Violent clashes cannot be eliminated. My submission is that this situation will emerge as a great problem in the near future. How can we get population growth, environment and development in harmony in an Islamic changing society?

### **The Political Climate:**

The wind of change (*perestroika*) blowing through Eastern Europe and in the defunct Soviet Bloc is not an exercise in isolation. The entire world is growing into a global political village. Events move fast in such continuity and discontinuity that the Islamic world cannot be left out and Africa is in the middle of the turmoil.

Islamic societies which by virtue of religion in many parts of Africa accepted 'theocracy', 'sharia' and a world order according to Islam, and its laws may have to face modernizing influences including multi-party democracy, pluralistic societal organization, international legal systems, and adaptation to a 'new world order'.

In the past, most African States gave themselves a structure which today 30 years after independence, becomes a problem especially for the younger generations. Many Muslim-populated states in Africa accepted or had imposed upon them the one party state model. Comparable to Leninism and Stalinism, these models are today in crisis and severely challenged by the younger generation who are looking for more freedom and democracy.

Earlier accepted patterns of political behaviour are under critical challenge. Already products of Nigeria's Northern University at Zaria, the Ahmadu Bello University, have emerged as Islamic radicals in a positive sense, challenging the *status quo* with the support of such teachers like Professor Bala Usman and others who are demanding freedom and democracy on international Western style models. Such a democratisation process turns already accepted systems upside down: The role of the Emirs is reduced to merely representative and purely religious functions. Their political, economic hegemony is curtailed. The masses are involved in decisions that concern their lives by means of a political sharing process be it in a Federal system or in a parliamentary system or in whatever other forms.

Established traditional teachings and powers are being threatened and questioned, e.g. Madaki versus Emir of Muri. People start taking their own destiny into their hands.

Freedom brings with it liberal tendencies including the ability to free oneself from religious bigotry. Anti-religious sceptics and outright atheists are therefore going to emerge and increase as a new group even in an Islamic dominated society if they are not already existing.

### **The Gap Between the Rich and the Poor**

Although the founder of Islam wished for an egalitarian society where class and status were equally shared, there is a general tendency in many Islamic societies, though not only limited to Islamic societies, of a marginalization based on an antinomy of social inequalities.

To the untutored, Islam appears to favour by a *Fiat* of God's will the few who are scandalously wealthy, with a consolation prize of Heaven for the majority who are degradingly poor. This situation is gradually gaining the attention of researchers. Let me state here what I personally feel: "Wealth and poverty are man-made! They are not God-determined."

For a practical evaluation, many Islamic states of Nigeria contain the largest numbers of marginalized people. Whether it is in Kano, in Sokoto, in Homo, in Bauchi etc. the beehive of beggars, paupers, delinquents and dependents leaves much to be desired. They have a scanty rich few and a strikingly mammoth crowd of paupers.

Compared to Christian populated areas like Enugu, Owerri, Onitsha, Lagos, Benin, Calabar where begging is culturally and religiously abhorred, a sociologist could correctly describe an Islamic populated city in Nigeria as outwardly democratic but containing poverty and beggary as a necessary part of their faith. On the other hand, a Christian/traditional city would be self-helping and self-reliant, hard working and earning with a wealthier situation overall. Of course this analysis could be contested as it is not an absolute. Nonetheless, the casual social scientist and observer discovers this anomaly in the briefest unbiased study.

A one-day drive from Port Harcourt in the Christian-traditional Africa South to Kano in the Northern Islamic trading centre of old reveals a stark-clear difference. Why is this so? Does Islam encourage poverty? Why are Islamic cities predominantly populated by many poor people? Why is begging the order of the day in Islamic centres as against Christian centres in the same neighbourhood belonging to one country? There is a sharp contrast between Bauchi City and Jos City, between Kano and Kaduna. And when you find a few beggars on the streets of Enugu, they have often Islamic background!

Why? The Islamic societies in Nigeria tend to become unequal and unjust, and the trend towards marginalization and exclusion is well underway within such societies. There is an unwritten thesis that Islam and poverty are near identical! I do not agree with this thesis however even though I am alone in my view.

In public and in the religious places of worship, one hears the slogan of national unity, equality and such 'sweet nonsense' that is deceptive as it is not practiced when the real social situation of the populace is considered.

These newly created inequalities no matter for whatever reason in Islamic Africa make it evident that 'under-development' is not a uniform phenomenon, but it hits with special cruelty certain social categories. In Africa, rich people live next to others who are in total misery.

The social change I observe today is that the normally passive Muslim by virtue of Western education and exposure is beginning to question the *status quo*. Things cannot continue this way any longer. Either we have a solution or we shed off the religion that encourages such massive poverty, if it really does.

The belief in Allah and in destiny which such people took for granted as their lot with the hope of repayment in heaven is giving way for the fight for more justice today in Islamic societies. Champions of such social justice include people like Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola of Western Nigeria, himself a Muslim but with his wealth he is helped many out of poverty and empowering them to fight and change their seemingly accepted destiny.

The consequence is: if we want to face the challenges of the day we have to work for the betterment of these powerless 'have-nots' who are excluded from any possibility for betterment and development. These masses will prove to be a great problem for the state and for society. No wonder then that within the last five years, over 25 riots have taken place in these Muslim regions in the guise of religion. After all, the poor have nothing else to lose.

### **The Religious Factor of Intolerance**

As has been said elsewhere in this lecture Africans are notoriously religious people, a religiosity which permeates every facet of life, including eating sleeping, celebration, rituals; from birth till death.

At the present time, Islamic as well as Christian Africa is experiencing a 'religious supermarket'. There are so many schools of thought, all giving ready-made answers to the problems of human existence that one is confused at their proliferation. There is even an invasion of movements of

mysticism. From Asia, Europe and America a new wave of teaching is wading through, challenging established teachings, calling for revolution liberating the minds of people or out rightly questioning the 'raison d'etre' of all established religions. Behind these mysticisms there is not only the religious but also the social and political elements.

The consequence is that these movements favour fanaticism, intolerance and ignore an intellectual critical approach. They impose a mentality which is hostile to the requirements of true development which must be also intellectual and cultural. Because of the potential power of religion as a tool for social mobilization, there is a remote possibility that this religious boom could, if well controlled by tolerance, lead to a total re-definition of the spiritual and religious heritage of the continent. At the moment, however, politics has hijacked religion in some cases with trouble in Islamic societies.

### **The Youth**

It is on record that Africa's youth on the range of below 15 years of age represent about 80% of the continent's population. This is a figure with a drastic consequence for youngsters. The problems of the continent fall on them squarely and it is their future which is at stake. Earlier on, the Islamic structures in the North of Nigeria disallowed British or Colonial or Missionary incursion into their domain. Thus, there is no education and no mixture on a social or religious framework. Today, the youth of the North including the government have discovered that time was held back and the future of youth in a modern state is at stake.

As young people experience the decline in jobs, the deterioration in and lack of basic education, they are at the same time growing restive. They no longer accept passively a situation which condemns them, like their fathers in the past, to manipulated slavery. The new generation is ready to question any form of totalitarian power. Demonstrations and mass rallies calling for radical changes have been held in the past and are constant features of our social-political scene.

Through these re-indications, young Muslims of today are trying to take charge of the socio-political transformations which their fathers denied them for religious reasons. Sometimes, the drastic expression of the frustration is unpredictable and irrational, nation would be held on the brink of social upheaval for such trifles as citing a market in the town or killing pigs and such trifling distractions due to a roadside preacher of the other faith as in

Kafanchan in 1987. But what do you expect an idle youth to do? Of course, cause trouble!

The young people are wooed by all the movements we have mentioned above. They are threatened from all sides by modern possibilities. Their restlessness does not only stem from the fact that they no longer know where they can look for what is right and good, but from the fact that they have lost their roots. Prostitution is on the increase in Islamic societies, alcoholism is there, sex crime has arrived and the general malaise of unbridled western youth had crept in gradually among Islamic youth in Nigeria. Western music, mode of dressing, recreational attractions, etc. have taken their toll here. Divided between two worlds, many of our youth today including normally conservative Islamic youth stand the risk of being ensnared by the manipulation of those mystical movements from abroad (India, Asia, America, Europe) which try to neutralize all the energy which they could invest in building their own future.

There are of course on the other side some positive developments; attendance in schools today is normal. Girls go out now in public, attend schools and universities, live the modern life styles influenced by the West including its liberties and are in search of their own identity, Muslim married women go out to vote today. It would have been unthinkable ten years ago. The MAMSER brought social changes into Islam and its world view. This is a potential social change in Africa's Nigeria.

### **Conclusion:**

This paper has not dealt with the topic assigned properly because of the time limit for the lecture and the large amount of material which must necessarily be condensed. The few points raised however show that Islam has a great potential to contribute positively to the development of society in Africa. Logically seen, this positive contribution can only obtain in a situation of peace. Peace as we know is not possible without justice. And true peace can only be achieved upon the true foundation of justice. Development which is the fruit of peace makes the building of society possible.

We might, therefore, conclude that Islam as a powerful religion in Nigeria and Africa needs to undergo, in the spirit of the Koran and of religious purification, a reformation, experience and development which elements will guarantee stability for a united and dynamic nation. I wish Nigerian Muslims this Koranic peace!

## Chapter Four

### African Human and Religious Values as Challenges to the Rest of the World<sup>1</sup>

*“People who do not look back to their ancestral-cultural heritage cannot look forward to posterity.”<sup>2</sup>*

#### **Our Competence to Speak for Ourselves**

A return to the origins and a hard look into certain areas of our African culture should lead us to develop out of these original sources, internal potentialities for development both in economic, political, social and other fields and I shall single out the family, arts, religion, land, property, commonality, law, political organizations, economic enterprise, birth and death, as areas for reflection. For us Africans, a reflection of this nature has its worth and value in the fact that it grants us the opportunity to say, without an interpreter, what is and what is not Africa or ourselves. An opportunity to reverse the frames of reference; to establish our values differently; to give new definitions from an African frame of reference; leading to interpretation, perceptions, goals, responses and behaviour patterns which make Africans authentic without necessarily contradicting the universal truths that guide mankind.

Much of what is known or written about Africa has been done by Non-Africans, most of whom are European intellectuals and ‘experts’ and much of it is blackmail. A general tendency has been to ‘look down’ on Africa and Africans as;

- The ‘continent of hunger’,
- The white man’s grave’,
- ‘The land inhabited by lions, scorpions, reptiles and monstrous animals’,
- ‘The cannibal peoples of the forest and equatorial region’,

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<sup>1</sup> Ike, O.F.; Paper delivered at the Conference Hall of FB Theologie Interkulturell of the Goethe University, Frankfurt/m, Germany in June 1992

<sup>2</sup> Ozor Neife Ozoike, ninety-year-old man from Umana Ndiagu, Nigeria.

- 'The land of slaves',
- 'The continent of heat',
- 'Dumping ground from the wastes of the Western world',
- 'A continent to exploit its mineral resources',
- The land of black people with black souls as dark as the devil and destined to be the wretched of the earth',
- 'The dark-skinned people whose religions, culture, politics, arts, are uncivilized and primitive in its degrading understanding.

Thus, whatever is bad is given the term black:

- Black Magic
- Black Market
- Black Money
- Black Business
- Black Devil
- Black Religion
- Black is Bad

This and many other prejudices, sometime held in good faith, have been formulated by Western anthropologists, scientists, historians, travellers, adventurers, writers, cultural ethnologists, politicians, traders and missionaries, among a host of others whose prejudices, misleading books and false authority about this continent have led many innocent truth seekers and interested listeners astray. A mirage therefore hangs over the continent. Such negative, misleading and false views about Africa seen nonetheless to prevail in some quarters still, despite several attempts by honest and objective persons, scientists to present Africa as it is, in its entire practice and even before Greek civilization arrived.<sup>3</sup>

The Igbo people of Nigeria worked on iron at a time when historically Europe was still in the Stone Age at Ngwube Anierobi has written elsewhere: 'In every civilization you find the African Architecture'.

### **Joy of Life**

Cardinal Josef Tomko, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples has rightly observed that the joy of life is one of Africa's greatest gifts and thus a challenge to the peoples of the rest of the world. He writes:

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<sup>3</sup> Davidson, B., *Discovering Africa's Past*. London, 1978.

*“There is first and foremost a common value that imbues the African spirit in all its cultures, and that is joy of life.”*

I recall the deep impression made upon the hearers by the remark of Bishop de Longe in Munich in December 1988:

*“You, dear friends, have everything but you are serious and sad. We have almost nothing, yet there is joy on our faces. This is a value that is a sign of youth, which overflows in celebration and in Christian help; it helps in overcoming the difficulties of daily life. It facilitates optimism and even enthusiasm in the faithful, and is a valuable source of apostolic and missionary dynamism.”<sup>4</sup>*

Pope John Paul II adds;

*“The sons and daughters of Africa love life. It is precisely this love for life that leads them to give such great importance to the veneration of their ancestors. They believe instinctively that the dead continues to live and remain in communion with them. Is this not in some way a preparation for belief in the communion of Saints? The people of Africa respect the life that is conceived and born. They rejoice in this life. They reject the idea that it can be destroyed, even when the so-called “progressive civilizations” would like to lead them in this direction, and practices hostile to life are imposed on them by means of economic systems which serve the selfishness of the rich”. In the religious sense, reverence for the divine majesty, the sense of the sacred, the way of celebrating and rejoicing in the Lord (Feter Dieu!) with others in a joyous, jubilant community, are all cultural aspects which edify, move and enrich the faithful of other cultures. In Africa, the Mass is truly a celebration: you “celebrate” it, while we “attend” or “participate in” it; the very words denote the cultural differences. Gestures, drums, dances, swaying, and songs are only external expressions of the basic festive attitude of the African spirit”*

### **A Profound Religious Sense and Respect for the Sacred**

As globalization, technology, informatics, telematics and market economy based on extensive materialism engulfs the European nations, a link is missing in the cosmic reality of peoples where God has either been ejected or has been pushed out into a completely, different, extra-mundane arena. In reality, if many peoples in the civilized world have lost orientation, meaning and

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<sup>4</sup> Loc. cit

sacrality, it is because religion has been banned, theology has been reduced to science, and mystery to myth and God has become a new anthropology. Africa has a solution to this 'anaemia' of the Western world. Africa, like the African prophet Edward Blyden said over 100 years ago is the '*Spiritual Reservoir of the World*'.

Africans have a profound *religious sense, a sense of the sacred*. The existence of the divine being and the invisible spirit world is natural to them, and it seems obvious that this being should have his mysteries because he surpasses man and the capacity of human reason. Several decades ago, the Egyptian fellas rejected the Soviet presence in their country because they considered them abnormal and insane since they wanted to convince the Egyptians that God does not exist, something they thought was absurd and almost contrary to all evidence. There is a great respect for Church persons, sacred places and objects. Religion imbues life and there is no split between faith and daily living. The natural sense of religion, sometimes fostered by fear of the sacred or the desire to obtain benefits and security, is elevated and ennobled by the revealed truth. There is great openness to mystery. I recall the gist which the voodoo 'priests' gave the Holy Father during his visit to Cotonou, Benin: a wooden statue of a woman holding a box in her upraised hands; '*the box of mysteries*', they told us, waiting to be unveiled. Our minds immediately turned to the '*Awaited of the Nations*' who has still not been accepted by them, but is desired by them in some mysterious way. '*Seeds of the World?*' For Christians, this openness facilitates assent to the mysteries, which can seem difficult for the rationalistic mentality to accept.

For the above reasons, the Churches in Africa are already living a faith which in many respects are already acculturated and proper to them, even if much remains to be done so that faith can operate "to the roots of each culture" (EN 20), in all its manifestations of custom and societal living. Besides, these Churches are aided by their common conviction that religion must *involve all of life* and the whole person, just as the person must enter entirely, *soul and body*, into worship and celebration. Valuation too is the *community* atmosphere in which ecclesial life and the life of faith is lived, because religion is not something *private* but social as well. These attitudes are not found spontaneously in any other cultural form.

The Church in the African continent can draw from the rich '*wisdom of the people*', which can be found also among the uneducated, who express their ideas in proverbs or other forms, such as the second Vatican Council speaks

of (AG, Gs, etc.). For the African everywhere is a vehicle for religion, as John Mbiti reports:

*Traditional religion permeates all the departments of life. There is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and material areas of life. Whatever the Africa is, there is his religion. In traditional Africa, there are no irreligious people. To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participation in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the community.... African people do not know how to exist without religion.*

Africans believe in the effectiveness of prayer and they turn to God in moving ways, including external movements, inspired by their deep respect for the divine majesty and transcendence. Worship and celebration involve the whole person, body and soul, and piety cannot be relegated to some private realm; with its symbols, gestures and prayers, it even accompanies public life, without positing any division between the sacred and the profane. African cultures and religiosity have a sense of community that helps Christians develop the ecclesial sense of communion and unity. These cultures lend themselves easily to the insertion of small Christian communities in which the proverbial solidarity is expressed. On a broader scale, such a sense of community links up with the concept of the Church as the family of God and is expressed in a deep sense of communion with the Universal Church and with its centre, which is encountered in the African communities. How often one notices a sense of suffering during certain discussions that go against that communion, just as one suffers when a member of one's own family or father is offended.

In the words of the Prefect of the Congregation of Peoples in the Vatican:

*One could almost say that the African soul is not only 'naturalized Christians' but 'naturalized Catholics' as well. It is certain that 'anti-Roman feeling' has no origin or home in Africa; the ground is not even appropriate for it, it is a foreign commodity.<sup>5</sup>*

## **The Family and Community**

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<sup>5</sup> Tomko J., Ibid.

The Pontifical document '*Evangelium Vitae*' by Pope John Paul II has exposed a persistent culture of death and destruction found in the minds of modern men and women especially in the so called technological societies and has called for a 'culture of life' which respects human dignity, worth and value and has a place for the family. Europe and America are going through a horrific crisis of the family. Individualism and technical progress have challenged human dignity. Virtually, over 60% of families are broken with divorce rates and the number of single parents is growing high. What can Africa in their thought and action about the family offer the civilized world of Europe and America? It may simply be called, the gift of the family, which is an extension of the place of the life and the promotion of life and community.

In speaking of African values, one can certainly not fail to mention the sense of family, to which is connected respect for life, both of which are not only taken on by the Church, but held in high esteem. The extended family system is still widespread, but is severely threatened by urbanization; it presents some valuable aspects that help maintain a spirit of communion and of welcome. Christian solidarity and human solutions to the problems of orphans, the community is a good basis for concretely living the communion of the Church as God's family. Quite a few extended African families have members belonging to different confessions or religions and can become natural platforms for witnessing to one's own faith and for evangelization in the spirit of mutual respect and tolerance. The African family seen as the place for giving life and protecting it, receives a special attention in the Church of the continent which can enrich other cultures. The image of the African mother living symbolically with her child is a symbol of love for life.

### **Communality and Spirituality**

It is not easy to make generalizations about Africa. One area where many non-Africans see the original African lifestyle is the family. The essence of community, sharing, 'living and let live' and togetherness was shown through the large family. The family was a sign of life. Loneliness was unknown. The large extended family offers a possibility for social security and social insurance. John Mbiti's famous saying still holds in Africa: '*I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am*'.

Marriage showed in traditional society that love is communal, not individual. Marriage was a union of two families, two clans, two villages and not just a private love relationship between two persons, male and female. The communal dimension strengthened the longevity of marriage and reduces separation or divorce. Egoism was reduced. Marital love and care was

societal responsibility. Worldwide today there is a crisis of the family expressed via divorces, population control and new models of child upbringing. Could these problems not receive a different method of solution in the context of Africa?

Traditional African religion is non-institutional. It is communal in the same way that African arts products are peculiarly the expressions of some community. One exists in an African society through active participation in the arts, religion and philosophy of the community. The commonality theory is also called communalism by many African thinkers. In this communality, participation as theory and as praxis is of course of crucial importance.

Because the earth provides the goods of this world, food, trees, sand, water and also consumes the goods of this world through burials into the bowels of the earth, the earth was worshipped and respected. This worship was female-oriented type of religion, thus the earth is seen as 'goddess', a constant recipient of water from heaven and God the giver and taker. Taking the above together, the pure African society is fundamentally egalitarian. It is communalistic. In this society, every member has the right to a home, the right to equal protection before the law and traditions, the right to work, the right to care for others and be cared for whenever necessary, the right to protest and the right to rebel, even against the final decision of the community, the right to training, aid and other forms of education, the right to participation and leadership in government, art, religion and philosophy, and the right to inheritance and equitable sharing of all the benefits and undertakings of the community.

The facts are part of the most remarkable achievements of the Africans that hold on to these fundamentals, age after age as if clutching to the last threads of life itself. The African community spiritually validates and establishes the psychological soundness, emotional sanity, social profitability and the individual benefaction that the multiple-wives' system encourages. Its humanist quest for the fulfilment of all proper human instincts, for the promotion of love and peace, for the satisfaction of the deep bio-social impulses of all women, where women far outnumber men and its will to perpetuate the family, the clan, the ethnic group, the '*polis*' and the race go far beyond the term 'polygamous' together with the infinite brood of wild implications, racist connotations and libidinal overtones that attend this term.

### **Respect for Elders**

Old age in African culture is a gift of the gods, a sign of wisdom, a regard for good life. African societies generally respect the elderly and cared for them. The old lived within the given family milieu and are guaranteed stability and historical presence. When an old man dies, it is like the tragic destruction of a library in Europe. Among the requirements of the tradition is the principle of respect for the elders. For they are transmitters of past experiences, the existential links of the past with the present, and the nuclear bearers of tidings to the past with the present, and spirit-gods of the nether-world. The elder is the democratically chosen representative of each extended family or clan in the democratic government of the 'polis'. He is a leader, never a ruler, being an instrument for the execution of religion, moral, philosophical and political will of the people, who remain the first and final source of governmental power. This form of respect for the elders and the inherent promotion thereby of continuity in tradition frowns at Methusalean authoritarianism, foxy Machiavellians and wheelchair romanticism. Hence the assertion of Casely Hayford:

*It is the duty of the head of the family to bring up the members thereof in the way they should go, and by family you must understand the entire lineal descendants of a head 'paterfamilias'. It is expected of him by the state to bring up his charge in the knowledge of matters political and traditional. It is his work to train up his wards in the ways of loyalty and obedience to the power that be. He is held responsible for the acts of recalcitrant members of his family, and is looked to keep them within bounds and to insist upon conformity of their part with the custom, laws, and traditional observances of the community. Nor is the elder a candidate for dictatorship or tyranny, for to the degree that he represents the sovereign idea and receives the attendant homage and respect, to that same degree must he respect their time-honoured laws, traditions and sentiments. He may be called into account should he act or talk otherwise, and may in serious cases, be deposed or asked to die. He leads but never rules, he guides but never governs.<sup>6</sup>*

### **Values**

In African culture, there was evidence that virtually the entire creation had a meaning, known or unknown to mankind. Creation was not meaningless. The

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<sup>6</sup> Ike, O., Freedom is More than a Word, CIDJAP Publication; Enugu 1998, p.28.

universe has a purpose in the mind of the creator. Thus, religion, sacrifice, worship rites and rituals characterized mankind's response in Africa to the 'God of Creation' 'Chineke'. Every tree has a name and meaning. The seasons have names and meaning. Every individual creature has a 'Chi' or personal deity that was guiding it. There was no chance of accident. Value was given to sand, water, stars, and in fact all nature. Agricultural seasons, economy, social life, culture, law, trade and arts point beyond itself. From a philosophical point of view, arts point to the divine and religion. Every work of arts says to the beholder:

*"Look beneath and beyond me for what I represent and say is more than what you see. Deep expression yet modest, it concerns itself with life, in faces and figures showing man in his nature and activities in the stages of his ancestry, birth, life, death, mystery and power."*

Here again, it must be said that African arts, because of the said philosophical preoccupations, is never a question of matter alone: because the element of spirit, which is breath of the divine, of God and of God in man, is always present.

### **The Ancestors**

Humanity had continuity and history. The worship of ancestors expressed the respect and debt of the present generation to those who lived before, and this respect guaranteed to the present that the yet unborn would honour the dead. In other words, the living-dead, the ancestors and their worship showed belief in the continuity of life, eternal life, and continuity of the human race in a historical respectful dimension.

### **Reverence for the Earth and Nature:**

Because the earth provides the goods of this world: food, trees, sand, water and other consumables, which return through burial and decay to the bowels of the earth. The earth was thus, worshiped and respected. This worship was a female-oriented type of religion, thus the earth as 'goddess' a constant recipient of water from heaven, male god); a giver and taker. All nature was respected and creation had integrity. This virtue has to be cultivated again in a technological world.

### **Social Roles**

The gender issue determined the roles of people in traditional society. In agriculture, in trade, in economy, in social life, in politics, in every aspect of

culture, there was clarity as to the roles of men or women and their interdependent functions. Some of these roles were based on nature, for example, the woman gives birth to children; the man climbs trees, or based on traditional roles for example, the man goes hunting, the woman plants green around the house.

### **Celebration of Birth, Death and Events**

The phenomenon of life, whether in birth or in change of life through death was highly celebrated and occasions for feasting. This attitude to life, seeing life and death as a gift thus celebrating it enhances the dignity of human life and encourages the community. This practice is very persistent up till now and is exemplary. Celebration by means of feasts and events encourages community harmony and peace.

### **Love for Children and Procreation**

African societies love children and still do. The childless are very sad. It is a course for which religious rites are performed. In such a society, the future is guaranteed where there are children. The family is strengthened.

### **Human Rights & Ethics**

The rights of the individual were guaranteed only within his clan or village milieu. Outside his clan or village, rights cease to exist. The right to life, to movement, to freedom of speech and otherwise, to religious practice, all these were possible within the ambient of the immediate cultural existence and were fully guaranteed. People outside this milieu were not automatic recipients of these rights but could acquire them by good behaviour and peaceful coexistence. Ethics do's and don'ts and morality were given a divine sanction with a rational human explanation.

### **Law**

The function of law was to preserve the given community. Law came either as tradition handed over by the ancestors or as a social construction agreed upon by the given society. Law was not alien. The need for the law led to its obedience.

### **Political Organization and Consensus via 'Palaver'**

Traditional African societies guaranteed full participation of all in the village communal responsibility of government, whether it was republicanism in Igbo Society, or controlled monarchy in Yoruba Society, or theocratic-feudalistic system in Fulani. In all, the principle of 'palaver' or communal debates for 'consensus' was possible. Government and the affairs of the village concerned

everyone. The age grade system, the market, the industry of arts and crafts, social checks and balances including the use of moral, physical or other sanctions guaranteed the political existence of the unit.

### **Land**

In the pure African society governed by a humanistic community spirit, land belongs to no one. Land belongs to the people. The individual and hence the family have the right to the sacred and secular utilization of the land, but not appropriation in the absolute sense. For as Chancellor Williams observes:

*“Land is seen as God’s gift to man for use as a sacred heritage, transmitted by the forefathers as a bond between the living and the dead, to be held in trust by each generation of the unborn who will transmit it thus to the next generation.”<sup>7</sup>*

How could we reconcile this existent traditional view of the land with the border clashes for land prevalent now on the continent? What new interpretation could be given to the land so that it assumes its original African connotation, namely; a heritage to use and to pass on to the oncoming generation?

### **Property**

In African societies, property was a gift of God to someone. Property had no meaning if somebody accumulated too much for himself. The wealthy shared their wealth with others; in other words, property was a ‘social mortgage’, a thinking that could become very useful today. Respect for nature, the environment, the trees, the water was dynamically practiced. Only needs were tampered with in a religious sense. Exploitation was limited. Is it possible in today’s world to look at property less as acquisition and more from the point of need? Africa could avoid extreme materialism, if only we could look inwards to discover our rich cultural heritage and place property in its right perspective.

### **Conclusion**

#### **Africa’s Problems are Europe’s Problems**

Africa is poor in a general sense but it has a wealth of humanity and many values, which can be lived and raised up in Christ in order to be given to

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<sup>7</sup> Ike, O., op. cit. p.26.

others. With a very few exception, writes a Nigerian economist, Professor Ake,

*Africa's development plans have ended up in strategies by which few people profit and use the gains for their own interests. The plans are inevitably upset. There is no widespread participation of the people in decision in the political and economical fields, nor has there ever been.*

A number of problems in the economic field are to be lamented; the immense international debt, economic dependence on non-African markets and nations, large areas beset by hunger, power struggles and wars which then promote the arms trade to the detriment of development and produce violence and oppression. The meagre traditional economy is not enough to heal and satisfy all these needs. In addition, there are immense problems like HIV/AIDS, the problem of many millions of refugees and displaced persons, the emigration situation, difficulties in health care and education, rampant urbanization, illiteracy, infant mortality, etcetera. In the economic field, Africa is one of the world's poorest. When one compares its per capita income which according to the World Bank's 1992 figure, ranges from a high of 2,670 dollars in South Africa, to a low of 60 dollars in Mozambique, to the income of Western countries which ranges from 10,000 to 37,000 dollars.

Today, the net worth of the whole of Africa is slightly higher than that of Belgium. The economy is based primarily on agriculture and husbandry at a mere subsistence level. Fortunately, the land is fertile except for the desert areas, which however, are growing larger. Great progress could be obtained with proper techniques of cultivation, irrigation and conservation, as well as through the processing and marketing of products. Natural and mineral resources, oil fields, the resources constituted by hydraulic power, can be found in various areas. However, the question is, who will profit from them? Various development and aid programmes have been set up and not all of them have always been altruistic. In the ongoing dialogue between Africa and the rest of the world, especially Europe, some questions keep on repeating themselves:

*If Africa underwent many wrongs by others in history and over the centuries, we must ask ourselves what must be done to change this situation? Who must one turn to and what message, convincing and expecting shall we use to effect human rights and common*

*welfare for the whole human family, of whom the sons and daughters of Africa are important parts?*

To quote Pope John Paul II further in his sermon to the African Synod Fathers in Rome at Easter 1994;

*“The Church which at this moment is speaking through my words rejoices in the fact that the peoples of Africa with their cultures and traditions are living today in their own states and systems, that they are sovereign in their own continent. This sovereignty enables them to evaluate all that was positive in what Europeans brought for the development of their continent; it also enables them to judge critically all the injustices suffered during the colonial period and even earlier, resulting from the cruel practice which lasted so long, of reducing to slavery many sons and daughters of Africa in order to deport them to the new world.”<sup>8</sup>*

### **From Dependence to Interdependence**

What we need in Africa are avenues for creating a basis for categories, which determine development potentials forming the basis for authentic development. Attempts by people of non-Western cultures to develop themselves according to their priorities, innovative rationality, cultures and world-view have all too often been dismissed as irrelevant; they have been interrupted and stopped as historical records testify, by abrupt abortions of the pre-colonial slave trade, colonial foreign imposition and neo-colonial internal alienation strategies which interrupted the political, economic, social cultural and technological possibilities for development within Africa. History books and our own practical experiences have much to tell about this anomaly, which Anierobi Ngwube describes as “ethical savagery, moral barbarism and moral cannibalism”.

This is the time to search for factors necessitating progress, adaptation and interaction. Cultural change, therefore, is a constant challenge for a people to maintain their cultural continuity in the face of new conditions. It is not just the transfer of technology or economy that is at stake. More at stake is the search for categories for the definition and evaluation of cultural, ethical and

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<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, op. cit.

religious conditions relevant to the development and modernization potential of Africa.

### **The Church Lives and Works in this African World**

*The mission that Christ entrusted to the Church is not 'a mission in the political, economic or social order' (Cf. GS 42). However, this in no way diminishes its consequences for temporal affairs. Indeed, the gospel proclaims an integral redemption, which encompasses all aspects of the human person.... How could one fail to take into account the suffering-filled history of a land where many nations are still in the grip of famine, war, racial and tribal tensions, political instability and the violation of human rights? <sup>9</sup>*

All is not lost, there is hope and the winds of change are already blowing. We have to have strong consciousness of being sent, of having a great task to perform, of serving a supreme cause: "Christ is calling Africa. Africa is ready for Christ." And Christ is with us in this work. Today more than ever, Christ is Africa's only hope. Africa can now carry Christ back to Europe and the rest of the world. This is the task, the challenge and the new era of evangelization facing Europe and all those who relate to Africa. The answers are not far-fetched. Dialogue, solidarity, justice and love capture the essence of this new interdependence and this new evangelization.

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<sup>9</sup> John Paul II Angelus, 20 March 1994.

## Chapter Five

### The Church in Nigeria: The Family of God in Communion, Dialogue and Mission<sup>1</sup>

#### **I. Our mandate to preach the Good News and transform the world:**

A new period has started in the history of mankind. Far-reaching changes that have left no people untouched have brought this about. The phenomenon of globalization, the introduction of communications technology through the means of telematics, informatics and space-craft; the near abrogation of physical boundaries of nations by economic, social, political and cultural configurations have changed our perceptions of religion, the State, the family, society, the Church and even somehow, of God himself. Yet, we should like to make it clear that in spite of all these changes, there is very much that does not change, because it has its deepest foundation in Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13: 8). Every Christian generation refers to Him, when it is being asked to prove its identity as a missionary community (Matt 28: 18 - 20). Jesus Christ Himself refers to the Father's work (John 5:17). He is deeply conscious of the fact that He is fulfilling a task, in which God's work among men gets its shape and form.

We are invited to witness and to share our faith and strong hope in charity, proclaiming with joy what the good Lord has done and continues to do for us as individuals, families and as Church in our continent, country and dioceses. This goodness of the Lord indeed extends to the entire Nigerian people and “*we marvel at what the Lord has done for us*” (The Psalms).

At such periods in our national life when it really seemed that the nation was dancing on the brinks of disaster (and there were many such times in the checkered history of our motherland), the good and most merciful Lord was present, preventing the worst and God has continued to manifest his merciful face, granting divine protection on our Church, people and country

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<sup>1</sup>Ike, O.F.; Paper presented at the Second National Pastoral Congress in Nigeria at Pope John Paul II Centre Wuse, Federal Capital Territory Abuja on 14th November, 2012.

which often stood before imminent and apparent disaster. It is our mandate, therefore, to preach the good news of salvation to our people, for the transformation of society (Math. 28: 20). To God who created heaven and earth, the triune one who is ever present in our midst as “Emmanuel” be praise and honour and glory and majesty and adoration forever and ever, Amen.

**2. Context and Challenges:** The world needs Good News. There is plenty of bad news already as we experience daily, everywhere and in manifold forms, transmitted through the media and communication instruments. Our world is in dire need of joy from boredom, aecidia, meaninglessness and apathy.

The eternal trinity of one God in creation brings life and joy to the world. Jesus Christ, the redeemer in his incarnation has become the Good News and the bearer of joy as recorded in the Gospels. He is the ‘Best News’ the world has ever heard and will ever hear.

By taking upon himself the burdens and sins of each person, making conversion, proclamation and charity possible, he opens the doorway to reconciliation and salvation for many (Luke 22: 14 — 23). In the many works of inspiration under the Holy Spirit of God, these Gifts of Joy are present and transform our lives.

Our immediate challenge therefore as ministers of the Word is to preach Joy and the Good News, like Jesus did, not ‘Doom News’. There is urgent and compelling call to be courageous enough to heal the wounds and tackle the problems posed on our country and people by situations that reduce or remove the joy of the people through manipulated divisions; the lack of much needed dialogue at various levels of the society; the apparent breakdown of peace in many communities within the Church and the country; horrendous and growing poverty of the larger members of society, especially of the youth, leading to increasing disparity between the rich and poor; the alarming unemployment of over 30 percent of the population remains a grave concern.

Joy is killed when mediocrity becomes a way of life and doing things haphazardly, without the aim for excellence becomes a national culture. At a time when humanity faces fundamental questions of life and death, of lack of meaning and disorientation of values, of war and peace, abuse of the environment and the scandal of poverty in the midst of plenty, a world that

has grown in technical, social, economic and political sophistication, that has become more complex, it is important to acknowledge that humanity faces very difficult challenges,

We are witnesses to the senseless religious fanaticism, terrorist attacks and the killings, sometimes *'in the name of God'* of many innocent citizens, some of whom are Christians murdered in their places of worship, in their homes and also places of work. Currently, as many of us are aware, despite all the preaching in Churches and other places of worship, our country is challenged by unbridled corruption and manifold theft which has graduated to become in itself an impunity, just as cancer does to the body, and therefore very difficult to eradicate.

The faces of corruption are real, its consequences many, the damage to the moral psyche of the young unquantifiable and this injustice cries to heaven for vengeance. We experience often and indeed daily, the manifold forms of deprivation and injustices prevalent in our communities and at all levels, within the society and within the Church, within our families and in the Nigerian State. Such deeds create conflicts, hatred, divisions, misunderstanding and apathy.

As a people of faith guided by the Good News of Jesus Christ, we must be appalled by the lack of good governance imposed upon the good people of Nigeria in virtually all the States within the Federation by bad leadership, dictatorships within our democratic dispensation, fraud, impunity, lawlessness, abuse of peoples and human rights, unfair local and international trade and the negative consequences of globalization, economic disparity, environmental degradation, violence and in humanity. These are some of the challenges which confront the Church's ministry of love and the ordinary Nigerian.

In their own concluding message to the world, the Church and to the African peoples whom they shepherd, the Synod Fathers at the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops in 1994 in a 71 point Nuntius '(Message)', gave a communique that announced with profound significance the event as a *"Synod of Hope"*, *"Synod of the Resurrection"*, saying with full encouragement: *"At this very time when much of fratricidal hate inspired by political interests is tearing us peoples apart, when the burden of the international debt and currency devaluation is crushing them, we, the Bishops of Africa, together with all the participants in this holy Synod, united with the Holy Father and with all the brothers in the Episcopate who elected us, we want to say a word of hope and*

encouragement to you, Family of God in Africa, to you, the Family of God all over the world: *Christ our Hope is alive; we shall live*” (Message of the Synod, no. 2). With the words of Paul VI, they announced that Africa is the “*new fatherland of Christ*” and our whole being cries with joy and thanksgiving to the living God for the great gift of the Synod” (Nuntius, no.3).

### **3. The Church in Nigeria: Family of God in Communion Dialogue and Mission**

My short reflection is to address the theme of *Dialogue, Communion and Mission for the Church in Nigeria, which is the Family of God*. As preachers of the Word, we are all aware that divine grace accompanies our work, “*for without Him, we can do nothing*” (John 15: 5). Yet in our ministry, we experience a world that refuses to listen; a world that doubts and even refuses to believe; like the “*parable of the sower*” (Luke 8) in the Gospels. Our world has grown in apathy and falsehood and is not eager to receive the ‘Word’ because it is busy with other important matters, albeit, ‘**ephemeral pursuits**’ presumed to bring happiness.

Like the prophets of old, our hope is a strong belief in the powerful and liberating message of the Gospel, “*that God is love*”, “*to be worshipped in Spirit and in truth*” (John 3). This truth is found in the living traditions of the Church which traverses a world full of contradictions by calling people of all nationalities to conscience, compassion and creative action. This social mission is inspired by the passion for Justice (Amos 5: 24); shaped by Catholic Social Thought and lived by the people of God in everyday reality. Pope John XXIII wrote in his Social Encyclical ‘*Mater et Magistra*’ that the “*Church owes the world the duty not only of preaching the Gospel and Social Thought, but also of Social Action*” (Nr. 33).

### **4. Faith:**

The Church as Family of God on Mission - is the model and theology of the First Africa Synod (1994). The Church in Nigeria: Family of God in Communion, Dialogue and Mission is a statement of vision and faith by the Pilgrim Church, imbued with faith and determination. The adequate armour for the Church in Nigeria to wear at this time, is be girded in faith, defined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church as “*that gift of God, freely given, which enables us to believe, without doubt to what God has revealed*”. It is faith which calls the Christian to stand up with prophetic courage, armed with ethical, moral and spiritual strength to give hope, serve those in need, pursue peace, defend the life, dignity and rights of all peoples and maintain a fundamental option for the poor and the most vulnerable in society. This is a call that is

deeply biblical as found in the life and example of the Incarnate Word himself, Jesus Christ, who came “that all may have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

### **5. Sacrament of Unity:**

The Church is to be the sacrament of this unity that brings salvation. This idea has been very clearly put before us by the Second Vatican Council in ‘*Lumen Gentium*’ Nr. 1 and Nr. 9. This essentially means that the Church has the task to realize the salvation of peoples, which includes the unity of all people, and that the Church herself must be the sign. To be the Family of God in Communion, Dialogue and Mission is to be like and to resemble the MOST HOLY TRINITY of One God 7 the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Unity is the first principle of the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. The Church, configured to this mystery has the constant need and challenge to be ‘One’ and remain United in faith, hope and Charity under the successor of Peter, the Pope, the Church is called to a unity in doctrine (orthodoxy) and a unity in the practice of charity (orthopraxis). This explains why since the time of the Apostles, and at each age and circumstance, the Church seeks for Unity. In every attempt “to respond to the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel” (*Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II, No.1), the Church works to unite the family of God through Dialogue and a Mission that promotes the Good-News to all within the believing community.

### **6. Mission belongs to the essence of the Church:**

The Church exists to evangelize as pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II strongly represent in their various encyclicals, ‘*Evangelii Nuntiandi*’ and *Dives in ‘Misericordia’*. Mission belongs to the essence of the Church and it is the task given to the people of God. In regard to the whole of the mission the Church is to fulfill in the world, the task of establishing a Christian community among every nation is one of the most important. The Church would not be able to fulfill this world—encompassing task, if her presence had remained limited to Jerusalem. The function of the People of God in the society has often been one compared to that of the yeast in the dough. Yeast must not stay in one part of the dough. It does not then serve its purpose in the baking of bread. It must spread throughout the dough in order to be of benefit.

The same holds good in the Church. She works throughout the world wide society of people like yeast in dough until it becomes bread, that is, until the Kingdom of God in its fullness comes among us. Therefore, the Church wants a place for herself among all nations, getting at home among them.

From their midst and in the company of all of them, she seeks a way to be one with each other and with God. The Nigerian and African milieu is known for openness, sharing, ‘palaver’ and the art of consensus building and sharing in any dialogue. This inclusion promotes presence, thus, the need for the Church to be present in every community in every form known as integral evangelization... by the Word and the Sacrament, in the social and economic order, in the world of the aged and the young, in arts and the academia, in the theatre and in culture, music, politics and technology, so that “*through Christ, all may be reconciled in God*”.

Pope John Paul was so optimistic of his vision for Africa and belief in her people and destiny when he added: “*indeed, this continent is today experiencing what we call a sign of the times, an acceptable time, a day of salvation. It seems that the hour of Africa has come, a favourable time which urgently invites Christ’s messengers to launch out into the deep and to cast their nets for a deep catch*” (Luke 5; 4; EIA, no. 6).

### **7. The people of God include all the baptized:**

When we talk of involving the people of God in the process, certainly we do not mean to limit ourselves to Bishops, priests and perhaps the religious. The people of God include all the baptized and all men and women in our society. If the family is the domestic Church, and the most basic unit of the Church, it is therefore here that the practice of faith, hope and love starts with all the virtues. Activities and projects of the local Church which are Catholic must develop a process from below move upwards towards the diocesan, national, regional and continental levels.

The Catholic Church stands above other institutions as the best in class of organizational structures. The myriads of catechists, academics, scholars, medical professionals and other professionals, women, seminarians, monks, traders, non—Catholics on the ecumenical dimension, youth, various movements and associations, the workers, children, rural farmers, urban poor, refugees, the sick, old people, priests in their manifold organized associations, many indigenous religious congregations, the civil society, the State and its organs to mention but a few are part of Church on Mission and need to be empowered to be present in the work of Mission.

**8. We must change from a clerical notion of Church to Church as Communion,** a people of God in which every member has both rights and duties, including active involvement in what goes on in the Church.

### **9. Ecclesiology of Communion:**

The active role of the laity in the church can only be enhanced through encouraging participation of each and every baptized person in the identification of issues to be discussed, the decision making itself, the implementation and evaluation. It is one thing always to talk about the need for lay participation in the Church and quite another to give effect to that invitation through concrete processes as the Africa Synod. There is therefore real need to develop an Ecclesiology of communion in the true African sense.

We need to strengthen all structures and institutions for democratization, consultation and deliberations within the Church. Everyone matters. The coincidence of the Africa Synod with democratization events in many African countries at the same time is a useful lesson. If the civil organs would receive hundreds of thousands of memoranda for their call to people's opinion on whatever matters the policy executives wished for the various national constitutions such as in Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa, Zimbabwe, one would expect the same strategy to be used by the Church to receive people's opinion on pastoral congress or Synod issues, more so, that these Synod issues are crucial, important and concern the lives of people in a very fundamental way.

### **10. Communion and Participation is key:**

The wisdom of our ancestors and Common Sense often teach us that people participate better in things they were part of and contributed from the beginning and therefore keep the agenda going for a longer time. They develop a sense of love and concern for them since they feel themselves responsible. It is rather difficult to involve people in the implementation of an agenda they were not part of initiating. It takes much longer time even explaining to them the rationale and the reasons why such actions should be pursued in the first place. One has to begin with convincing explanations on why they had been left out in the preparation itself. Evangelization means concrete plans and strategies to share the Good news of Christ with children, youth, adults, men and women, the old and the sick, physically challenged and disabled people, workers and the unemployed, leaders and their followers, politicians and professionals, the poor, displaced people, prisoners and refugees, rural farmers and urban dwellers, the academia and scholars; Clergy and religious, even prophets and persons of other Christian beliefs extending to traditional worshippers, Muslims, and non-believers. In summary, evangelization is all embracing.

### **11. The Methodology used for Mission is Critical:**

In today's socio—economic and ecclesial reality, the methodology for any major endeavour is as important as the content and event itself. This is so because the methodology used in an enterprise affects the outcome and results. Paulo Freire's methodology and pedagogy of education was effective in Latin America towards people oriented mobilization and education. Methodologies can be developed which assist even children through drama and illiterates to be involved and contribute to such an important process as the Synod. A theme such as reconciliation, conflict, justice and peace is not something reserved for experts. It could be approached with an encompassing methodology so that all are involved and are eager to see that the implementation and reception is positively concluded.

### **12. Evangelization, Mission and Dialogue is Integral:**

The Bishops of Nigeria at the First Eucharistic Congress in 2002 at Ibadan brought up the model of Church as Family of God on Mission with a book to the effect published for the faithful. That document has remained of excellent quality with content and vision still mandatory. That exercise of the First Congress bears respectful repetition in the Second Congress because the truth it contains remains to be exhausted.

Evangelization includes: proclamation (*kerygma*); service (*Diakonia*); witness (*martiria*); worship (*leiturgia*); building community and solidarity (*koinonia*). It concerns all human endeavour and permeates all facets of life, be they religious and therefore spiritual, moral and therefore ethical; cultural and thus educational; political and hence involving the economic; physical which is then linked and extends to the environmental, just to mention but a few. Everything is evangelization properly understood because the Incarnate Word desires to reconcile all things unto himself for the glory of God and the salvation of entire creation. To consider the theme of evangelization, one sways into the arena of family, community, clan, the ethnic group, village and the nation and extending to the entire human family of nations. Evangelization includes the message, the pastoral methods and needs, the animating theologies, the interaction, the special situations and the vision for the future. African cultural values are indeed open and all-inclusive and any person or group who has a positive contribution to make for the success of a dialogue or enterprise was often welcome. Kola nut was never denied anybody just because he or she did not belong.

Once present during the breaking, the person participated as is found in Igbo culture. This corresponds to the theology of Church as family which the

Synod desired to develop deeper. How could a group of experts and theologians for that matter be considered unwelcome for an event where they had spent their lives urging and pushing for its implementation and practice.

The example of the Vatican II is best understood if one knows that the theologians were the key actors who assisted the bishops in the intensification of the required debate and sharpness surrounding the topics of that great *kairotic* event. As we implement the phase of the Synod, it is necessary to develop attitudes which appreciate pluralism and the unique contribution of every group. That is in fact a valid way, but also the best Way to allow the Spirit space to lead the people of God on Mission and the Church as the place for the realization of this Mission of preaching Jesus Christ to a world that is in dire need of the Gospel.

### **13. Conclusion and Rediscovering the many Faces of Mission in our Country:**

The Second Vatican Council invited all members and sections of the Church to foster in themselves a truly Catholic spirit, and to spend their energies in the work of evangelization ('Decree Ad Gentes', 36). Mission, therefore, is witness but it involves also service. In the same way; Mission is service but it involves also witness.

The theme of *Church as Family of God — in Communion, Dialogue and Mission* is relevant for the local Churches within Nigeria and indeed for Africa. It is an excellent and good model for the world of today. This is so because it links itself up to the theme of Evangelization which is of essence. Everything has to be imbued with the light of the Gospel. United in Christ, faith is made easy and love follows. The real challenge is to foster a spirituality of communion in solidarity and prayer. These can be accomplished through mutual assistance; exchange of talents; responsibility for one another; men and means; learning from each other; Diocesan, Parish and group twinning and partnerships on inter-diocesan, diocesan and local levels within the nation;

*Proclamation* - Jesus Christ remains the complete and true man for all peoples and for all ages. We must make him relevant as a man for this time and for all times.

*Enculturation* - A faith that is not enculturated is a faith that is not received (Paul VI). Enculturation is an agenda and this is the beginning of Africa's cultural *Rebirth*, Dialogue and *Communion* in solidarity; building bridges with

entire humanity through dialogue is the sure way to peace in the world. This is realized through dialogue between hierarchy and laity; between bishop and priests; between religious and clergy; between Church and Society; between faith and life; between believers and non—believers; between faith and reason; amongst gender and political; economic and social realities that there may be peace, unity and development.

*Justice and Peace* - If there is no justice, there shall be no peace. Linking Globalization to African self-determination. Empowerment programmes for women youth and men. Placing the poor at the centre of our ministry. Good governance in Africa, promoting development leadership as a key to progress of nations; involvement in public affairs as an essential dimension of the Gospel; promotion of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) in schools and seminaries: setting up centres of CST in Africa; inter African networking. African Peer Mechanism (APRM); Europe, Asia and the USA to allow Africa stand on its own identify. *Means of Communication* - The Church must go into the mass media and evangelize it.

## Chapter Six

### **Beyond the Gender Agenda: Religion, Society and the Crisis of Values and Marriage in Contemporary Nigeria<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Introduction**

Nigeria today is undergoing a turbulence in the socio – economic and political landscape, a situation which exposes the notion that the line of social conflicts has been broadly drawn between the feudal, military and elite political classes on the one side, who dictate both the music and the dance style in the arena of deciding people’s destinies, and the overwhelming majority of the citizenry on the other who are pauperized, deprived, abused, denied rights and marginalized. Many of these are women. The issue as you can see is not primarily a gender question. It is more a line drawn between the few who have hijacked power and among them are men and women versus the rest of society the majority, among whom are also men and women.

Controlling the vast wealth and coercive forces of a nation so richly endowed, the former has sought to maintain a stronghold on the people. The large uneducated, uninformed peasantry, working class, enlightened but disenfranchised youths and the entire citizenry sit on the fence and watch how military *cum* civilian and feudalistic tradition have crippled freedom, initiative, development and dignity of persons. It is indeed a disaster that at the imminent turn into a new millennium, a strategically placed country like Nigeria still lies flat on the ground crawling while those we fought to liberate such as South Africa and elsewhere, are towering high and moving fast with the rest of the world into the new century and the new millennium. The case of Nigeria is bound up with disappointments and the failure of unfulfilled visions and unfulfilled dreams. But we cannot give up. Actually, this is the time to intensify the struggle.

The context of Nigeria is that of society in need of the ingredients of a modern nation within the comity of nations. We lack a democratic government; we lack an accountable government; we lack the political virtues in many of our politicians, namely; prudence, justice, tolerance and

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<sup>1</sup> Ike O.F.; Paper delivered at Zodiac Hotel at an N.G.O. Summit on Beijing and the Gender Agenda in Enugu, 1995

patriotism; we lack a sound economic and socio-political environment which is actually the best ground for economic success, namely a free and fair environment for the competition of talents, goods and productive factors which are the basis of a successful economy; we lack fiscal and budgetary discipline in the hands of technocrats who at the moment manage our affairs; we lack discipline and patience which the so-called Asian Tigers, less privileged and endowed as we are, are currently using to attract investors, investments and an accountable and functional socio-economic and socio-political climate for the benefit of the majority of its citizens.

The virtues of honesty and transparency seem not to be written in bold letters in the dictionary of those who have usurped power and the administration of this God most-blessed nation called Nigeria.

### **Blessing and the Abuse via Apathy**

We have a great country, richly endowed with human and material resources, a country with one of the great beauties of geography, aesthetics, cultures, traditions, varieties and multi-plural ingredients which any modern nation today called great has as its credential. Unfortunately, Nigeria's assets and blessing are turning as it were as a curse against its people. We are not a nation of complainants more than any other, people anywhere else in the world could also be described as being complainants; we are not a nation of thieves or dishonest bunch who are the worse in this business known to all children of Adam.

My guess is that Nigerians, and by this I mean the majority of the people have by their apathy, lack of interest, lack of demand for responsible leadership by acquiescence, by keeping quiet, by not shouting and crying foul, by not being involved, by keeping aloof and politically inactive, by giving room to the odd and notorious virus which makes it possible for semi-illiterates, mediocre, never do wells and their likes to emerge into the forefront of power.

This nation would assume its pride and dignity if the citizens of this great country wake up from comatose disinterestedness in the political, social, and general welfare of the nation at large and demanded for their birth right. I have the courage and the good faith to believe that even in the midst of chaos, nature abhors disorder and tries to find a balance. Even in the face of seeming hopelessness, faith and hope still ginger humans to look forward towards a vision of the world of their dreams and ambitions. As we witness within our world and society, unquantifiable manner and proportion of

disgust, apathy, resignation, poverty and lethargy, I am encouraged that there are some who are determined to ask questions and to reject the *status quo*.

### **Vision 2010 in Perspective: Wither Marriage and the Family**

The Nigerian government came up in recent time with the Vision 2010 vocabulary. This is an ambitious focus beyond the magic year 2000 for which and to which we have all in the past 20 years been mesmerized as the year for solution to all the problems we could ever imagine and the answer to all our questions: Health for all by the year 2000, jobs for all by the year 2000 evangelization 2000. The ambitions are uncountable; the good will is notable and the efforts are various.

Nonetheless, the problems on ground remain the hard and granite facts that more people in our country have been impoverished, more homeless, and more living in all forms of squalor and dashed hopes. Pessimism and nihilism are on the increase and there does not seem any other way out than to give hope to humans and focus on another distant time during which humans would patiently wait for, realize a measure of set goals and give government and organizations within human societies a breathing space to re-plan, redraw the agenda and spend public money, if unguarded, wastefully and stupendously. Vision 2010 would not want to repeat the mistakes of the past.

This is why within the land, all manner of people, illiterates, semi-illiterates, intellectuals and talkers including theoreticians, magicians and serious minded people are lumped together by the government of the day to fashion out an undisputable but realizable Vision 2010 for Nigerians who are already tired of unfulfilled hopes and leaving their country of birth in Containers, fake passports, etcetera, to become free slaves in other free lands not minding the futility, absurdity and risks involved. In so doing, the government of the day is of the opinion that “two heads are better than one” in any balanced reflection.

Vision 2010 is an attempt to a new hope in the year that Nigeria celebrates half a century of existence (fifty years) as a nation and a geographical entity. Vision 2010 must, therefore, be seen as a most serious and delicate strategy to right the wrongs of the past, respond to the needs of the present and plan meticulously for the future of this great nation of which we have no other alternative. It is our God given place on the planet to work, renew the face of the earth, participate in co-operating of our environment and merit the salvation of our eternal souls. Not to succeed is to fail entire generations and to live a planless and meaningless existence.

### **A Time for Change**

The time for a change has come. The challenge of the moment is to allow rational and pure religion to emerge. This is what Jesus Christ actually accomplished in his life and teachings. This is why we believe in the future of religion and therefore of Christianity. The incarnation, that is, the mystery of the child born in Bethlehem, the Emmanuel, the 'word made flesh' is the radical moment of God directly intervening in history to reverse the trend and abuse and to legitimatise, that is orientate religion to be a tool for human promotion, salvation, liberation and authentic existence.

The incarnation is the point of departure for rational theology and true religion. In the historical Jesus of Nazareth, the God of the sky and the yonder walked the roads of Israel, lived in Egypt on exile, taught his disciples, laughed and ate, wept when there was need, changed water into wine, showed compassion and sympathy to the sick, the weak, loved children and made them his friends, loved women and stayed often near the sisters Martha and Mary, raised their brother Lazarus from the dead after weeping, and showed those who had eyes, ears and a pulse to feel that "the Sabbath is made for man and not man for the Sabbath." The Jesus of the Gospel broke Jewish fetish and ritualistic acts and the so-called traditional religious beliefs, which relegate the dignity of the human person, worth our value. Jesus allowed his disciples to enter a farm on a Sabbath day and eat instead of dying. He told people to fast but to put oil on their heads instead of pretending. He fed crowds of people who were hungry by asking his disciple to produce what food they had, instead of hoarding it.

When a woman was caught in adultery and brought to Jesus, he challenged the accusers to be fair and produce the man also with whom she was caught in the act. The drama ended by the elders leaving one by one in answer to Jesus Question: "*Let who among you without sin cast the first stone*" (John Chapter 8). Surely they were all guilty of advanced adultery with their age. Jesus has shown that God is good, that religion, that is true and right religion exists, and not just magic, he proved it in his life. Jesus challenged dishonesty, hypocrisy, greed intolerance, bigotry, wickedness, clannishness, and injustice and gender oppression. He had a balanced relationship with men and women whom he called his brothers and sisters. The religion is Jesus-like. It is not gender and culturally based. Actually religion has the role to purify culture, not sink under cultural idiosyncrasies. This is what Jesus of Nazareth, historically God, has bequeathed to humanity. I believe Him. He agreed that taxes should be paid to Caesar but insisted that Caesar should not take away the honour due to God. He should treat human beings well and respectfully,

not enslave them. In Jesus Christ, theology has become history, rational yet mysterious, straight forward, enriching and fulfilling. Jesus said: “I came that they may have life in full” (Jn. 10:10).

The *status quo*, the Pharisees, the feudal lords, the military dictators, the usurpers and the Herods, the tax collectors, the not well read, the chief priests, elders and the wealthy did not like Jesus’ idea of democracy which insisted on equality of everybody before God and the law. They did not appreciate his desire to liberate the ignorant and downtrodden from the shackles of oppressive and superstitious religious fanaticism, fundamentalism and charlatanism. They did not like his gender-neutral posture. Those who had power wanted to keep it, for as long as they could. They gave bribe to one of Jesus friends called Judas and he betrayed him. The ignorant mob disappeared before the powers that be. They changed their tune to shout, “crucify him” before the Hon. Justice Pilate Tribunal in Jerusalem.

Jesus was hung on a tree as a criminal, having gone through the judicial process of injustice. When he died, only women were found around him. At his resurrection only women were there to meet the angels. Jesus is now resurrected and the Christian religion with an authentic Christian theology has come to show that there is new way of life. Christianity all through the ages has gradually matured to see male and female in the light of God’s equal children and partners. Any Christian group that does not see it this way cannot easily convince the women and men of today. That is what Nigeria needs today.

A democratic, free, fair, just and happy community of persons where male and female are co-equal, co-respected, and co-liberated. Authentic religion can make this happen. The role of religion in the political empowerment of women is very solid and valid from this perspective. The pulpit and sacramental life of the Christian community would, thus, become the point of departure for the humanity in Jesus Christ. There are many chances. But our women must realize, like it happened in the life of Jesus, that this achievement could only come through the way of the cross; “*In Cruce Salus*” (In the cross is salvation). This new vision is the fruit of hard work, patience, prayer, organization, mobilization and conscientisation.

Men and women can make this happen. It is my wish that the usurpers of political economic, religious and cultural power will be enlightened to give a fair chance to all on the basis of merit and justice. It would then become a genderless society where women and men are sisters and brothers as the

Lord the creator made them in the '*imago Dei*' (Image of God). In such a situation, all citizens become bearers of fundamental human right and duties: they shall contribute to the common good including the right to resistance and perform crucial duties of patriotism, willingness to sacrifice and promote the common good.

### **Critique of Religion Vis-à-vis its Societal Relevance**

Any person who has researched into the social anthropological context of virtually every society in this world would come to a conclusion which states that religion is, can be and has often been a tool for the expression of self-determination, self-actualization and a catalyst for social mobilization.

Religion has been seen as the moment of salvation and liberation for its adherents, as the discipline for the improvement of the social order and as the moment of faith, belief and orientation for humankind in this world. Actually the word 'religion' has over 1000 definitions, coming as it were from the Latin '*religere*'. At the bottom line of all these definitions is the fact that religion refers to men and women's relationship with transcendence, with the divine, with the supernatural.

Religion is the moment of meaning giving, orientation, guideline and salvation so much needed by humankind in their quest for life after life, for good luck here on earth, for security and freedom from all shackles of oppression, depression and frustration. There could be two sides of this dilemma, namely: pure religion and manipulated religion. This distinction needs further X-ray. The essence of religion is the attainment of salvation in God, a word with multi-dimensional interpretations. Projections about heaven and the 'other world' expose the limitations of the present and the yearning for continuity.

### **Critique of Religion**

The substance of religious beliefs namely, the idea and belief in God's promises and God's will have gradually exposed the anthropomorphic and sometimes hijacked manipulations of the extra-terrestrial domain by clever humans. Could we know God in full? If religion is the supernatural ambient how could humans in nature experience it? No wonder, the great philosophers of religion like Rudolf Otto speak of religion as '*Mysterium Tremendum*' and '*Mysterium Fascinendum*'. Karl Marx calls religion "the opium of the people" and Ludwig Feuerbach the German Hegelian and protestant theologian who in 1841 published his 'Essence of Christianity' affirms that:

*The foundation of true philosophy is not to posit the finite in the infinite but the infinite in the finite. We should capitalize not on the idea that God created man but on the idea that man created God. The origin of the idea of God has the character of hypostatization. By this process, man projects all the positive qualities he has into a divine person and makes it a subsistent reality before whom he seems crushed or estranged and feels that he is a miserable sinner. The idea of God as father emanates from the need of man for security. The idea of God made flesh expresses the excellence of love for others. The idea of a perfect being is borne to represent for man what he should be but does not succeed in becoming. The idea of heavenly existence is nothing but faith in the terrestrial life, not as it is actually but as it ought to be ...<sup>2</sup> Feuerbach ended his religious critique by insisting that; All theology is really anthropology. God is simply a creation of man for having many wishes, which he desires to have fulfilled, persuades himself that a God exists who can fulfil them. Therefore, religion merely represents an unconscious attempt on the part of man to deify objectively his own essential nature.*

With this religious critique, the area of debate and discussion is widened. Religion is seen to have a relevance and context in inter-human society but also has to be checked for abuses.

### **The Development of the Family**

It would be existential dishonesty to presume that there is an ideal family, ontologically ideal without any socio-cultural historical context. The family was not baked in heaven and brought down to the earth. There is no common understanding of the term. Because the concept of the family is scientifically a socio-anthropological one, it is necessary that we discuss:

*“The origin and structures of the family, the concrete situation of families in Nigeria and our response.”*

Such will enable a modest, balanced and existential participation in seeing the family, not just as an ideal out of this world’ reality, and worldly socio-cultural order, defined to suit at each stage, the set goals of society and of the people involved. This is not to say that from our current understanding of human dignity and worth, there should be no postulations about the ‘ideal’

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<sup>2</sup> Feuerbach, L; *Essence of Christianity*, 1841.

family. No! However, we must make sure that each time we postulate the ideal; such ideal remains an 'illusion' until it is 'concretized.'

Many people are surprised to hear that the family had stages of development in history. What of the Genesis chapter one episode? Studies of social anthropology have come up with manifold forms of family and parenthood in society's development. Lewis Morgan and Max Gluckman have summarized fifteen stages of development of marriage and the family, beginning with promiscuity and ending with monogamous marriage and the Christian conception of family of Western civilization. We need not go into detail in this study. In the Old Testament, God allowed polygamy. In the New Testament Jesus encouraged faithfulness, not just monogamy. The technical basis of society has also been one going from the stages of savagery through various grades of barbarism to what we today call civilization.<sup>3</sup>

According to studies of anthropology:

- 1 The first stage of human society was considered to be one of promiscuity without any rule defining incest, but this stage has passed out of existence leaving no trace.
2. The second stage was that of the 'consanguine family', based on the inter-marriage of brothers and sisters, but barring that of parents and children. This too was nowhere observable, but its prior existence was demonstrated by the Hawaiian system of designation of kin. In Hawaii, all of the parent generation are called by a single term, with only set distinguished; and if maternal uncles (mothers' brothers) are classified with fathers, this must be because, previously all were fathers, in that they had free access of their sisters. Similarly, a man called all of the lower generation (all nephews and nieces) sons and daughters because, said Morgan, all his sisters were his wives, as they were wives of his brothers; and in his own generation cousins were called brother and sister. In short, the kinship terminology survives as a kind of palaeontological record of forms of marriage.
3. He incorporated this development with another evolutionary stages to grades of barbarism and on to civilization. The general thesis was taken

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<sup>3</sup> Ref. Lewis Morgan: "The Customs of the Iroquois, pub. 1851, USA; and Max Gluckman, politics, law and ritual in Tribal Society, Blackwell, London, 1965, p.10.

up and set out in a strikingly reasoned analysis by Friedrich Engels in the 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State' (1884). Morgan's own three forms of kinship terminology guided classification of societies in the stages of technical development, so that it could be criticized severely. To take one striking example: he placed the highly developed Hawaiians, one of the 'very noblest' of cultures devoid of the metallurgical arts (Lowie) among the lowest 'savages' (Prof Gluckman, *N. Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society*, Blackwell, London, 1965).

In addition, he did not examine all the kinship terms, or deal with anomalies. It is technical beyond my own belief to set out this detail, which can be consulted in many books. Our interest here is to stress that the whole analysis is built on the presumption that men only use those terms of kinship address which are warranted by actual sexual and potential reproductive relations, save that there is a further presumption that the terminology never fits an extinct marriage system, but always the preceding one.

Morgan's was only one of many similar attempts to work out the evolution of the family, and most of them depended on treating some customs as fossils surviving from the past and indicating earlier forms of the society, with others as forerunners of the future. In this research, Gluckman sets out one kind of model of this sort of theory.

4. Travelers in Australia had reported that the Aborigines knew nothing of the role of men in begetting babies. These Aborigines thought that a woman conceived when the spirit of an ancestor entered her body as she passed one of a number of sacred spots. Then when a woman felt a baby stir in her as she passed one of these spots, she would ascribe it to the entry of a spirit, and her child would be linked to that spot. The Australian Aborigines were already cast for a lowly place in the ladder of social development, so this belief fitted in well with the other classes of facts, which many anthropologists besides Morgan had thrown into a scheme of evolution. In many tribes a man inherits clan, name or surname, property, office, from his mother's brother, and not from his father. The child belongs dominantly to the mother's family, not to the father's. On *a-priori* ground, it was assumed, as by Morgan, that mankind was originally promiscuous and did not pair in marriage. Therefore, no one knew who the father of a child was; only its mother was definitely known. But the mother's brother was known, his authority over the

child was socially emphasized and hence the ignorance or at least the irrelevance of the role of a man as a begetter.

5. As groups of men began to marry groups of women, excluding outsiders, only the mother was known with certainty, so that the line of the mother was dominant. Matrilineal succession must have been the earliest stage of human society. This rule of mother-right, or matrilineal, was broken when individual men in one tribe began to capture women from other tribes; the children of these captured wives were their own and did not belong to the mother's families. These forcible marriages of women from outside the tribe became the pattern for marriages inside the tribe. It was argued that the practice of stealing brides survived in symbolic form as the reluctance which the bride in many tribes has to show when being taken by her husband. In some, she is ceremonially seized by her husband's friends in a mock fight; in others, she has to weep and be enticed with gifts through each stage of the wedding rites and consummation; even into our modern times, it is appropriate to carry her over the threshold of the new home, as if she were Sabine bride.
6. From this stage of capturing brides, as men and women became paired in marriage or men began to take many wives, the father got increasing control over the children: father-rights steadily ousted mother-rights. In all tribes which have father-right the mother's relatives have some rights over the child, and these were ascribed to customs surviving from an early stage of mother-right. For example, among the Tsonga of Mozambique, and many other matrilineal peoples, a man's sister's son can take any of his uncle's property which he pleases.

This kind of scheme was worked out with learned and logical arguments, sometimes based on elaborated statistics. Nevertheless, it was purely conjecture. It cannot be proven or disproven. Other opposite theories have been advanced with equally good logic. Some writers have argued that father-rights must have been more fundamental than mother-rights. In many animal societies one old male dominates the herd or troop, and drives away his own sons while he keeps the females, so it was argued that early human societies must have been similar.

7. Freud deduced from his psychological investigations that in this situation somewhere the sons killed their father, were stricken with remorse, instituted the incest taboo denying the females to them and from this

'Oedipal' conflict there developed human culture. Yet others have pointed out that the higher apes lived in pairs and that was the original condition of mankind, from which they fell into group-marriage, or a man took several wives, or more rarely a woman several husband. Arguments can be worked out to support all these schemes, and if one varies one's definition of what has survived from an earlier stage, the facts can be marshalled to support each argument. When one has worked out one's scheme one places each tribe on the right rung of the ladder: if in a society with mother-right customs of father-right are found they indicate the beginnings of assertion of father power, if in a society of father-right customs, giving some power to the mother's family are found, these are survival from the stage of mother-right or the other way round. Aside from their inherent weaknesses the theories are sterile, for they pose no further problems. In modern society, the State has legislated marriage in its many forms like in Nigeria as the basis for the statutory recognition of the family. Rights and duties thus emerges there from.

8. We may go further to focus on other complications. The state *vis-à-vis* the family. Bertrand Russell observes: "*within the monogamists family, there are many varieties*". Marriages may be decided by the parties themselves or by their parents. In some countries the bride is purchased. Then there may be all kinds of differences as regards divorce, from the Catholic extreme, which permits no divorce, to the law of old China, which permitted a man to divorce his wife for being a chatterbox. Constancy or quasi-constancy in sex relations arises among animals, as well as human beings, where, for the preservation of the species, the participation of the male is necessary for the rearing of the young. Birds for example, have to sit upon their eggs continuously to keep them warm, and also have to spend many hours of the day getting food. To do this is among the species impossible for one bird, and therefore male co-operation is essential. The consequence is that most birds are models of virtue. Among human beings, the co-operation of the father is a great biological advantage to the offspring, especially in unsettled times and among turbulent populations. But with the growth of modern civilization the role of the father is being increasingly taken over and there is reason to think that a father may cease before long to be biologically advantageous, at any rate, in the wage-earning class.

If this should occur, we must expect a complete breakdown of traditional morality, since there will no longer be any reason why a

mother should wish the paternity of her child to be indubitable. Plato would have us go a step further, and put the State not only in the place of the father but in that of the mother also. *“I am not myself sufficiently, an admirer of the State or sufficiently impressed with the delight of orphan asylums, to be enthusiastic in favour of this scheme.”*<sup>4</sup>

## V. Single Parenthood in Nigeria

Single parenthood refers to the situation where only the father or the mother is bringing the children up. The phenomenon exists and is also spreading and growing. Urbanization, anonymity in the cities, Western style education, economic changes, dislocation of families, migrations of all sorts, cultural disarray and abandonment of original positions, bad or ill-luck in marriages, natural death, widowhood, disappointment, demographic changes in the male-female gender equation, moral loss, the growing automation of the individual, far away from extended family in the villages, legal equality and simplification of customary law to civil law, spiritual death of a partner and breakdown of various traditional practices etc, have led to this phenomenon.

The statistics are not available but whereas in traditional society the percentage would be guessed to be around 5%, authoritative source in recent times show that in 1994 a conservative estimate could place single parents in Nigeria to 25% of marriages, contracted whether in polygamous or monogamous relationships. In many Muslim societies in the North of Nigeria, the statistics could be over 30% as we study in the *Alumajiri*, street boys' phenomenon. What is to be done? What ethical consideration is there to make of this very societal problem. The children bear greater part of the consequences, psychologically, socially, economically and personally? It is problem to the single parent and a major problem to the large society. Jewish biblical records show the creator as saying: “It is not good that man is alone. I shall make him a partner” (Gen 1).

The Bible also records that “God made them male and female and for this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife and both shall become one flesh. They are no longer two but one. What God has joined together, therefore, man cannot put asunder” (Matt. 19). What do we make out of this ideal in the face of several cases of single parenthood growing in quantity around us? What pastoral implications are there? Are there social consequences? Could the Law or organized Churches control the situation? How?

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<sup>4</sup> Russell, B; In “Russell Best” University, London, 1975, p.714.

### **Points to Ponder**

1. From the social and ethical point of view, it is wrong and inadmissible to judge why a marriage had to break up. We have no rights in such conscience-like decision. We could try to save a marriage and in fact must. But if they had to break-up, it is sad. One should work hard that one's marriage was not at stake. The possibilities are always there. To preserve love, protect marriage, remain faithful and make the family a priority might be lines of action.
2. Single parenthood existed in the past in human history and evolution. It worked in its own way. It exists today and it works somehow. It may not be an ideal stage, but we are not yet in heaven. In antiquity, it was at a primitive stage where conventions had not been elaborated to a dogma as it is in our time that single parenthood worked well. Today, the pluralistic nature of society and the double, single, successive, polyandrous or polygamous forms of marriage exists alongside. There is not much we can do about it than to work hard and preserve the values by example and hard work which we preach. Actions, they say, speak louder than words.
3. Single parenthood has its peculiar problems, just as polygamous or polyandrous or even monogamous marriages have their own peculiar problems. If we must focus on the problems caused by polygamous marriages? Either way, there are problems; which is more ethical?
4. We are told in axioms that these are self-evident truths, which need no proof. They have to be assumed before the rest of what they contain can be proven. Today, many argue that the acceptance of axioms make nonsense of all mathematical and speculative sciences. Experience is the best teacher. Ideals and reality differ often. And yet, without axioms, how could one go a step further in mathematics. Without objective truth and knowledge, could we make any assertions? But it argues rationally that among competing ethical standards of behaviour, one is higher than the other. Ethics show that the values of the family in unity help the society more than the disarray of single parenting. The topic is delicate and cannot therefore be axiomatised.

### **Conclusion**

The time has come for us to debate in all openness, the various problems and causes of high rate of divorces in our society. The discussion will of course expose a society that traditionally arranges marriages for the children, not because there is love, but because there is wealth. The exposition will lead to the economic strangulation of many families by bad governments, which create stress and tension in the family, as well as limit the ability to self-actualization of many families. One might call to book the attitude of the church which encourages contractual marriage without a certain knowledge of each other before marriage, whether by simple, innocent friendship or by dating. Is our Christian message and witnessing obsolete? Do we preach the 'good-news of salvation' or the old news of doom? Any meaningful discussion on the family, its fundamental and spiritual roles, its education, societal relevance and its biblical dimension in our times must call upon the State, the Church, the local customs and traditions, the law, the economy, the socio-political context and the environment to a round-table chat.

Only this will enable the seemingly irreversible rising trend to single parenthood to be checked. Egoism and selfishness has to be questioned on individual levels. Relevant and quality education has to be promoted. Ethical standards would be expected from all sectors of the society and this could become our basic rational measure for establishing the 'common good' and the general progress of humanity, in its march towards historical destiny. Our task and duty is to continue to create such milieu for communal sharing of ideas and of life in our mutual desire to make the world a better place. Our role and our task must be from ethical point of view, to sympathize truly with the victims of single parenthood who are in difficulty, and not to judge them. We are challenged to open up and accept, nay face the reality, before us. Positive action demands help, counselling, aid and openness to lighten the burden and re-absorb them in their tragedy into societal life. Ostracism is not an answer.

## Chapter Seven

### Mixed Marriage, the Gospel and the Youth: Reflections on our Faith in a Global and Pluralistic Society<sup>1</sup>

*“In your country, there are many marriages between Catholic and other baptized Christians. Sometimes, these couples experience special difficulties. To these families I say: you live in your marriage the hopes and difficulties of the path to Christian unity. Express that hope in prayer together, in the unity of love. Together, invite the Holy Spirit of love into your hearts and into your homes. He will help you to grow in trust and understanding.”* (John Paul II, Address at York, UK, 1982).

#### **Background**

Catholic Church is genuinely concerned to develop an understanding of human nature and to teach the truth about love and humanity as received from Jesus Christ, a truth founded on human reason and divine revelation. This truth is often confirmed in the cultures and traditions of peoples and civilization throughout ages. Its intent is to promote mankind’s welfare and happiness rather than using them, serving rather than dominating or exploiting; guiding in truth and charity rather than promoting ignorance; preaching love rather than the law. It is this vision of love that seeks to reflect on mankind’s search for the meaning of life from the beginning and to apply this vision to the particular conditions of every age.

The youth and adults of Nigeria are asking questions. They have a right to reasonable and honest answers. What the Church seeks to do is to present a vision of life in which love is the norm. It is a learning process, though, often carried out with the rest of mankind, and based on experiences gained from the various branches of science, art and literature. The Church’s stand may be unpopular and even contradict the much-accepted wisdom of the age, but that does not mean that it is wrong. A heavy responsibility rests with the Church to show that fidelity and generosity in human relationships is not just practical, it is also a norm. Moreover, it is the best way. Perhaps to link its understanding of sex and marriage to a ‘moral law’ is not the best since law tends to restrict and to prohibit. On the contrary, the way of love that Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> Ike O.F.; Paper presented to Catholic Young Men and Women at the St. Leo the Great Catholic Parish, Enugu in 2010

has shown us is the way to freedom of spirit, to greater personal growth and development, to the promotion of warm human values.

### **Scope**

The topic namely; *Mixed Marriage, the Gospel and the Youth based on Reflections on our Faith in a Global and Pluralistic Society* is a broad theme. Things have changed so much from what used to be. Many new questions emerge and old answer does not seem to be satisfactory for the youths of our time.

A growing global and pluralistic society widens the horizons to choice, to knowledge and to critical enquiry as well as to faith, which poses challenges among the youths. An era of permissiveness has set in, nonetheless, people are daily searching for meaning and for happiness. The youths accept often that truth matters but have hard time finding it easily or trusting the sincerity of adults who tell them this 'truth'. The youths look at actions of elders and or institutions, not just the spoken words. They want conviction and witnessing, not merely authoritative statements. Our young people are the "Church of today, as well as the hope of tomorrow."

The question of 'mixed marriage' is a very important one that raises a number of delicate ecumenical and pastoral issues. In our society, mixed marriage is more likely than ever. The days when Catholics live apart from the rest of the society are over, and we have become used to living in a society where men and women of different races, cultures and traditions mix together. These changing patterns of the society are bound to be reflected in the experience of the Church. The Church's policy concerning marriages between Catholics and those of other faiths was clearly spelt out by Pope Paul VI in a '*Motu Proprio Matrimonia Mista*' in 1970. The question has been asked as to the appropriateness of the term 'mixed marriage' to describe a variety of different situations. Pope Paul VI himself was well aware of the problems created by this particular term. In many parts of the world, it is used to describe marriage between members of different races and religions.

On the one hand, it refers to the marriage of a Catholic to a non-baptized person or to someone who, although baptized, is not an active member of any Church. On the other hand, it also refers to the marriage of two practicing and committed Christians. It is obviously important to make the distinction very clear. The suggestion has been made many times that the

more appropriate term to describe the second kind of marriage would be 'inter-Church marriage'.<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, great confusion could be caused if different terminologies would be adopted for different cases, therefore, generally, the term mixed marriage shall be used.

### **What is Marriage?**

Marriage is the state in which two people live together in a partnership of love and life, expressed through free consent, that is, not being under restraint; and not impeded by any natural or ecclesiastical law for the purposes of founding a family, for assisting one another in mutual help, for bringing up the children entrusted to them by God, that is to say, for securing their physical, mental and moral development until such time as they are capable of carrying on for themselves. If consent is lacking, there is no marriage.<sup>3</sup>

The consent must be an act of the will of each of the contracting parties, free of coercion or grave external fear. No human power can substitute for this consent. If this freedom is lacking, the marriage is invalid. In the beginning, the command was given by God to men to increase and multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28). It is evident, therefore, that if God instituted this natural contract of matrimony, it is a holy thing. The state of matrimony is a good state; it follows naturally upon a mutual agreement, which is called contract.

In Bible Old Testament; "Therefore, a man shall leave his mother and father and shall cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh"(Matt. 23: 24). Throughout the Old Testament, marriage was a natural and holy contract. In the New Testament, Jesus on the occasion of His miracle at the marriage feast at Cana, (John 2:1-11) sanctified marriage in a particular way and raised it to the level of a sacrament, that is "*an outward sign of inward grace*".

Sacramental marriage means that those who enter into it enter into a holy and a sacred state of marriage in which they receive an increase of sanctifying

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<sup>2</sup> Refer to the CTS Publication, London 1990; Mixed Marriages: The revised directory promulgated by the Bishops Conference of England and Wales, 30.04.1990.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Code of Canon Law, CIC, 1057 paragraph 1; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1983, Numbers 1625 – 1629.

grace; they are raised, as it were, to a higher plane of supernatural activity, and at the same time have a right to all the necessary grace that their state required from time to time. It can truly be said that those who fulfil their duties in the married state, both to themselves and to their children, arrive very easily at a high state of sanctity. The elements essential to Christian marriage as contained in *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council, 1965, in numbers 47 to 52 are:

- \* *The essence of the matrimonial consent itself, namely, the exchange of the right to sexual intercourse which is open to the generation of new life;*
- \* *The unity of marriage, namely that this right is to be exchanged with no other person during the lifetime of the other partner;*
- \* *The permanence of marriage, namely, indissolubility and that this right is intended to remain as long as both live.*

The Code of Canon Law says that our Lord raised to the dignity of Sacrament the very contract of matrimony between baptized persons, and there can be no valid contract of marriage without it being a Sacrament. All those who are validly baptized, that is to say, really baptized, when they contract marriage between themselves receive the Sacrament of matrimony whether they know it or not, whether they will it or no not. In a mixed marriage between a Catholic or a baptized non-Catholic and one who is not baptized, there is no Sacrament but only the natural bond of matrimony.

But if the unbaptised partner should at a later date become baptized then that natural matrimony becomes a Sacramental marriage. It is important to remember this in the case of what is called 'mixed' marriages, when the non-Catholic partner is converted at a later date to the Faith, but of course if both parties were validly baptized and married, the marriage is a sacrament from the beginning.<sup>4</sup>

### **Mixed Marriages**

The basic attitude of the Church has always been to pay special attention and render pastoral care to those who enter into the married state, both in preparation state and in the continuing support after marriage. The Catholic Church speaks of the family as the 'domestic Church', and is well aware that unity within the family is always something vital to the stability and development of the marriage. There are so many factors today which militate

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Dom Peter Flood, OSB, *Matrimony and Nullity*, CTS Publications, No. S 247, London, 1971.

against that vital unity that the Church is naturally worried about blessing a union when religion itself might become a source of division. Yet, religion, different though they are, could form a good basis for a life and love relationship between two mature adults, leading to mutual fulfilment. The Catholic Church has a special concern for marriages between Catholics and persons of other Christian traditions or other faiths. Experience shows that certain problems arise in many mixed marriages. Preparation for marriage is part of a much larger programme of preparation for life, and it is the duty of parents, priests, and appropriate schools or centres of formation.

Writing in 1970, Pope Paul VI spoke of the Church's duty of discouraging mixed marriage, and of the Church's clear preference that "Catholics be able in matrimony to attain perfect union of mind and full communion of life." At the same time, the Pope was at pains to point out that, men and women have a natural right to marry and beget children, and that the Church must ensure that her laws do justice to the demands of God's law and to the right to enter into marriage in accordance with God's law. The points stressed by Paul VI are equally valid today, and will remain so.

*"In entering into marriage, the Catholic partner must be reminded of the conscientious obligation they have of doing nothing to endanger their own faith; of doing all that they can to pass on that faith to their children; and to their children; and of respecting the conscientious convictions of their partners in marriage."*

At the outset it is important that we should distinguish clearly between different kinds of 'mixed marriage'. According to the Motu Proprio of Pope Paul VI:

*Neither in doctrine nor in law does the Church place on the same level a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic, and one between a Catholic and an unbaptized person; for as the Second Vatican Council declared, those who, though they are not Catholics, "believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are brought into a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church". Moreover, although eastern Christians who have been baptized outside the Catholic Church are separated from communion with us, they possess true sacraments, above all the Priesthood and the Eucharist, whereby they are joined to us in a very close relationship. Undoubtedly there exists a marriage between baptized persons, since such a marriage is a true*

*sacrament, a certain communion of spiritual benefits which is lacking in a marriage entered into by a baptized person and one who is not baptized.*<sup>5</sup>

The Church is concerned to show proper respect for the beliefs and convictions of others. It is not possible to spell out in precise detail how each couple will solve the problems that sometimes arise when the sincere beliefs and convictions of each partner are in conflict.

It is however, necessary to insist that those who are about to enter into marriage should recognize and face up to their responsibilities in this area. When two people are planning to get married, they are much more open to God's grace and His influence. The experience of being in love is one that touches people very deeply. You cannot quench love. But you can bend your position because of love. This could be a good point for the Catholics towards the non-Catholic partners. Love should make intending couples to be willing and ready to do anything good for each other. This is an opportunity for the clergyman and the parents to deepen the faith of the Catholic partner, and to alert the other partner to the seriousness with which the Church approaches marriage.

Mixed marriage in modern society is always likely to bring to the surface the difference between the Catholic understanding of marriage and that of others. Among Christians, there may well be differences about the nature of marriage as a Sacrament, the importance the Church attaches to the celebration of marriage within the Church, and about certain moral principles pertaining to marriage and family life. These questions can only be fully resolved when Christian unity is restored.

Meanwhile, it would be desirable if Catholics are fully aware of the teaching of the Church in these matters as well as being sensitive to the different views of other Christians. Where a marriage takes place between a Christian and an unbaptised person, this difference may well be far more radical. In practice, the same will often be true where the other partner has been baptized but has no actual experience of Christian faith or practice.

It is wise to anticipate that in both of these cases, the Christian view of marriage may well be entirely unfamiliar. Thus, the requirements of the Church that Catholics should marry according to 'canonical form', that is, in

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<sup>5</sup> Paul VI, *Matrimonial Mixta*, 1970.

the presence of a priest and two witnesses, are a matter of Church discipline, and can be dispensed by the Church for serious reasons. However, the requirement that marriage be accepted as a life-long union of two people in love and fidelity is an expression of the teaching of Christ himself, and can never be altered. The same is true of the duty to preserve one's faith.

### **The Church's Norms**

The new Code of Canon Law, which came into force on 27th November 1983, states the following in Canons 1124, 1125 and 1126:

*“Without the express permission of the competent authority, marriage is prohibited between two baptized persons, one of whom was baptized in the Catholic Church or received into it after baptism and has not defected from it by a formal act and the other of whom belongs to a Church or ecclesial community not in full communion with the Catholic Church.”*

What may be important in this legislation and different from the old Canon Law of 1917 is that:

'Mixed Religion' is no longer referred to as an impediment requiring dispensation. What is required is the express permission of the competent authority, that is, of the Local Ordinary. Without that permission, a marriage would be unlawful, but not invalid. The Church's legislation now takes account of those Catholics who have defected from the Church by a formal act. Such persons are not obliged to observe 'canonical form'. However, they do require permission to marry Catholics as such marriages are now considered to be mixed marriages.

*“The Local Ordinary can grant his permission if there is a just and reasonable cause. He is not to grant it unless the following conditions are fulfilled” (Canon 1125).*

- \* *The Catholic party is to declare that he or she is prepared to remove dangers of defecting from the faith, and is to make a sincere promise to do all in his or her power in order that all the children be baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church;*
- \* *The other party is to be informed in good time of these promises to be made by the Catholic party, so that it is certain that he or she is truly aware of the promises and of the obligation of the Catholic party;*

- \* *Both parties are to be instructed about the purposes and essential properties of marriage, which are not to be excluded by either contracting.*

It is important to note that the new code requires “a just and reasonable cause” to justify a dispensation, which should not be interpreted in a negative sense only different from the 1917 code which required “a grace reason”.

*“The spiritual maturity of the couple and their ability to face up together to the difficulties of a mixed marriage would also be a just and reasonable cause for granting the required permission. The Local Ordinaries and other pastors of souls are to see to it that the Catholic spouse and the children born of a mixed marriage are not without the spiritual help needed to fulfil their obligations: they are also to assist the spouses to foster the unity of conjugal and family life.” (Canon 1129).*

Couples that have entered into a mixed marriage have a special call on the pastoral care of the Church community and of the clergy. There can often be pastoral difficulties for such couples, and they are entitled to the Church for pastoral care. This responsibility can only be met fully when the whole parish community is involved in the support of marriage and family life. In the case of marriage between Catholics and persons from another Christian tradition, this pastoral care should be given whenever possible in co-operation with the clergy of the Catholics partners.

### **Gospel Values and Conclusion**

What the Gospel makes clear is that love is the driving principle and motivation for creation, the incarnation and salvation of mankind. “*God loved the world so much that he sent his only begotten son*” (John 3:16). Much of what Jesus urged his disciples to be, to do and to teach is “to love one another” (John 13:34). In its teaching on love and marriage, the Catholic Church takes up the theme of love, being giving of self to secure the wellbeing of the other.

What make life interesting and exciting are the endless possibilities for growth and development. Like love, marriage is a challenge to a couple to help each other to grow and develop the positive sides of their character. They can do this by learning to cope with life together, enjoying the good times and weathering the bad times. Romance can suffer a severe shock when confronted with the limitations placed on dreams by shortage of money. Genuine love helps when confronted with these challenges and responds with “for better for worse”. It expresses what may be too complicated or too sensitive to put into words. It can express gratitude,

hope, forgiveness, acceptance and equality. It brings with it the ultimate in intimacy, in sharing one's very self in mutual possession.



## *Chapter Eight*

### **Potentialities for Development in Traditional, Social and Economic Structures in West Africa**

#### **Section I**

##### **Introduction;**

This topic is as exciting as it is difficult, for what is Africa? Who is African? And where do the identities and the differences start or end? The answers to these questions' expose a poor medley of contradictory answers.

Within the continent itself, there is a dramatic *petitio principii* in vogue. The Ogbunike Clansman, ignorant of the geography and politics of Africa is categorized as an "African". For him, he is an Ogbunike man, period.

The standard Massai or Kikuyu clansman who is antagonistic to the Kenya National idea and reality is designated an "African".

The Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa tribesman who consider Nigeria not as a nation but merely a geographical expression and who fight the Nigerian Nation answer Africans.

In Uganda, there was a policy and praxis of "Africanisation" which identified Tanzanians as aliens. Right now, there are religious ethnic, political and tribal conflicts within Liberia, Togo, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroun and all over the continent. Nigeria today for example, is a country with over one hundred million people. A notable external similarity is the color of the black skin. Its people have about 250 languages, different values, ideas about life and cultural patterns.

The Nigerian Society is so diversified that with a journey from the Northern part to the South of the same United Country, one actually feels like having traveled through so many nations in one Country. The difficulty in discussing easily a pan-African identity would be readily understood from this example.

You would therefore, ladies and gentlemen, see with me, that to talk about Africa and its heritage, one has to trail on grounds that contain major *petitio principii* and contradictions. We have before us the search like Heidegger

would say; "for knowledge which is capable of being on the look out for something and seeing it as it really is". The search for and the seizure of that being (knowledge) which can be properly called and identified as African seems to be as ontological as the description of this ontology may be phenomenological.

### **Back-Ground**

In June this year. Theology Interkulturell of the Faculty of Theology, University of Frankfurt, organized a Colloquium which focus was, to determine the rationality inherent in cultures with an aim to find the basis for the one Human Right for all and the Right to indigenous development.

The participants discussed elaborately and intensively from various backgrounds, and experiences the cultural, ethical and religious aspects of development, the present situation of events in Africa, the pre-colonial and colonial tragedies which have virtually paralysed growth in the continent coupled with man-made and or natural hindrances to full development. The Colloquium, I understood was part of the preparations for this dignified International Symposium.

As participant at this Colloquium, I maintained as I still do, that the failure of so many development projects and strategies in Africa could be attributed largely to the fact that many westerners ("European experts") and genuine Agencies concerned with Justice and Development unfortunately are concerned with development solely in economic and technological terms, seldom recognizing the place of other important elements inherent in the idea of development such understanding of the term. Could there ever be authentic development without man - that is without the human society's ethical, cultural, social and religious background in view?

One Fact which confirms the foregoing is the idea that many economic development models conceived in Western Nations and founds workable there when transported to African Nations failed woefully. They failed because the "experts" considered in isolation the concept of development - primarily from the point of view of economy and technology when this idea was rather broad and integral.

Of course, such modals did work in the industrialized northern developed nations themselves but failed upon trial elsewhere. One of Germany's greatest sons and thinkers Max Weber recognized decades ago that there is much scope for closer investigation of the ways in which development entails

ethical choices that are sustained in their turn by religious worldviews of widely differing cultural origins.

Max Weber did demand in an analogical fashion that there is need to search for innovative potentials in other cultures of the world which have the ability to carry on and sustain a self-reliant [independent) rationalization and modernization. Because of the specific affinity of religion to rationality, Max Weber accorded religion a primary role in this process of rationalization and modernization.<sup>1</sup>

**Culture of courses not static;**

Even though culture refers to the entire way of life of a people past and present, there is always evidence of a dynamic interplay of factors necessitating progress, adaptation and interaction. Cultural change therefore is a constant challenge for a people to maintain cultural continuity in the face of new conditions.

It is not just the transfer of technology or economy that is at stake. More at stake is the search for categories for the definition and evaluation of cultural, ethical and religious conditionalities relevant for the development and modernization potentials of Africa.

What we need in Africa are avenues for creating a basis for categories which determine Development potentials forming the basis for authentic development. Attempts by people of non-western cultures to develop themselves according to their priorities, innovative rationality, cultures and worldview have all too often been discussed as irrelevant, interrupted and stopped as history records testify to the abrupt abortions via the pre-colonial (slave trade), colonial (foreign imposition) and neo-colonial (internal alienation) strategies which interrupted the political, economic, social, cultural and technological possibilities for development within Africa. This is not the place to narrate the multifarious tragedies of-the black man. History books and our own practical experiences have a lot in stock about this anomaly which Anierobi Ngwube describes as "ethical Savagery, moral barbarism and moral cannibalism",

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<sup>1</sup> Ref. Max, Weber, Gesarngielte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre, 3.Aufl. Tübingen, 1968, pp,594(f).

**Persistent Ignorance about Africa:**

Let me focus on another matter which is of major importance as it is in itself a *petitio principii*. There is existing also within Europe an embarrassing ignorance of what is Africa, its culture, its people and its destiny. We do not blame Europe, we blame ignorance of much of what is known or written about Africa has been done by non-Africans, most of whom are European intellectuals and "experts" and much of it is blackmail. A general tendency has been to "look down" on Africa and Africans as the "continent of hunger", "the white man's grave", "the land inhabited by lions, scorpions, and reptiles and monstrous, animals", "the cannibal peoples of the Forest and equatorial regions", "the land of slaves", "the continent of heat", "dumping ground for the wastes' of the Western world", "A. continent to exploit its mineral resources", -the land of black people with black souls as dark as the devil and destined to be the wretched of the earth", "the dark-skinned people whose religion, culture, politics, art etc, is uncivilized and primitive" in its degrading understanding. Thus whatever is bad is given the term black.

Black Magic,  
Black Market,  
Black Money,  
Black Business,  
Black Devil,  
Black Religion,  
Black Is BAD

This and many others prejudices (sometimes done in good will and good faith) have been formulated by Western anthropologists, scientists, historians, travelers, adverturists, writers, cultural ethnologists, politicians, traders, missionaries among a host of those whose prejudices, misleading books and false authority about this continent have led many innocent truth searching and interested listeners astray.

**A mirage therefore hangs over the continent**

Such negative, misleading and false views about Africa seem nonetheless to prevail in some quarters still, despite several attempts by honest, good willing and objective persons to present AFRICA as it is, in its entire practice and

ethical views. Africa was already great even before Greek Civilization arrived.<sup>2</sup>

The Igbo people of Nigeria worked already on iron at a time when historically Europe was still in the stone age, like Ngwuibe Anierobi has written elsewhere. "In every civilization you find the African Architect".

For us Africans, a Symposium of this nature has its worth and value strongly in the fact that it grants us the opportunity before policy makers to say without an interpreter what is and what is not AFRICA ourselves. We can reverse the frames of reference establish our values differently; give new definitions from African frames of reference; leading to interpretations, perceptions, goals, responses and behaviour patterns which make Africans to be authentic without necessarily contradicting the university truths that guide mankind.

The reality of Africa is more complex than many think. It is dangerous to treat the continent as one piece. It is clearly not a famine'-stricken continent, for example, even if natural and man-made causes unleash famine in some areas over time now.

Africa is the name of the continent located in the Eastern hemisphere of the earth, south of the Caucasian Europe, South of Mongoloid Asia, between the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans. It is the continent where scientists teach us that man first arose, where art, religion and philosophy commenced, where civilization began, and it is the father-land of the dark-skinned people, who beginning in the fifteenth Century A.D. were massively, racially and globally taken by aliens into slavery. It is the continent which poses itself aesthetically as a question mark and which from time immemorial has attracted men of all races and continues to call on its descendants by all means to embrace its fatherhood.

Africa is the continent inhabited largely by and belonging to the race of dark shinned people. Africa continues to claim its children by investing its colour on its children wherever they may be and however they are "produced".

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<sup>2</sup> Davidson, B., *Discovering Africa's Past*, London, 1978.

Africa also marks out its children by investing its clear physical and cultural features on them, no matter the continent or country in which they possess legal "citizenship."

## **Section II**

### **Potentialities for Development in Traditional, Social and Economic Structures in West Africa**

"People who do not look back to their ancestral-cultural heritage cannot look forward to posterity"<sup>3</sup>

The Kenyan novelist, Ngugi Wa Thiongu in his book "Devil on the Cross" graphically portrays the nature of Africans tragedy in the face of the continents present problems of degradation internally and externally in a moving parable about the peasant farmer and Ogre. He writes

"The Old man told me... of a peasant farmer who used to carry an Ogre on his back. The Ogre had sunk his long nails into the neck and shoulders of the peasant. The peasant was the one who went into the fields to get food, the one who went into the valleys to fetch water, the one who went to the forest to get firewood and the one who did the cooking. The Ogre's job was to eat and thereafter sleep soundly at the back of the peasant. As the peasant became progressively thinner/and more depressed at heart, the Ogre prospered and flourished, to the extent of being inspired to sing hymns that exhorted the peasant to endure his lot on earth with fortitude for he would later find his rest in heaven. One day the peasant went to the diviner, the diviner told him that the solution was for the peasant to boil some oil and pour it on the nails of the Ogre when he was fast asleep. The peasant said:-

"What if I should burn my back?"

The diviner said;

"Nothing good was ever born of perfect conditions. Go home". The peasant was saved from certain death only when he did what he had been advised to do by the diviner." [Ngugi Wa Thiongo. Devil on the Cross, London, 1988, p.62]. It is sad and tragic to note that while the peasant farmer in Ngugi's parable found the courage to follow the diviner's advice unto salvation by

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<sup>3</sup> Ozor Neife Ozoike, 90 year old man from Umana Ndiagu, Nigeria.

burning part of his back with oil and successfully killing the Ogre, many people on the continent have neither found the wits nor the pluck to free themselves from certain alienating, anti cultural and exploitative tendencies from the East, the West or even from introduced religion operating now in Africa, whether Christianity or Islam.

A return to the origins and a hard look into certain areas of our African culture should lead us to develop, out of these original sources, internal potentialities for development both in economic, political, social and of her fields.

This is my aim to this section, and I shall single out the, Family, art, religion, land, property, communality, law, political Organizations, economic enterprise, birth and death, as areas for reflection.

In the past, there is "ample evidence to show that programmed efforts to develop Africa built on the basement of Euro-American and Arab-Islamic experiences and influences instead of via the peculiar history and culture of Africa boomeranged and did not benefit the citizens of the continent.

This has resulted in the total collapse of the external paradigms of development orchestrated and pursued by hosts of development advisers and experts. These models collapsed because, like the Marxist model in Eastern Europe, they were external make-ups, lacking in roots in the mind, culture and philosophy of the people and thereby side-stepping adaptation which is the only possibility, for assimilation of alien-cultures for internal progress.

As a result of this ill-adaptation, this paper has joined the call by many well-meaning researchers and social scientists in Africa and elsewhere to conclude that a long-lasting and effective development in Africa must work out its own development models from our local civilizations. No matter how "Sub-standard", "under-developed", primitive and slow it may be, Africa and Africans as things stand now cannot make long-term progress if we did not move at our own space, learn from our past, slow as it maybe, nonetheless gradually progressive, constructive and authentically African.

Thus, religion, ethics, technology, culture, social-structural organizational patterns existent in African's local cultures grow to become tap-rooted models of development which can last and lead to the much needed integral development of the continent.

## **1. Large Family**

It is not easy to make generalizations about Africa. One area where many non-Africans see the original African life-style is in the family.

The essence of Community, sharing, "live and let live and togetherness was shown through the large -Family. The family was a sign of LIFE". Loneliness was unknown. Members of the kindred with problems with them and solutions were familiar. The large and extended family offered possibility for social security and social insurance. John Mbiti's famous saying still holds in Africa.

"I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am". Marriage showed in traditional society that LOVE is communal not individual, marriage was thus a union of two families, two clans, two villages and not just a love/private relationship between two persons (male and female). The communal dimension strengthened the longevity of marriage and reduced separation divorce. Egoism was reduced. Marital love and care was a societal responsibility.

Worldwide today, there is a crisis of the family expressed via divorces, population control, new models of child up-bringing etc. Could these problems not receive a different solution method in the context of Africa?

## **2. Art**

The people of the continent distinguish themselves from others in many forms and matters, art being one of them. African Art [in spite of variations in the many African Societies), share the same characteristic form, never embodies or presents suspense, essentially offers its music, artifacts, poetry drama, sculpture, folk tales and paintings in such a way as to vividly establish equilibrium and to glorify harmony. African art often portrayed society. Its typical power was illustrated in terms of a specific philosophical pre-occupation namely force. Force is, to the pure African vital. It is a universal, omnipotent energy to which all thought and action are related. To exist is to live vigorously for active force is existence and existence is force. If existence and vital force are correspondents, then none of them may be overcome. Hence the aesthetic establishment of symmetry, balance or equilibrium as essential to the production, distribution and appreciation of African Art. And hence harmony as a fundamental aesthetic goal.

There is need to discover original African Music and Art and the spirit of harmony behind it as a way of solving conflict situations on the continent today.

### **3. Religion**

Art points beyond itself. From a philosophical point of view. Art points to the Divine, to Religion, Every work of art says to the beholder;

Look beneath and beyond me for what I represent and say is more than what you see. Deeply expressive., yet modest, it concerns itself with life, in faces and figures showing man in his nature and activities in the stages of his ancestry, birth, life, death, mystery and power. Here again it must be said that African Art, because of the said philosophical pre-occupations is-never a question of matter alone, the aliment of spirit which is the breach of the Divine, of God, of God in man, is always present. For the African is everywhere a vehicle to religion, as John Mbiti reports:

"Traditional religion permeate all the departments of life. There is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the-religious and the non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life.

Wherever the African is, there is his religion.... In traditional Africa there are no irreligious people. The human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involve participation in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the community.... African people do not know how to exist without religion."

Traditional African Religion is non-institutional. It is communal in the same way that African Art products are expressions of some community is peculiar. One exists in an African Society through active participation in the art, religion and philosophy of the Community. This Geist is here called Commuality the theory of which is also called Communalism by many African thinkers. In this commuality, participation as theory and as praxis is of course of crucial importance. Because the earth provides the goods of this world, food, trees, sand, water and also consumes the goods of this world; (burial, decay, human beings taken back to the bowels of the earth), the earth was worshipped and respected. This worship was a Female-oriented type of religious show, thus the Earth as "Goddess"-a constant recipient of water from Heaven (male Goddess); a giver and taker.

#### **4. Land**

In the pure African Society governed by a humanistic Community Spirit, LAND belongs to no one. Land belongs to the people. The individual and hence the Family have the right to the sacred and secular utilization of the land, but not appropriation in the absolute sense. For as Chancellor Williams observes:

Land is seen as God's gifts to man for use as a sacred heritage, transmitted by the fore-fathers as a bond between the living and the dead, to be held in trust by each generation for the unborn who will transmit it-thus to the last generation.

How could we reconcile this existent traditional view of the land with the border clashes for land prevalent now on the continent? What new interpretation could be given to the land that it assumes its original African connotation-namely-a Mortgage to use and to-pass on to the oncoming generation?

#### **5. Property**

In African Societies, property was a gift of God to someone. Property had no meaning if somebody accumulated too much for himself. Wealthy shared their wealth with others: In other words property was a "Social Mortgage" - a thinking that could become very useful today. Respect for Nature, the Environment, the Trees, the Water was dynamically practiced. Only needs were tampered with in a religious sense. Exploitation was limited.

Is it possible in today's world to look at property less as acquisition and more from the point of need? Africa could avoid extreme materialism if only we could look inwards to discover our rich cultural heritage and place property in its right light as African culture shows.

#### **6. Community**

Taking the above together, the pure African Society is fundamentally egalitarian. It is Communalistic, In this society, every member has the right to a home, the right to equal protection before the law and traditions, the right to work, right to care for others and be cared for whenever necessary, the right to protest and the right to rebel (even against the final decision of the community), the right to training, aid and other forms of education, the right to participation and leadership in government, art, religion and philosophy, and the right to inheritance and equitable sharing of all the benefits and undertakings of the community. These facts are part of the

most remarkable achievements of the African - most remarkable because the African held to these fundamentals, age after age, as if clutching to the last threads of life itself.

The African Community spiritually validates and establishes the psychological soundness, emotional sanity, social profitability and the individual benefaction the MULTIPLE-WIVES SYSTEM encourages. Its humanist quest for the fulfillment of all proper human instinct for the promotion of love and peace," to the satisfaction of the deep bio-social impulses of all women (not just a few women in a-community) where women far outnumber men and its will to perpetuate the family, the clan, the ethnic group, the "Polls" and the race go far beyond the term "polygamous" together with the infinite brood of wild implications, racist connotations and libidinal overtones that attend this term.

### **7. Respect for Elders**

Old age in/African Culture is a gift of the gods, a sign of wisdom, a reward for good life. African Societies generally respected the Elderly and cared for them. The Old lived within the given Family Milieu and guaranteed stability and historical presence. When an old man dies, it is like the tragic destruction of a library in Europe.

Among the requirements of the tradition is the principled respect for elders. For they are transmitters of past experiences, the existential links of the past and the present, and the nuclear bearers of tidings to the unborn, the ancestors, and the spirit-gods of the nether-world. The Elder is the democratically chosen representative of each extended family or clan in the democratic government of the "Polls". He is a leader, never a ruler, being an instrument for the execution of the religious, moral, philosophical and political will of the people, who remain the first and final source of governmental power. This form of respect for the elders and the inherent promotion thereby of continuity in tradition frowns at Methuselahean authoritarianism, foxy Machiavellianism and wheel-chair romanticism. Hence the assertion of Casely Hayford:

It is the duty of the head of the family to bring up the members thereof in the way they should go, and by family you must understand the entire lineal descendants of a head mater-families. It is expected of him by the state to bring up his charge in the knowledge of matters political and traditional. It is his Work to train up his wards in the ways of loyalty and obedience to the powers that be. He is held responsible for the freaks of recalcitrant

members of his family, and is looked to keep them within bounds, and to insist upon conformity on their part with the customs, laws, and traditional observances of the community. Nor is the Elder a candidate for dictatorship or tyranny, for to the degree that he represents the sovereign idea and receives the attendant homage and respect, to that same degree must he respect their time-honored laws, traditions, and sentiments. He may be called into account, should he act or talk otherwise, and may in serious cases, be deposed or asked to die. He leads but never rules, he guides but never governs.

## **8. Values**

In African Cultures, there was evidence that virtually, the entire creation had a meaning, known or unknown to mankind. Creation was not meaningless.

The universe had a purpose in the mind of the creator. Thus Religion, sacrifice, worship Rites and Rituals characterized mankind's response in Africa to the "God of Creation" - "Chineke" Every Tree has a name and meaning. The Seasons have a name and meaning. Every individual Creature had a "Chi" or personal deity (spirit) that was guiding it. There was no chance for accident. Value was given to sand, water, stars, "intact all nature. Agricultural seasons, economy, social life, culture, law, trade and art pointed beyond itself; "See beyond me - for I represent the deity among men". Thus a deep religious worldview.

### *(a) The Ancestors;*

Humanity had continuity and history. Ancestor worship expressed the respect and debt of the present generation to those who lived before, and this respect guaranteed to the present that the yet unborn would honour the dead. In other words, the living-DEAD, the ancestors and their worship showed belief in continuity of LIFE (Eternal life) and continuity of the Human race in a historical respectful dimension.

### *(b) Faith Worship;*

Because the earth provides the good of this world, food, trees, sand, water and also consumes the goods of this world (burial, decay, human beings taken back to the bowels of the earth) the earth was worshipped and respected. This worship was a female-oriented type of religious show, thus the Earth as "goddess" - a constant recipient of water from Heaven (male goddess) a giver and taker.

*(c) Social Roles;*

The gender issue (male or Female) determined the roles of people in traditional society. In agriculture, in trade, in economy, in social life, in politics in every aspect of culture, there was clarity as to the Roles of Men or women and their inter-dependent functions. Some of these Roles were based on Nature (e.g. the woman gives birth to children; the man climbs trees), or based on traditional roles (e.g. the man goes hunting, the woman plants greens around the house). The question of Emancipation of Women (from what?) is a European question which came when Roles became juxtaposed and confused.

*(d) Celebration of Birth and Death and Events:*

The phenomenon of life, whether, in birth or in change of life through death was highly celebrated and an occasion for feasting. This attitude to life, seeing life and death as a gift, thus celebrating it enhances the dignity, of Human: life and encourages the community. This practice is very persistent till today and is exemplary. Celebration via Feasts and Events encourages community Harmony and Peace.

*(d) Love for Children and Procreation:*

African Societies loved children and still do. The barren are very sad. It is a curse for which religious rites are performed. In such a society, the future is guaranteed where there are children. The family is strengthened. Abortion is not a topic!!!

## **9. Human Rights/Ethics**

The Rights of the individual was guaranteed only within his clan or village milieu. Outside his clan or village. Rights ceased to exist. The Right to life, to movement, to freedom of speech and otherwise, the religious practice all these were possible within the ambient of the immediate cultural existence and fully guaranteed. People outside this milieu were not automatic-recipients of those rights but could acquire it by good behaviour and peaceful co-existence. Ethics, do's and don'ts, morality were given a Divine sanction, not rational/human explanation.

## **10. Law**

The Function of Law was to preserve the given community. Law came either as tradition handed over by the ancestors or as social construct agreed upon by the given-society. Law was not alien and obedience to it was not by grumble. The need for the law led to its obedience.

## **II. Political Organizations:**

Traditional African Societies guaranteed full participation of all in the village communal responsibility of government, whether it was Republicanism (Igbo Society), or controlled monarchy (Yoruba Society), or Theocratic-feudalistic system (Fulani), in all, the principle of PALAVER or communal debates for consensus was possible. Government and the affairs of the village concerned everyone. The Age-grade system, the market. Industry of arts and crafts. Social checks and balances including the use of moral, physical or otherwise SANCTIONS guaranteed the political existence of the UNIT.

## **SECTION III**

### **Conclusions**

The conclusion of this paper is a humble postulation that individual human beings living in a society are the basis of any meaningful development. Human recourses, not just capital, nor income, nor technology, nor material resources constitute the ultimate basis of the wealth of nations.

The Catholic Social Teachings identified this noble truth during the Vatican Council for the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* explicitly states;

*"Man is the author, the centre and the end of all social and economic life. Economic developments must remain under man's direction".<sup>4</sup>*

To put this in plain language: "Development is for man, not man for development".

A country which is unable to develop the skill and knowledge of its people and to utilize them effectively in the national economy will be unable to develop anything else. In this connection therefore, we can mention that Africa's search for progress certainly moves on in spite of notable setbacks. There are many positive developments and we mentioned them briefly:

A fresh look at Africa's signs of hope;

- (a) Africa is a youthful continent; two thirds of the population are below 30 years and on the whole are better educated than theirs elders, more urbanized and more knowledgeable about the international scene.
- (b) The Crisis of confidence and the broken psychology of the African

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<sup>4</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* No.63

after the colonial trauma seem to disappear gradually with the re-birth of self-confidence, new African art and a mass of literature. People now think of their continent as the prime mover rather than the object of its own development. Many people prefer to take an internalized critical view rather than copy other people, nay always blame other people for their problems. Africans are waking up to the fact that Africa has to develop not just survive with outside help or image. The MASSAI, The Igbo, The Nini, The Kikuyu, The Fulnai never believed in self pity or defeat.

- (c) There are signs of cultural revival in many countries. Local Music is on the increase. African dresses and attire is in vogue. The use of local languages, aesthetics, art; advert and various forms of culture is everywhere noticeable.

In the Christian Churches, there is a call to indigenization and acculturation to elevate the African identity via local Church music and rites, in spite of seeming official opposition from the Central authority of these Churches.

- (d) The economic record is more varied than is often imagined and fortunately does not always reflect decline and death except for war ridden zones.

Improvement in living standards such as housing, feeding, education is taking place, even if new problems in the same areas are coming up due to inadequate policies, rising populations and official mismanagement. Nonetheless, resources abound if only they could be well utilized. Signs of economic recovery, using Western indices are there and many nations of Africa are resetting their priorities along-side economic reform.

- (e) Enterprise is a popular tradition in Africa as is the market economy. Some more effort should be channeled to move from "private survival to collective take-off". Africans have to wake up to the fact that self-development and self-reliance is the only guarantee for a long-term economic survival, rather than surviving on the charity of the outside world solely.

### **Change and Challenges**

The United Nation Deputy Secretary-General and interim Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) told the 18th

meeting of the Conference 'if African Development and Economic Planning Ministers in Addis Ababa on 20th-24th April 1992, that change necessitates challenge. CREF. ISSA B. Y. Diallo, in the Courier, ACP-EEC, N. 134, July/August 1992, Bruxelles, ISSN 1013, 7335, P.59]. "The world is changing and Africa particularly is changing with it. The most- obvious signs of change there are at the moment basically, that many conflicts in and between states are being settled, notwithstanding, the resurgence of others, that a move is being" made towards democratic systems of government, thanks to the will of the people themselves, and that there is increasing awareness that better inter-African Co-operation will speed up economic integration like the signing of the charter setting up the African Economic Community in Abuja on 3rd June 1991" (Ibid, p. 59).

The big challenge for the rest of this decade is in encouraging economic and social change with both a forward looking and inward looking hindsight, promoting regional co-operation in a political, economic and social climate which is constantly changing and is already having noticeable effects in the countries of Africa. After three decades during which the United Nations adopted international development strategies, Africa has looked at its disappointing economic results and realized that it has itself to do most of the work required to meet its growth targets. Afro pessimism is destructive and surely not a way to view the continent.

The current drive for economic, political and social reforms in line with world-wide developments is to be encouraged and not greeted with polite expectation, resignation, fear, exclusion or worse still division, Africa is on the move in spite of centuries of oppression and aggression. Not all that has been labeled development has been proved after some time to be development proper. After critical evaluations, we are today able to see that technology and its progress may lead to a higher level of communication and production among men including the mastering of the environment, but many human beings-have become degraded, marginalized and reduced in their worth, basic dignity and in their rights because of this negative form of technology yes but not at the cost of man's dignity.

It is not everything development in America and called development that must qualify in Africa as development. In other words, there is added need in Africa based on our values, to set out new criteria for development within AFRICA.