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RENEWING MISION AND IDENTITY OF THE CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION THROUGH COMMUNICATING FAITH IN THE DIVERSITY OF CULTURES

1. Our mandate to preach the Good News and transform the world

At a time when humanity faces fundamental questions of life and death, of lack of meaning and the disorientation of values, of wars and peace, the 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 and has become ever more complex, humanity faces difficult challenges. For those who aim at a humanity integrated in justice, equality, dignity, freedom, peace and progress, this belief and faith compels them to stand up with prophetic courage, armed with ethical, intellectual, rational, 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 in the spirit of "caritas et veritate" (Pope Benedict XVI). This is a call that is deeply African as contained in Igbotogy and the wisdom therein of "*Onye anwuna ma ibe ya efula*" *Egbe bere Ugo bere*". It is also found in the biblical scriptures as exemplified in the life and teachings of the "*Incarnate Word*" himself, Jesus Christ, who came "*that all may have life and have it more abundantly*" (John 10:10).

St Thomas Aquinas, the great scholastic of the middle ages, upon whose thought patterns and philosophical traditions, the Aristotelian pagan philosophy of Greek antiquity was liberated and made the pedestal of Western dominant Christian philosophical thinking and theological interpretation in schools, desired to give response to the call of the Holy Spirit, as we today try to do. His' was in humble recognition that persons called to be responsible Agents working within the institutions of the "Ecclesia" must lead by working to heal the wounds and tackle the challenges posed upon mankind by horrendous poverty, ignorance, diseases, senseless wars, injustices and conflicts, the lack of good governance, dictatorships, unfair trade, preventable violence and inhumanity experienced in virtually all the continents. Today, the negative consequences of globalization are glaringly epitomes of this scholastic drive for a bridge between faith and reason.

Thomas Aquinas settled for the simple theory that *"Grace builds on Nature", that "God helps those who help themselves"* and that *"there is a fundamental link between faith and reason, theology and real life"*. This social-theological and philosophical mission was inspired by common wisdom inherited from the family and the ancestors; driven by the passion for Justice (Amos 5: 24); shaped by Catholic intellectual Thought and lived by the daily excruciating and practical everyday reality of the people of God on Mission. 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 pronouncing Social Doctrines, but also of Social Action"* (Nr. 33). Rising from the 1971 World Synod of Bishops, convoked under Pope Paul VI, the Fathers of the Synod concluded in their Statement that *"action for justice and peace and participation in the transformation of the world"*

remained a fundamental and constitutive element in the preaching of the Gospel".

This is the setting for the Mission and Identity of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition which finds its ***Sitz im Leben*** (context) in the interventions the Catholic Church makes since the time of the Apostles at each age and circumstance, *"to respond to the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel"* (Gaudium et Spes, Vatican II, No.1). This is carried out through the sharing of faith and strong hope in witness to what the good Lord has done and continues to do for the Church. It is the practice of theory, the influence of ideas on history and the action of working for peace and justice, freedom and reconciliation in order to restore the image of God in all humanity.

2. COMMUNICATING FAITH IN THE DIVERSITY OF CULTURES

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 was beyond thought and speculation, has received practical solutions by virtue of recent developments in science and technology. Consequently, 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 of *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. What people have experienced within the past few years in the winds of change blowing worldwide including parts of Africa since the so called Arab spring has surprised all. We have witnessed the arrogance of power disappear and the hegemony of dominant minorities transferring powers to the Will of the People, albeit, through peoples sheer determination often without guns in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Lybia, Sudan to mention just a few. 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, and Czech, Slovakia). The Southern Sudan remains the greatest enigma after 42 years of war between native black Africans and immigrant Arab Sudanese. 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. The recent phenomenon in Nigeria, 42 years after Biafra and the search recently for a truly workable constitution that guarantees nationality, regional autonomy, a measure of true federalism which restores peoples natural resources to their control seems the only realistic solution to the Boko Haram jihadists.

- ***Economic realities*** 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 (Cf. "The Rough Road 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, art, theatre, songs, technology, language, values and orientation. 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. On this, we could go on and on.

- ***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"*. Environmental issues have assumed in the context of Igboland, the albatross of development. Agricultural lands are used for housing, marketing or business without proper spaces for development, parks and human ecology. Waterways find their own pathways, thus, the growing erosions and gulley, the unplanned cities and

mega cities often overpopulated but without access and the reduction in the quality of life for our people.

- ***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, some conditions need to be fulfilled. The prejudices and until now received and perceived attitudes of one people or group against another must give way for a *"dialogue of cultures and civilisation"* to emerge. This does not compromise the truth but it makes the Truth a vessel in the service of charity. The opposite, which is a *"clash of cultures"* does no one good and deepens the world view of 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 "*particularism*" 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 others 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.

This is the basis of tolerance, much needed in communicating faith in the diversity of cultures. Yet, in the last five years, 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 which 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"*.

3. Theology and Life, Faith and Reason:

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.

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, as Blessed Pope John Paul II himself stated in his World day Message of Peace in 2001, that "the value of peace 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 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".