

# **AFRICA: SALT OF THE EARTH AND LIGHT OF THE WORLD IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY NEW EVANGELISATION**

## **A DRAFT PAPER FOR THE 2012 WORLD SYNOD OF BISHOPS ON THE THEME: THE NEW EVANGELIZATION FOR THE TRANSMISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**

### **INTRODUCTION AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

The Papal exhortation *Africae Munus* which he released in Benin Republic in the November month of the Lord's year 2011, Pope Benedict XVI wrote: *Today too, the Lord Jesus exhorts the Christians of Africa to proclaim in his name "repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations" (Lk 24:47). For this reason, they are called to be witnesses of the Risen Lord (cf. Lk 24:48). (AM No.163).* This is a challenge to the Church in Africa especially at a time when she has been preserved by the Grace of God and retains the treasure of true religious identity and a faith that seeks the face of God at all times. The Pope also made clear to the church in Africa, that through the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, the Lord in his goodness and mercy urgently reminds you (Africa) in the words of the Gospel of the evangelist St. Mathew, that "you are the salt of the earth ... the light of the world" (AM No.176)

This call to evangelizing the good news to the world is a great assignment given to Africa at a time when the challenges of evangelization is enormous. It is necessary for the Church in Africa to give its contribution in building up Justice and Peace as expressions of evangelisation, or better said to promote evangelical values where they do not exist. Thus, the promotion of Justice and Peace is the basis for evangelisation.

Pope John Paul II clarified his idea of a new evangelization: "The Church today ought to take *a giant step forward* in her evangelization effort, and enter into *a new stage of history* in her missionary dynamism. In a world where the lessening of distance makes the world increasingly smaller, the Church community ought to strengthen the bonds among its members, exchange vital energies and means, and commit itself as a group to a unique and common mission of proclaiming and living the Gospel. 'So-called younger Churches have need of the strength of the older Churches and the older ones need the witness and impulse of the younger, so that individual Churches receive the riches of other Churches'".

Pope John Paul II used the term to reawaken and elicit renewed efforts in a new missionary and evangelizing undertaking on the continent. In this regard, he said to the bishops in Latin America: "The commemoration of this half millennium of evangelization will have full significance if, as bishops, with your priests and faithful, you accept it as your commitment; a commitment not of re-evangelization, but rather of a new evangelization; new in its ardour, methods and expression." Consequently, the new evangelization is not a matter of redoing something which has been inadequately done or has not achieved its purpose, as if the new activity were an implicit judgment on the failure of the first evangelization. Nor is the new

evangelization taking up the first evangelization again, or simply repeating the past. Instead, it is the courage to forge new paths in responding to the changing circumstances and conditions facing the Church in her call to proclaim and live the Gospel today. (XIII Ordinary General Assembly Lineamenta No. 5)

The second Vatican Council has asserted that “the joys and the hopes, the grief and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the grief and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts”.<sup>2</sup>

In 1994, the Church of Africa led by her Bishops gathered in Rome under the Holy Father for the special assembly for Africa of the synod of Bishops. That great occasion, which has severally been called an event of grace, focused on the multi-dimensional aspects of evangelisation in the new millennium in Africa. It addressed the ‘Church as Family’ and gave methodical and profound reflections on integral Evangelisation, focusing as it were on proclamation, dialogue, enculturation, Justice and Peace and the means of social Communications. Hence, “It is impossible to accept that in evangelisation one could or should ignore the importance of the problems so much discussed today concerning justice, liberation, development and peace in the World. This would be to forget the lesson which comes to us from the gospel concerning love of our neighbour who is suffering and in need”

The issues of Justice, Peace and Development were given a great attention by the Synod Fathers. Justice is the Foundation for Peace. The African Synod emphasized that “*the proclamation of justice and peace is an integral part of the task of evangelisation*” (Ecclesia in Africa, 107). It is in the light of the Synod’s emphasis, and the emphasis of the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, and in the spirit of the Lesotho Pan-African-Seminar on Justice and Peace (1988), that we would emphasise that “A commitment of peace, justice, human rights and human promotion is also a witness to the Gospel when it is a sign of concern for persons and is directed towards integral human development”

This is so because “*the liberation and salvation brought by the Reign of God come to the human person both in his physical and spiritual dimensions.*” Jesus’ many healings clearly show his great compassion in the face of human distress, but they also signify that his mission, from the very beginning, is meant to free people from these evils.

An integral concept of evangelisation necessarily includes promotion of human development in justice and peace. In this matter, Pope Paul VI recalled in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI, 31:AAS LXVIII (1976) that there are;

“Close links exist between evangelisation and human advancement, that is development and liberation. There is a connection in the anthropological order because the man who is to be evangelised is not an abstract being but a person subject to social and economic factors. There is also a connection in the theological sphere because the plan of creation cannot be isolated from the plans of redemption, which extends to the very practical question of eradicating injustice and establishing justice. There is, finally, a connection in the evangelical order, that is, the order of charity, for how can the new law be proclaimed unless it promotes a true practical advancement of man in a spirit of justice and peace.”

### **CULTURAL VALUES AND HERITAGE OF AFRICAN PEOPLE**

*“People who do not look back to their ancestral-cultural heritage cannot look forward to posterity.”*

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 African or ourselves. It provides 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’,
- ‘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 religion, culture, politics, arts, 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

These and many other prejudices, sometimes held in good faith, have been formulated by Western anthropologists, scientists, historians, travelers, 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, seem 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>2</sup> The Igbo people of Nigeria worked on iron at Ngwube at a time when historically Europe was still in the stone age. Anierobi has written elsewhere: “In every civilization you find the African Architecture”.

### **Joy of Life**

Cardinal Josef Tomko, Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation 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: “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>3</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 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 'anemia' 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 fellahs 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>4</sup>

### **The Family and Community**

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, 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, 'live 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 is a union of two families, two clans, two villages and not just a private love relationship between two persons, male and females. The communal dimension strengthens the longevity of marriage and reduces separation or divorce. Egoism is reduced. Marital love and care is 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, it also consumes the goods of this World through burials into the bowels of the earth, the earth is worshipped and respected. This worship is a 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 respected the elderly and cared for them. The old lived within the given family milieu and were 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>5</sup>

### **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 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 a name 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. 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 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 and 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 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 miserable. 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.

### **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. Ethic's 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 down 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 'concensus' 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>6</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 useful today. Respect for nature, the environment, the trees, the water, was dynamically practised. 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.

### **THE MODERN CHURCH IN WAVE AND TIDE**

The salvific mission of Christ was foreshadowed in the prophesy of Isaiah, where Christ's mandate included setting captives free, preaching the good news to the poor, and declaring the acceptable time of the Lord’s favour. The Church in her social teaching has always toed the line of her Master who became one of us in the mystery of the incarnation to give us the fullness of life in the Godhead (John 10:10). In spite of prevailing social stereotypes of his days, Christ broke new frontiers in a society steep in ritualism, to make them realize that the glory of God is man fully alive (St. Ireneaus).

Today, the Church of Christ in America has not only heeded the Pauline call to “come over to Macedonia and help us”, she has raised her voice to question the terrible situation in the world. In effect, the Church is once more fulfilling her social functions in fidelity to the gospel and the sacred traditions she received from the apostles. Today, the words of *Gaudium et Spes* have taken a living breathing form, and the joys and hopes, the pains and anguish, of the modern church have attracted universal attention, such as to have become regarded as followers of Christ.

In our times, we find ourselves in an era of a profound secularism which has led to a loss in the capacity to listen and understand the words of the Gospel as a living and life-giving message. This is particularly the case in the western world, where history and identity have been deeply affected by events, changes in society and ways of thinking. In our cultures, many view the secularizing trend, in a positive sense, as a liberation from the things of the past or as the way completely to separate any idea of

the transcendent from the world and humanity. Although anti-Christian, anti-religious and anti-clerical references are sometimes heard today, secularism, in recent times, has not taken the form of a direct, outright denial of God, religion or Christianity. Instead, the secularizing movement has taken a more subtle tone in cultural forms which invade people's everyday lives and foster a mentality in which God is completely or partially left out of life and human consciousness. In this way, secularism has entered the Christian life and ecclesial communities and has become not simply an external threat for believers but something to be faced each day in life in the various manifestations of the so-called culture of relativism. Furthermore, this tendency is having serious anthropological implications which put in question basic human experiences, for example, the relation between man and woman as well as the meaning of reproduction and death itself.

Traces of a secularized way of looking at life can be seen in the daily lives of many Christians, who are oftentimes influenced, if not completely conditioned, by the culture of images with its models and opposing forces. Temptations to superficiality and self-centredness, arising from a predominating hedonistic and consumer-oriented mentality, are not easily overcome. The "death of God" announced decades ago by so many intellectuals has given way to an unproductive cult of the individual. A real possibility exists that the fundamental elements of explaining the faith might be lost, which will then lead to not only spiritual atrophism and emptiness of heart, but also, on the other extreme, substitute forms of religious affiliation and a vague sense of the spiritual. In such situations, the new evangelization is seen as the needed impetus for weary and worn-out communities to help them rediscover the joy of the Christian experience, to find again "the love you had at first" which was lost (*Rev 2:4*) and to emphasize the true meaning of freedom in the search for truth.

At the same time, some regions of the world are showing signs of a promising religious reawakening. These many positive expectations, resulting from a rediscovery of God and the sacred in various religions, are, however, being overshadowed by the phenomenon of fundamentalism which oftentimes manipulates religion to justify violence and even terrorism, a serious abuse of religion. "We cannot kill in God's name!" Furthermore, the proliferation of the sects continues to be an ongoing challenge.

Having briefly treated the cultural sector, we now turn our attention to the social sector, where the great phenomenon of migration is increasingly forcing people to leave their countries of origin for more urban settings, thereby changing the ethnic make-up of our cities, our nations and our continents. Consequently, our societies are experiencing an unprecedented encounter and mixing of cultures, resulting in forms of corruption, the erosion of the fundamental references to life, the undermining of the values for which we exert ourselves and the deterioration of the very human ties we use to identify ourselves and give meaning to our lives. In the process, culture becomes extremely fluid and "fluctuating", increasingly leaving little space for the great traditions of life, including those of religion, and their task of objectively contributing to a sense of history and the identity of individuals. Associated with this

social sector is the so-called phenomenon of globalization which is not easily understood, thereby requiring Christians to intensify their efforts at discernment. If we consider only its aspects of economy and production, globalization is a negative phenomenon. However, in a positive sense, globalization can be viewed as an occasion for growth, in which humanity can learn to develop new forms of solidarity and new ways to share the development of everything for the greater good of all. In such a situation, the new evangelization can provide the opportunity no longer to perceive the Church's mission as a north-south or west-east dynamic but one which transcends the geographic confines of past missionary activity. Today, all five continents are fields of missionary activity. We must also seek to understand the sectors and places in life where faith is absent, not simply as a result of drifting from the faith but from never having encountered it. Transcending the geographic confines of former missionary activity means having the capacity to raise the question of God at every moment in the encounters created by the mixing and rebuilding of the fabric of society, a phenomenon which is taking place in almost every local setting.

This extensive mixing of cultures is the backdrop to our third great sector which has an increasingly determined effect on the lives of individuals and the collective conscience, namely, the means of social communications, which, while today providing great possibilities for the Church, also represents one of her greatest challenges. Although these means of social communications, in their initial stages, were limited to the industrialized world, they are now able to influence vast portions of developing countries. Today, no place in the world is beyond reach and, consequently, unaffected by the media and digital culture, which is fast becoming the "forum" of public life and social interaction. Undoubtedly, the diffusion of this culture has its benefits, including major access to information; greater opportunities for knowledge, exchange and new forms of solidarity; and the capacity to build an increasingly "world culture" which leads to a common patrimony of values and a greater development of thought and human expression. These potentialities, however, cannot hide the inherent risks when this kind of culture is taken to an extreme, including a selfish concentration on oneself and personal needs; an overemphasis on the emotive aspects of relations and social bonds; the loss of the objective values of experience, reflection and thought, which are reduced in many cases, to ways of reconfirming one's individualistic feelings; the progressive alienation of the moral and social dimensions of life which makes others a mirror for self or simply a spectator to one's actions; and, finally, the formation of a culture centred on passing novelties, the present moment and outward appearances, indeed a society which is incapable of remembering the past and with no sense of the future. In this sector, the new evangelization means that Christians need to show boldness in these "new *aeropaghi*", where they live everyday, and find the means and approaches to ensure that the Church's patrimony in education and knowledge, safeguarded by the Christian tradition, has a part to play in these ultra-modern places.

A fourth sector in which changes call for the Church's evangelizing activity, is the economy. On many occasions, the Magisterium of many Popes has denounced the growing disproportion in the northern and southern hemispheres in access to resources

and their distribution as well as the damage to creation. The persistent economic crisis today illustrates the problem of using material forces to establish rules in a global market intended to ensure greater justice in relations among peoples. Although the communications media is giving less coverage to these problems, beginning with the plight of the poor, the Church needs to become more aware of these concerns and take concrete measures to address them.

The fifth sector is scientific and technological research. We are living at a moment when people still marvel at the wonders resulting from continual advances in scientific and technological research. All of us experience the benefits of this progress in our daily lives, benefits on which we are becoming increasingly dependent. As a result, science and technology are in danger of becoming today's new idols. In a digitalized and globalized world, science can easily be considered a new religion, to which we turn with questions concerning truth and meaning, even though we know that the responses provided are only partial and not totally satisfying. New forms of "gnosis" are emerging where technology itself becomes a kind of philosophy in which knowledge and meaning are derived from an unreal structuring of life. These new cults, increasing each day, ultimately end up by turning religious practice into a clinical form of seeking prosperity and instant gratification.

Finally, the sixth sector is civic and political life. The changes which have taken place since the Second Vatican Council can rightly be called colossal. The fall of Communism, which ended the division of the western world into two blocks, has helped foster religious freedom and has provided the opportunity for age-old Churches to re-establish themselves. New economic, political and religious forces are emerging in global politics from places like Asia and the Islamic world. This has created an unprecedented yet totally unknown situation which is rich in potential but also fraught with risks and new temptations of dominion and power. In this sector, the Gospel must be transmitted in the following endeavours: the duty to seek peace; the development and liberation of peoples; improvement in forms of world and national governments; the construction of possible forms of listening, living together, dialogue and collaboration by various cultures and religions; the safeguarding of the rights of persons, entire peoples and, above all, minorities; support for the most vulnerable in society; and the stewardship of creation and the commitment to the future of our planet.

### **ARISE AFRICA, PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS TO THE WORLD**

In concluding his Apostolic Exhortation, the Pope Benedict XVI wrote: Once more I say: "Get up, Church in Africa... because you are being called by the heavenly Father, whom your ancestors invoked as Creator even before knowing his merciful closeness revealed in his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Set out on the path of a new evangelization with the courage that comes to you from the Holy Spirit." (AM No. 173)

Africa is a continent filled with life, dynamism and great potentials. African situations may be bad but not hopeless. She may be economically poor, but has a wealth of

values and priceless qualities upon which her renaissance and sustainable development could be validly erected. It is the moral obligation of the entire World not to allow these bright hopes to be drowned by the anguish of her present predicament. Africa may be under-developed today, but that is only a stage in the socio-evolutionary unfolding of history. Moreover, I share the view that under-development does not imply a lack of capacity, but an embryonic stage and infinite potential for development.

For her mission of evangelization, the Church in Africa draws upon several sources: sacred Scripture, Tradition and the sacramental life. As a great many Synod Fathers remarked, the Church's ministry builds effectively upon the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Moreover, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* is a guide to the Church's mission as "Mother and Teacher" in the world and in society, and is therefore a pastoral tool of the first rank. Christians who draw nourishment from the authentic source, Christ, are transformed by him into "the light of the world" (*Mt* 5:14), and they transmit the one who is himself "the Light of the world" (*Jn* 8:12). Their knowledge must be shaped by charity. Knowledge, in fact, "if it aspires to be wisdom capable of directing man in the light of his first beginnings and his final ends ... must be 'seasoned' with the 'salt' of charity."

In the light of the scriptures, the Pope also enjoins Africa in these words: In order to accomplish the task that we are called to carry out, let us make our own the exhortation of Saint Paul: "Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the Gospel of peace, besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" (*Eph* 6:14-18). (AM No. 96)

There exists in many Western circles an embarrassing ignorance of what Africa is, its culture, its people and its destiny. We do not blame the West. We blame ignorance. In these circles, Africa is serious bad news, which serves no purpose save as a sad catharsis to a Western conceptual scheme anaesthetized by the narcotic of material hype-development. Most of these views are nourished by bias and naive unwillingness to consider Africa from an empathic perspective. Non-Africans, most of who are European intellectuals and 'experts', have done much of what is known or written about Africa and much of it is undiluted blackmail. A general tendency has been to 'look down' on Africa and Africans as the 'continent of hunger' inhabited by savages and cannibals that live on trees and arboreal arrangements, a dumping ground for the wastes of the Western World, the land of black people with black souls as dark as the devil and destined to be the wretched of the earth, a land where primitivity dwelt in its morbid dimension.

Thus, whatever is bad is given the term black: black magic, black devil, black market, black business, black religion, etc. These views are advanced with such denigrate anthropology, which only a stranger to our milieu could entertain. This and

many other prejudices, sometimes held in good faith, have been formulated and consolidated 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. This misleading image-overhang prevails generously in Western conceptual schemes, quite oblivious of history that attested to Africa being the birthplace of man as well as human civilization. The remnants of this epochal starting point of human social evolution is littered across the face of Africa, pervades many African cultural realities as well as social ambient, religious practices, beliefs and philosophy. The Igbo people of south-eastern Nigeria worked on iron ore at a time when historically Europe was still in the stone age. This same people enjoyed, nourished and sustained a republican democracy when most of the Western World slumbered in primitivism. Coming from the heartland of Africa, conferences afford Africa an opportunity to say, without the suffocating expertise and traitorous competence of an interpreter, what is and what is not Africa or ourselves as well as what could best conduce to our development in lieu of our history and circumstance. They equally grant us an essential arena to reverse the frames of reference; to establish and affirm our values differently; to give new and appropriate definitions from an African frame of reference; leading to interpretations, perceptions, goals, responses and actions which could facilitate the birth of a new dawn for Africa.

Our competence to speak for ourselves cannot be over-emphasized. No matter the depth of knowledge claimed by someone from without, no one can represent this in its entire grim and hopeful dimension save someone who came from the circumstance in question.

“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>8</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 inter-dependence and this new evangelization.