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**PHILOSOPHICAL RESPONSE TO SOCIO-POLITICAL AND
ECONOMIC CHALLENGES IN AFRICA**

JUBILE SYMPOSIUM AT THE SPIRITAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
OF THEOLOGY (SIST), ATTAKWU

7TH DECEMBER, 2012

The Chairman,
The Rector, SIST,
Colleagues,
Participants
Distinguished ladies and Gentlemen

The Fulani Myth of Creation

I crave your indulgence to begin my presentation with a narration of the Fulani myth of Creation, for this “myth” which translates into the actual facts and behaviour of humankind, underlines the topic I have been asked to discuss at this largely dignified and philosophical audience,

*“At the beginning, there was a huge drop of milk.
Then Doondari came and created the stone;
Then the stone created iron; and iron created fire;
And fire created water; and water created air;*

*Then Doondari descended a second time;
And he took the five elements and he shaped them into man.
But man was proud.*

*Then Doondari created blindness, and blindness defeated man;
But when blindness became so proud,
Doondari created sleep and sleep defeated blindness.*

*But when sleep became so proud,
Doondari created worry and worry defeated sleep.
But when worry became so proud,
Doondari created death and death defeated worry.*

*But when death became so proud,
Doondari descended for the third time.
And he came as Gueno, the eternal one;
And Gueno defeated death”*

(Translation by Ulli Beier, in African Poetry, 1966; Cf. Obiora Ike: Understanding Africa, 2001).

This myth of creation narrated amongst the Fulani tribe of Nigeria and found in West Africa allows for reflection and deep thought. Some of you may recall that as children in schools, we learnt much early an old adage that taught us the following: *Pride goes before a fall*. This is the lesson I derive from the Fulani myth of Creation and I apply it to the reality of modern economic, social and political factors of disintegration amongst nations and peoples in our time. History books and folk tales are replete with stories that teach how a proud humanity believes in its ability to make and unmake, trusting in its capabilities alone, but often disregarding *the other* and *the beyond*. The above Fulani myth of creation simply reminds one that the time has come for humanity to develop new narratives, new metaphors and a new storyline for the urgent and compelling threats that face the political, social and p[olitical pillars upon which humanity seems to stand. With nuclear warfare accumulation, actual war and threats of war, humanity faces a predicament at its ability to sustain peace for the human species. We reached a stage where the ability to make weapons and make use same weapons also translated to the ability of both self- destruction of the inventor and the larger human ecology through the so-called weapons of mass destruction. My analysis of the problematic is to locate the question of the socio-political and economic challenges facing Africa and humanity today to the question of meaning, therefore of philosophy which is essentially the search for enduring values.

Ideas can change the world

It can be said and let it be said again that *Good ideas can change the world*. Throughout human history, new ideas have had a transformative impact on humanity, resolving ancient mysteries, uncovering new creative powers and opportunities. Many strikingly original intellectual ideas and social conceptions have aided the advance of civilizations and cultures. The Spiritan intellectual and missionary tradition was founded on Ideas is led by Ideas and has been sustained by Ideas, under the guidance of the HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD, as Christian faith and other religions would profess. This message is essentially the Good News of teleology, that entire creation is made for a purpose and that this purpose can only be fulfilled if it corresponds to the eternal Will of the *Eternal Mind and the Unseen Hand* that governs the universe. This is the invitation and the challenge of this Symposium – A call for ideas that translate into action.

As many of us have learnt, the history of human development is commonly described in terms of advances in technology, but this is an overtly-simplified view that disregards other transformative agents of change. The catalytic impact of the Club of Rome's report: *The Limits of Growth* (Aurelio Pecei, 1969) is sufficient proof that ideas can change the world. Ideas possess a transformative power. Social evolution is propelled by the perception of new possibilities, the formulation of new ideas and the adoption of new values which release and channel human energy for higher levels of accomplishment.

A cursory X-Ray shall show how great human ideas have benefited entire humanity with their many positive potentials in the areas of Agriculture, specialization of labour, property, markets, cities, money, banking, democracy and the internet. These are but a few examples of how new ideas have transformed the way we live and work together. Human rights, political rights, economic rights and social rights are a catalog of values which have radically altered the fabric of social relationships, leading to the progressive emergence of the individual as the pioneer and creative leader of social development. Let me underline this theoretical fabric: "*Ideas possess a transformative power. Social evolution is propelled by the perception of new possibilities, the formulation of new ideas and the adoption of new values which release and channel human energy for higher levels of accomplishment*".

We are invited to seek radical remedy to the prevailing social ills in our countries, not merely in technological fixes, but in a re-examination of the fundamental ideas and values on which the current system is based. The limits we confront are mental limits – limits to our perceptions, understanding, imagination, idealism and values.

Crisis creates opportunities

This paper offers in summary the philosophical postulation that *out of crises opportunities emerge*. The biblical story of Genesis and the act of creation follows this principle: Out of Chaos and *Ex nihilo (out of nothing)*, the world was made (Genesis chapter 1). If challenges are opportunities, then never before have the opportunities been so great; for never before has the African continent, nay Nigeria and humanity in general faced challenges comparable in magnitude and complexity to those that have emerged in recent times.

Exactly on the social, political and economic fields do we find the need therefore for a Manifesto for change. After several empirical studies and experiences of the drivers of capital and leaders of nations, one is led to conclude that responsible leadership demands consequences necessary to sustain the earth and build a more sustainable earth, but not on the models that have so far guided international behavior. Times have changed.

Economic theory has to be radically reinvented to squarely face the reality of rising unemployment, widening inequalities, growing ecological threats, frustrated social aspirations and unmet human needs.

Take a look ladies and gentlemen at the Arab Spring and the revolutions going on in North Africa, the Middle East and the level of insurgency we experience here in Nigeria of the phenomenon of Boko Haram. When human needs are not met, the stage for radical transformation and revolution is set. Monetary and fiscal policies are too crude and insufficient to steer the essential change of course required to address multidimensional demographic, ecological, economic, political and social crises. New values are needed to guide policy formulation and new institutions are needed to support peaceful social evolution and inclusive, equitable development in an increasingly globalised and interconnected world, to quote Ian Johnson, in the just published October series CADAMUS of the World Academy of Art and Science (Volume I, Issue 5, October 2012, pp. 11 ff). This is the situation of Africa and indeed globally.

The facts emerge when we consider ecology for example. There is deepening ecological crisis driven by unbridled economic growth, soaring energy consumption of natural capital, generating serious concerns over anthropogenic climate change, severe damage to terrestrial and ocean biodiversity, increasing water scarcity, rising energy costs, and depletion of resources.

Basic needs such as food are scarce in many African countries and this indeed is becoming global, beyond Africa. We observe periodic food commodity crisis driven by rising food prices, declining efficiency and productivity, depletion of scarce soil and water resources and diversion of arable lands to non-food energy crops.

Poverty indices are on the rise. Every African nation has its story to tell of enduring crisis driven by a divorce between growth and human welfare, and aggravated by rising levels of unemployment, income inequality, food and energy prices.

The list is endless, when we consider the economic parameters of finance and financial markets. The banking crisis is driven by inadequate and unfettered markets, leading to a growing diversion of financial resources for speculative, non-productive purposes and undermining the stability and growth of the real economy.

Finally, considering issues of security, as a result and aggravating factor, an emerging crisis in social stability, cohesion, physical and social security arising from the widening gap between human aspirations and available opportunities, leading to alienation, social unrest, crime and violence, and serving as fertile soil for the polarization of society and the rise of fundamentalisms.

The conclusion of the above mentioned pressure points is the assertion that those piecemeal fragmented strategies cannot address the pressing challenges facing the African continent, its peoples and indeed, humanity today. There is need for multi-dimensional interdisciplinary approach in addressing the global problematic, identifying its root causes, engaging the negative consequence through concerted human action. It is a call for transformational leadership at all levels.

The root cause of the crisis

A more fundamental question and the philosophical route to take involves considering the root causes of these universal syndromes which we call crisis. Studies agree that these pressure points of food insecurity, poverty, political and economic instability, cultural disarray, social inequality, unemployment and ecological degradation share several striking features. First is their mutual interdependence. Each magnifies the severity of the others and is in turn aggravated by all the others. Second is their common origin. Each can be traced back to similar underlying factors and “root” causes. This is the major reason why each of these multiple crisis defies effective remedy by piecemeal strategies. Third is the fact that they are all anthropogenic in origin. All are the expression of human ideas, values and action, not inalienable laws of nature, which means, that all can and can only be rectified by a change in our ideas, values and actions.

*A thorough analysis and evaluation shows that the **true source of the problem lies at a more fundamental level, namely, in the present value system and structure of modern society. And this present value system will only lend itself to permanent remedy when understood and addressed from a deeper and wider perspective.***

Let us not forget that the first economists were moral philosophers seeking to design a better social system to meet human needs, not scientists in search of some immutable laws for the economy. Economy is a human activity intended for a specific purpose. The production of things including goods and services, the application of technology, multiplying money, and even growth itself are merely means to an end, not ends in themselves.

There can be only one legitimate aim of economic activity which is to promote the maximum welfare of all human beings over time. This means that a New Economics founded on deterministic natural laws but on the human quality is required and must be founded on rational thought rather than fundamentalist dogmas whether unbridled and unregulated free market capitalism or planned economic determinism described as communism. A human centered theory of economics must place people first, while fully recognizing that humanity forms an integral part of the natural system.

Values are not merely utopian, they define us

The current crisis confronting humanity today reinforces *the importance of values as the essential basis for global social progress*. Unregulated markets that serve the few at the expense of the many, undemocratic institutions of global governance, rising levels of inequality, unsustainable exploitation and destruction of our natural resource base, rising alienation of human capital from productive employment and rising levels of social instability are signs of a social fabric increasingly divorced and insensitive to the welfare and well-being of large sections of humanity. Therefore, it is agreeable to conclude that *at the root of the multiple crisis confronting humanity today is a crisis of values that must be resolved before there can any hope of lasting solutions to the problems facing humanity*.

These values express humanity's most authentic and distinctive features in order to nurture that intrinsically universal cultural soil which makes for fruitful and constructive dialogue. They include shared values of solidarity, expressed through the promotion of justice; the values 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 misunderstanding, thereby, nurturing the path which leads to peace.

This is the response to any philosophical attempt to mend fences and balance the inequities worldwide as it affects the African continent and its peoples: It is a universal ambition to build peace among nations and this is possible through **forging a coalition of values without borders**. Justice, freedom, transparency, honesty, peace, responsible leadership: such values are without borders. They are valid for all human beings - and these values are key for respecting human dignity and promoting human development everywhere on the globe. I am sure that many of us agree that these values are critical to protect, enhance and promote for peace and progress to reign amongst all the peoples of the world in the service of the common good.

Conclusion

I conclude this paper with the following proposals for political, social and economic action in Africa and globally:

- African and World Peace through the Rule of Law
- Alternative Dispute Resolution and an African Elders Council
- Constitutional Democracy and Legal protection of citizens
- Economic Justice through Access to means and Resources
- Political Decentralization through Federalism and federal structures
- Food security through agricultural investments and access to Land
- Regional Integration of States within and beyond national boundaries
- Free and basic Education for all
- Self Reliance through skills acquisition and access to micro-finance
- Formalization of the informal sectors of the economy
- Respect and regard for Democratic principles in a multi-party system
- Resource Control and Fiscal federalism
- Ecological preservation and protection through environmental policies
- Gender justice through empowerment and affirmative action
- Infrastructural development through Private Public Partnerships
- Zero Tolerance for Corruption at all levels with enforceable laws
- Radical changes in institutions of Governance and Government
- Culturally rooted sustainable development through religious values
- Back to the Roots with respect for family and authentic cultural values
- Non-governmental organizations and civil society actors as watchdogs
- Media presence with Ethical and Professional communication skills