

# **African Renaissance: Solidarity and Renewal within Africa Today**

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## **Introduction**

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well" (Gaudium et Spes, No. 1).

### ***The Platform for Dialogue:***

#### *1.1 Christianity and the Scandal of the African Predicament*

The salvific mission of Christ was foreshadowed in the prophesy of Isaiah, where the Christic mandate included *setting captives free, preaching the Good news to the poor, and declaring the acceptable time of the Lord's favor*. The Church in her social Teachings has always towed 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 day, Christ broke new frontiers in a society steeped 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 of ignorance, poverty and disease that has been the burden of Africa. 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 has taken a living, breathing form in this hall. The joys and hopes, the pains and anguish of Africa have attracted universal attention. It has become that of the followers of Christ.

Africa, which is not a foreigner in the church of Christ, came to the synodal attention of the church, which fruits has over flowed its banks to irrigate the perceptual universe of the American Bishops as they called America and the West to solidarity with Africa. This conference therefore presents in a remarkably unique way, an essential arena for the continuing dialogue between the African predicament, the Church of Christ and men of goodwill. For this my thanks go to the Catholic Bishops Conference of America, as well as the organizers of this forum, who in fidelity to the gospel imperative

has once more directed the searchlight of discourse on the plight of their less privileged brothers in Africa, bringing it up once more and refocusing the attention of the world on the scandalous plight of contemporary Africa. We pray that the fruits of this conference would give birth to concrete actions directed towards ameliorating the trauma, pains and wounds of the African continent.

### ***1.2 Africa and The West: Squaring up Accounts***

The platform for dialogue and action availed us by the seminal document of the American catholic Bishops conference titled, "A call to Solidarity with Africa", is a very timely action in the spirit of a preferential option for the poor. This document, which in fidelity to the traditions of the social teachings of the church went out in Christian empathy to the situation of gross deprivation presently entertained by millions of people in Africa, most providentially gave us equally, a platform for this conference in taking place in the heart of a country considered by many as the Socio-economic and geopolitical epicenter of Western civilization. It is most providential that in that it is with the West that Africa has some accounts to square; account which if properly settled on terms gravitated by Justice, the rights of man to dignity and development, solidarity and a renewed commitment to challenge the "structures of sin", would see to the emergence of a renascent Africa.

The interactions between the West and Africa did not originate in this hall. This interaction has spanned over five centuries. Our meeting today nevertheless is part of that intercourse which has variously witnessed the good, the bad and the ugly. First, it was the exploratory trade, then unequal exchange, slavery, colonization and now neo-colonial exploitation and manipulation. In almost all instances of colonization of African nations, this triumvirate pattern was manifest: first the traders, the missionaries and then the administrators. Thus there seem always to be some ontologic collaboration between commerce, religion and politic (government) nay a metaphysic that has always conduced to either development of people or conspired to exploit some others. Such a collaboration on the positive scale (solidarity) is what we intend to examine in erecting a base for the enthronement of an African renaissance.

With the West Africa has ties that are deep and long rooted in history, ties from which we cannot easily disengage ourselves. The West brought us education and enlightenment, Christianity and western civilization, but also many other things among which exploitation and underdevelopment ranked high. African raw material has fed and continues to feed greedy entrails of Western industries leaving Africa poor and scorched in the bargain. African markets have been the dumping ground of finished luxury goods, which encourage non-productive consumerism as well as provide employment for the citizens of the West. The crème of African manpower was the yoke upon which the cultivation of the American plantations was laid. Today equally, African manpower contributes in no small measure in

the trained, and semi-skilled manpower needs of many western capitals, as the grim African predicament induces many sons of Africa into emigrating to some comfortable slavery to the west.

It is with the West that Africa has the strongest economic, historical and political ties to date and the future of the African continent will be determined largely by the tenor of her relationship with the West, just as Africa's present economic clime is determined by the favor or policy indigestion of the London and Paris clubs as well as their Bretton Woods surrogates-IMF and World Bank. In fact, any discussion on the fate and future of Africa, on the possibility of enthroning a sustainable base for an African renaissance, must reckon with the West of which the American civilization has assumed a central role. Indeed, it is largely with the West that we have to settle scores and balance accounts of the exploited peoples of Africa, with a view of liberating Africa from the clutches of underdevelopment.

### ***1.3 Our competence to speak for ourselves***

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 a serious bad news, which serves no purpose save as a sad catharsis to a western conceptual scheme anaesthetized by the narcotics of material hyper-development. Most of these views are nourished by bias and a naïve unwillingness to consider Africa from an empathic perspective. 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 undiluted blackmail. A general tendency has been to "look down" on Africa and Africans as the 'continent of hunger' a land 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 dimensions, etc. 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 denigrative anthropology, which only a stranger to our milieu and Weltanschauung could entertain. This and many other prejudices (sometimes held in good faith) have been formulated and consolidated by Western anthropologists, scientists, historians, travelers, adventurer, 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 Southeastern 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 primitivity.

Coming from the heartland of Africa, this conference affords 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. It equally grants 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. Here our competence to speak for ourselves cannot be overemphasized. It is our ownmost possibility. No matter the depth of knowledge claim by someone from without, No one can represent this angst in its entire grim and hopeful dimension save someone who came from the circumstance in question. I most providentially and humbly represent the voice of Africa amongst other voices that would be raised on behalf of Africa in this hallowed sanctuary of learning. Welcome to our world.

## ***2.0 Africa; the hopes and anguish***

We share the vision and submissions of Ecclesia in Africa No. 40, which found some echo in the American bishops' call to solidarity with Africa, "that Africa is a huge continent where very diverse situations are found"<sup>1</sup>. This situation as a matter of act brooks no generalizations in evaluating Africa's problems or recommending solutions. In spite of this it would not amount to a horrendous presumption for one to reflect that the face of Africa today is a horrid patchwork of poverty and pain. About 25 million adults and children accounting for over 70% of the world total are HIV positive in sub-Saharan Africa alone.

### ***2.1 The Hopes of Africa***

Africa is a continent filled with life; dynamism and great potentials African situation 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

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<sup>1</sup> Ecclesia in Africa, No. 40, A call to solidarity with Africa, P. 4

validly and 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 underdeveloped today, but that is only a stage in the socio-evolutionary unfolding of history. More over I share the view that underdevelopment does not imply a lack of capacity but an embryonic stage and infinite potential for development.

### ***3.0 Why the West must take another look at Africa: A call to Solidarity With Africa***

The African predicament as well as the international social question cannot be resolved without global solidarity. Africa is not an island unto itself; she is a part of the whole. "The destitution and deprivation of so many Africans demand a more urgent response from the international community"<sup>2</sup> The burden imposed on Africa by pervasive poverty, the annihilatory threats of disease (HIV/AIDS), strangulating debt profile, excruciating trade imbalance, Africa's heritage of inferiority complex, ignorance and functional illiteracy of a great percentage of Africans, wars, refugee problems, and the phenomenon of child soldiers, natural disasters, famine, human rights abuses, irresponsible and kleptocratic governance as well as the consequent "self-reinforcing circle of poverty, death, the breakdown of family and other traditional support systems, loss of social identity and deprivation"(Call to Solidarity, P.13) which this portends cannot hold out for long if the West and the entire world continue posing a nelson's eye to this crisis. It is my humble contention that no part of the world can master its problems by being indifferent to the fate of other regions. Widespread poverty in the Southern hemisphere swells the northward flow of people trying to flee poverty. It drives people to over-exploit the natural sources of life, thus threatening a tremendous damage of the entire ecological system. Moreover lasting mass poverty increases the threat to world peace. Hence it is in the West's fundamental and enlightened interest to promote the development of poor countries and regions of the world. In other to ward off these global dangers together, and safeguard their own future as well, the industrialized nations have no option but to form coalitions of solidarity with developing countries. In this regard the American bishops reechoed what the church had always held close to her social doctrinal heart: The bishops told America as well as the whole of the Western world that, *"Today there is less external intervention but more neglect and indifference. While the strategic rationale for intervention has diminished with the end of the Cold War, the ethical imperatives for engagement with Africa remain stronger than ever. The United States (West) must not write off Africa as having little relevance to our strategic priorities but rather must embrace a broader vision of our nation's interest in and obligation to, the world's poorest continent."*(Call to Solidarity, P. 19)

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<sup>2</sup> Call to Solidarity, P.13

The fact must be reiterated that enlightened self-interest alone cannot suffice for an ethical and humane approximation of solidarity with Africa or resolve the international problem of development. The preferential option for the poor, which the church has vigorously advocated and pursued, is a sound principle of justice should be the propellant of the West's solidarity with Africa. This follows from the fact that enlightened self interest can stimulate but limit solidarity. Only where the wealthy countries derive benefit, only where they themselves will be affected by the long term global consequences of their failure to provide assistance, will they be prepared to assist the poor countries majority of which are in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. This is an inadequate way of easing the burden of the poor countries. Furthermore, such a limited definition of solidarity translates into an inadequate conception of development. It leaves out of consideration legitimate aims and demands resulting from the personal dignity of the poor and thus lack the central notion, which ensures truly human development.

To this end, development concepts, content and context are not fully adequate unless they take cognizance and make allowance for the legitimate interests of others as such; in other words, unless the developed countries think less about their own interests and more about those of mankind as a whole; unless they take the step from limited to global solidarity would authentic and integral development in Africa, find a rich humus of human solidarity upon which to thrive. This global solidarity will *"reorient Western foreign aid policies to make greater and more specific commitment to global poverty eradication"* and move emphasis from some morally objectionable strings tied to Western aid

#### ***4.0 Basis Upon which to erect an Africa Renaissance***

Technocrats the world over would contend that the development process is anchored on the pursuit of sound macroeconomic policies that will promote sustainable economic growth, create more jobs, and ensure equitable distribution of income to raise living standard of the populace. The successful pursuit of these goals, they canvass, requires policies that will promote openness in trade, efficient financial system, increased capital flows, development of information and communication technologies and increased technical ability.<sup>3</sup> These are sound prescriptions from a lofty theoretical angle. These shades of prescriptions may have propelled western economies to world dominance, but Africa's development plans along these technocratic, IMF and World Bank orchestrated lines, according to Late Professor Claude Ake, *"have ended up in strategies by which a few people profit, and use the gains for their own interests: the plans*

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<sup>3</sup> Sanusi, J.O, Central Banking authority, economic stability and the rule of law, a paper presented at the Ninth Annual Harvard International Development Conference, Boston, 4<sup>th</sup> April, 2003, BIS review 24/ 2003, P. 1

*are inevitably upset. There is no widespread participation of the people in decision in the political and economic fields, nor has there ever been".* This leads us to believe that any meaningful and sustainable development of Africa that would serve, as the threshold of a new dawn must take its moments about certain fundamental considerations. Africa may be a continent in dilemma, but she has some priceless values that could propel her to greatness. These are potentialities for development that must be deeply rooted in the traditional, social and economic structures of Africa.

Our suggestions here may not be exhaustive, but they are at least fundamental:

**a. Development must be about People**

Any developmental policy or blueprint that is capable of lifting Africa out of the present doldrums must centered in and around the people. In the CIDJAP experiment in Nigeria, our catchphrase is that development is about people while business is about ethics. This is the cardinal framework for any integral development of Africa. Such development must cater for the whole human person, and encompass the people of Africa as a whole: developing their spiritual, religious, social, personal, moral, cultural, economic, political, mental, educational, physical and environmental dimensions of life

This people oriented framework would create a basis for categories, which determine development potentials forming the basis for authentic development. Attempts by non-Western cultures to develop themselves according to their priorities, initiative, innovative rationality and worldview have all too often been dismissed as irrelevant; they have been interrupted and stopped, as historical records testify, by abrupt abortions of pre-colonial (slave trade), colonial (foreign imposition) and neo-colonial (internal alienation) strategies, which interrupted the political, economic, socio-cultural and technological possibilities for development within Africa. This we advocate its resuscitation. Africa must search for factors necessitating progress, adaptation and interaction. She must be challenged to go back to her roots, preserve and not auction off her cultural heritage in the face of new conditions. This scaffold for development leads us to the realization that what is at stake here, is not simply the transfer of technology or economy, but more, a search for categories and bases for the definition and evaluation of cultural, ethical, social, economic and religious constructs relevant to the development and modernization potential of Africa.

African development must be built around African realities and heritage

**b. Solidarity Must be de-colonized**

There exists this grossly perverted logic that view development through a Euro-centric prism. This hidden ideology requires and demands Africa to evolve along the same lines as the West and accept the logic of market based economic thinking: the industrialized world is regarded as the center of the world and the model to which developing countries-as marginal subordinated areas- are adjoined. It is in this sense that co-operative development and solidarity has to be de-colonized.

In the past, there is ample evidence to show that programmed efforts to develop Africa on the basis of Euro-American and Arab-Islamic experiences and influences instead of on the peculiar history and culture of Africa boomeranged and did not benefit the citizens of the continent. This has resulted in the collapse of external paradigm of development orchestrated and pursued by Western technocrats, development advisers, and experts. These models owed their collapse to the fact that like the Marxist model in Eastern Europe, they were external ideas lacking 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.

The attraction of business opportunities exists in Africa, and for the continent to join the global economy on the foundations of justice and fair global competition, the West's relationship with Africa must be redefined. Suffice it to note here that as long as Western financial institutions such as IMF and the World Bank, which were set up to help weaker economies, but instead are seen to be indulging in the sabotaging of these economies continue in this practice, Africa's and the rest of the third world shall tarry longer on the road to economic progress. Multinationals and greedy conglomerates that reap large profits from African resources while in many cases demonstrating little concern for the negative impact their activities may have on peace, stability, human rights and the environment of Africa (CS,P.17) must not be allowed to pollute the water supply only to exploit the minerals in their place of operation. Corporate Social responsibility calls for responsible business. Africa expects this from the West especially at this stage of her history.

**c. The Odious Debt Question must be revisited**

Patricia Adams was correct on her incontrovertible assertion in 1991, that, "the single most strangulating shackle on Africa and much of the Third World is the debts "owed" to the West amounting to over 1.4 Trillion dollars. The original loans were mostly put to uses of very dubious benefit to the

countries concerned, and the repayments, which despite the hand-wringing and concern the North is insisting on, are stripping those countries of their assets and impoverishing their people and environments. This observation was made over a decade ago. Today Adams will shudder at the excruciating weight and terminal frustration that these odious debts have placed upon the hapless African peoples. Today many "sub Saharan African countries continue to service these debts to the tune averaging close to a quarter of government revenues, thereby shifting already limited resources away from vital health delivery services, education, and other efforts to eliminate poverty (Call for Solidarity, P.15) Despite this, the West's concern remains notoriously inadequate. It behooves us to understand that unless this debt burden is revisited and resolved in the spirit of the Jubilee call for debt cancellation by the American Bishops, African development will remain stillborn. Any serious developmental blueprint for Africa must first resolve this question before development can be firmly established on a sound footing.

d. **Leadership must be responsible**

Money can stimulate and finance development initiatives, but it is not enough. There is an indispensable need for an enthronement of responsible leadership in African power corridors. Chinua Achebe located the trouble with Nigeria in the failure of leadership. The same seems to be an inglorious matrix of the African situation. Irresponsible and kleptocratic governance more than any other factor contributed in stifling and derailing Africa's rise to prominence. Abacha of Nigeria, Mobutu of Zaire, Jean Bedel Bokassa of Central African Republic, are perfect examples of leaders whose grotesque incompetence and legendary kleptomania are unparalleled. Premeditated fraud and systematic theft is what explains their stupendous wealth against the groveling poverty of their people. Without good, responsible, leadership, resources mapped out for development can "still be diverted from the urgent task of poverty elimination through corruption, regional conflicts, oppressive or weak governments, and poor economic management". (CS, P.20). Good leadership is an index that is indispensable to any attempt at moving Africa forward.

e. **No Alternative to Self-Help**

Our pain and angst are principally ours, and that of the human race secondarily. Granted that African cannot develop in isolation in this increasing interconnected world, which globalization has made of the earth, the main thrust

of Africa's development or any formerly colonized or enslaved people must be in the direction of self-reliance. Africa will not be built only by foreign aid policies and expert-directed prescriptions from outside. She has been given, accepted gratefully and followed a lot of bad advice from the industrialized economies and their vestigial institutions. Many of these outside models have had disastrous consequences for African economies. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposes social and economic conditions which amount to nothing less than political decrees that ties Africa to the apron strings of Western technocrats. The current Nigerian experience with the IMF and the World Bank is a perfect example of foreign aid and foreign expert advice that are blind. Nigeria was in economic distress and approached the IMF and the World Bank for expert advice and assistance. The international Monetary fund (IMF) and the World Bank brought their desks into the Central bank of Nigeria (CBN) and told Nigerians they wanted a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), a massive devaluation of the Naira, a 100% deregulation of the economy, privatization of government enterprises and removal of all forms of subsidy including the one on petroleum products. We tried hard to please the big boss in the hope that he would put in kind word for us on our debts, or forgive us our sins of profligacy. Like an incensed god, he was not appeased. We further introduced Second Tier foreign Exchange market (SFEM), International Foreign Exchange market (IFEM), Foreign Exchange Market (FEM) and International Bank Exchange (IBE) all in an effort to find a realistic rate for the Naira. The aim was to allow the currency to float and find its level. Being currency without lifebuoy, it sank. Today the cumulative effects of these expert measures on the lives of the Nigerian citizenry are enormous. There has been a massive loss of jobs both in the private and public sector, closures, takeovers, merger of companies, extremely low capacity utilization by the surviving companies. Real income has plummeted many times over since then, public utilities and amenities have deteriorated while their charges have gone up. Wages are in arrears of some years. Agriculture is in coma. Imports are increasing while exports are virtually no existent save for petroleum. The socio-economic triangle is getting very much narrower at the apex denoting a small fabulously rich minority and broader at the base denoting a mass exodus of the greater majority into a poverty trapezium from which no escape seems likely. This seems to be the lot of almost all African countries that patronize the competence of IMF and the World Bank. This invariably informs our convictions that Africa cannot depend solely on the patron-mendicant relation between Western financial institutions, governmental aid agencies and the emasculated social

economies of Africa. It is imperative that a deep-rooted development, long-lasting and effective development in Africa must work out its own 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 do not move at our own pace, learn from our past, as slow as it may be and gradually build a progressive, constructive, and authentic Africa.

Africa must urgently rise to the challenge in solidarity with the rest of the world and plot her own development "within a composite framework located in a purely African reality as well as a structured and interpretative understanding of the emerging constellation of global forces and their implications for Africa"<sup>4</sup> In this regard, a word about globalization may be apposite, if we are not to embrace another metaphysic of a new imperialism. Granted that it is a phenomenon, which we cannot escape. But like Professor Amos Sawyer's warned: "if we are not careful globalization may be a new imperialism. Once again we find ourselves grappling with a phenomenon to which we have been invited without our having any say...In fact if our response to globalization is not an intensification of regional co-operation, then we are doomed" It is in this regard that NEPAD becomes a welcome initiative that should receive the support of all concerned in the human family that is presently facing an ugly and bleak existence in Africa.

## **Conclusion**

Africa may be poor, disease ravaged continent, but it is people are not forlorn dysfunctional people who are without hope. These are people who love life and celebrate it; their joy of life is legendary. These are people who laugh heartily no matter the weight of the load on their shoulders; whose art deeply expresses their faith in God and man; a people that love, respect and revere elders as the bridge between the living and our ancestral roots as well as a bastion of wisdom and experience; a people that love children and value relationships: all in an interconnected network of social insurance provided by their extended and large family systems.

Africa became a wretched continent when western capitalistic ethic that canonizes profit at the expense of man met and spun a historical synthesis of all negative stereotypes that disemboweled and derailed African march to development

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<sup>4</sup> Machungo, M. "The Road to Kampala" in Africa Forum, Vol 4 Nos 2&3, August, 2000, P.4

In spite of this Africans are waking up to the fact that Africa has to develop not just to survive. It is our opinion that with solidarity shorn of colonial or neo-colonial exploitative metaphysics and with a home grown developmental model fashioned around the cultural values and the peculiar strengths of Africa, a new energy would be liberated to propel Africa to the much-desired renaissance.

Thank you for your time and attention