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**TOWARDS A WORLD FOR EVERYBODY
COMMUNICATING FAITH IN THE DIVERSITY OF
CULTURES:
CONTEXT NIGERIA**

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TOWARDS A WORLD FOR EVERYBODY

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Mr. President,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. The challenge: A world for everybody?

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

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

Mankind is able to master the external universe. But can mankind also show goodwill and acceptance of the universal and basic principle that all human beings are fundamentally equal with dignity, freedom and integrity; that truth exists and that all are able to know and reach this truth, despite the attempts at relativism; that faith and tolerance are virtues possible for human beings within the multiplicity and diversity of cultures; and that imbued with an immortal soul, given freely by a supreme Being who is generous, kind, almighty and the

universal judge of all that is created, all human beings have rights and duties imposed upon them by their conscience and would obtain salvation in their circumstances? These are questions which repeat themselves even as the project of intercultural dialogue considers the principles of ‘coherent pluralism’ as basis for being human in an interdependent world.

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

- The *political climate* which shows that the winds of change (perestroika) triggered off in the late 1980’s, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its effects blowing through countries of Eastern Europe, was not an exercise in isolation. In very remote villages of Africa, Asia and Latin America, these winds have come to blow with potential for radical changes at all levels of human endeavour. It has brought with it some instability in systems and assumptions previously held as sacrosanct. Military dictatorships and monarchies have changed into democratic governments. Political configurations have been broken up, sometimes peacefully, often by violence, of some states into smaller nations and countries (e.g. Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Czech, Slovakia). Countries like Rwanda and Burundi lost over 800,000 people in communal clashes in 1994, caused to some extent, by the inability to break away peacefully from Belgian colonial structures imposed on various African peoples binding them to political configurations that took no cognisance of cultural originality, social expressions and authenticity. On the other hand, there is development of the merging of some groups of nations and interest groups into unions, such as the European Union and the Africa Union for the purposes of regional integration for peaceful existence, market linkages, political strategies and collaboration for mutual benefit.
- *Economic exchanges* include cross-border trade on goods and services, capital flows and financial investments. Today, almost two trillion dollars move around the world every day, seeking not the best production but the best return on speculation. Of the hundred largest economic entities in the world, fifty of them are trans-national corporations (Figures cited in “The

Rough to Globalization”, a CAFOD paper, December 2000). This is contrasted with the fact that poverty is on the increase all over the world, not just in the developing countries, but also, for countries until now regarded as wealthy, highly industrialised and developed. With rising poverty are the rise in homelessness, hunger and lack of jobs especially of the youth. Poverty has assumed not only the forms of physical deprivation but has become worse in its spiritual manifestations as found in loneliness, emptiness, meaninglessness and escape from reality. Many people abandon their homes in forced or induced migrations, searching for a better state of life. They find instead in their new countries of migration, much of legal barriers, non-acceptance, prejudices and xenophobia that they are often cut between their desire for their original homes despite its problems, and the challenges of their new migrant addresses with its unfulfilled hopes, disappointments and exile spirit.

- *Cultural influences* are obvious in the “westernisation” of so much of popular culture in music, clothes, lifestyles, etc. Today, the single largest export industry for the United States of America is not aircrafts, automobiles, computers, but entertainment- found in Hollywood Films and Television Programmes. The globalisation of films has eroded the originality of self determination for simple peoples in their cultural milieu, making the American dream and way of life a measure for civilisation worldwide. Money has become a world formula, a new value and the mighty author of all things. This culture exposes many flaws and weaknesses. It is often based on a materialistic conception of the world, devoid of any spiritual meaning, thus the meaninglessness of the present time. Individualism is on the increase, leading to a “*global crisis of values*”. There is apparent lack of ethical and cultural ingredients in determining the global social and economic systems in the formulation of policies that guide peoples and nations as businesses carry on as usual, negating and neglecting people’s traditional ways of life, their history, indigenous rationality, social development and cultural values.
- *Environmental issues* emerge showing defects in the recognised control mechanisms adopted among various societies, particularly by dominant western nations. Consumption patterns have increased. Specifically, one has to observe the horrendous waste of non-renewable resources; the dramatic and excessive burden on the environment’s capacity to absorb pollution, and manifest damage caused the global ecological balance. People are having more than they are becoming persons with integrity. Furthermore, there is the debateable matter of population growth in agricultural regions of the developing world. This is a source of strength but could threaten the already delicate balance of resources in these regions. According to Daniel Lynch of Notre dame University, Indiana: “there is no technology to support 12 billion people at the current

aggregate consumption rate; and there is no vision of a planetary ecosystem in equilibrium with this level of industrial metabolism”.

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

2. Communicating Faith in the Diversity of Cultures:

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

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

These conflicts are escalated by latent prejudices, complexes of superiority and inferiority art, fixations, attitudinal inhibitions, exotic sentimentalisms, negative patriotisms all of which make the need for a deeper reflection and research in inter human and intercultural dialogue necessary. Besides football where football fans and their nations side their favourite teams, in a general patriotism that is acceptable (which is a lighter matter), the dialectic between "US" and THEM" seems on the increase. The dialectic and scope of conflict is sometimes widened in ideological categories based on rationalised dichotomies and contrary positions on either side, without giving way to each others point of view, so that an antinomy is placed between the categories of "US and THEM"; "the individual and the community", "faith versus life", "knowledge versus experience", "religion versus disbelief", "relativism versus ethics", "the employer versus the employee", "the particular versus the universals", to mention but a few areas of such dualistic extremes. These dualisms increase when legitimate instruments of survival and communication are placed under the excruciating pressure of hegemonies and dominant claims, thus the "might is right philosophy".

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

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

3. Context Nigeria:

Nigeria is Africa's largest populated country, with a population based on the recent year 2006 census results showing over 150 million inhabitants. Nigeria is a good example of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, with over 350 ethnic tribes, over 400 different languages, and inhabited by people of Bantu stock, Arabic nomads and traders, Europeans and indigenous African peoples. Having obtained political independence in 1960 from imperial British empire, Nigeria showcases a country of contradictions, able to contain its heritage or destroy its potentials through tensions of the nature under discussion in this lecture. With the largest number of Muslims in any one African country and the largest number of Christians in the same country, Nigeria is bound by a still large percentage of traditional African and indigenous religions. There is both a variety of cultures, music, art, wisdom, religiosity and climatic integration. Nigeria has the great extremes of wealth and poverty, all, living side by side. Nigeria's philosophy is founded in one of its major tribes, the Igbo people of southern Nigeria who like the other tribes have rich cultural wisdoms and thought patterns showing a very deep cosmo-vision and wisdom.

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

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

In conclusion, Nigerian traditional values which are indeed African values show the importance of integrating cultural values into real life through pedagogy of practice which is lived faith than just a theoretical didactic method. The global outlook has shown a tendency to ideological socio-technological and economic paradigms which is a western contribution to development. African values are non ideological, they are life, thus the Igbo saying that “*Ezi Okwu bu ndu*”, literally meaning that “*Truth is life*”.

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

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

“Show me your faith and I will show you my works.

For faith without works is dead”.

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