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CHALLENGES TO THE CHURCH OF THE 3RD MILLENNIUM

IN INVOLVING ALL IN MINISTRY: A CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH OF THE 3RD MILLENNIUM *COMMUNION AND SELF-RELIANCE: SIGNS OF CHURCH AS GOD'S FAMILY IN AFRICA *THE CHURCH: ITS ROLE IN GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION *THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN DEFINING GENUINE DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA *A DISTINCTIVE CHRISTIAN WORLD VISION

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The Church: Its Role In God’s Plan Of Salvation

Introduction

STIMULATING works on Salvation and Redemption are, no doubt, already available, but I wish to add my voice to them in view of the Church as the authorized agent of Salvation, Evangelization and Catechesis. To do this, I shall look at the Church in relation to Salvation, The Traditional axiom, Outside the Church, No Salvation, The Progressive Evolution and Transformation of the Church as a vital channel for a more meaningful and fruitful evangelization and catechesis on Salvation. Finally, I shall give a summary of what was discussed during, The Symposium on the Dialogue Between Faith and Culture which took place in Nairobi, Kenya (16-18 February, 1997).

The Church: what it is

In his book, Christianity: The Religious Situation Of Our Time, Kung writes:

The Church is the community of those who have committed themselves to the Person and cause of Jesus Christ and who bear witness to it as hope for all men and women. Substantially linked with the Redeemer and Saviour, the Church is no isolated, self-satisfied religious association, but a community which forms a comprehensive community with others.¹

As Mother, The Body of Christ (Model of Church) and The Family of God (Church image presented by the African Synod) the Church has the vital rudiments for Salvation.

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As *Lumen Gentium* points out, "By its very essence, the Church is commissioned to be a central agent in propagating redemption and salvation for all." Schillebeeckx further reiterates this in, *The Church With A Human Face*, by referring to the Church as the Sacrament of Salvation and the unparalleled promoter of genuine transformation and authentic living in all. Similar sentiments are expressed by Henri de Lubac as follows, "If Christ is the Sacrament of God, the Church is for us the sacrament of Christ; She represents Him ... She really makes him present. She not only carries on his work, but she is his very continuation." Avery Dulles expresses his view of the diverse Church models: Institution, Mystical Communion, Sacrament, Herald and Servant by asserting that:

> From its very constitution, the Church is a communion of grace structured as a human society. While sanctifying its own members, it offers praise and worship to God. It is permanently charged with the responsibility of spreading the Good News of the Gospel and of healing and consolidating the human community.

Dulles' ideas have had a great impact on the notion of the Church as the principal agent of *salvation*. In its persistent effort to incarnate the *Good News of Jesus Christ* in the different cultures: amidst changing generations, global impacts, religious pluralism and worldviews, the Church strives to help people to understand God's plan of Salvation for them. For instance, in the AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa) Region, the Church has realized that to become relevant to its people it has to establish Small Christian Communities (SCCs). These have become the basic option for ministry and effective *Evangelization*. They were energized when the *African Synod* endorsed the model of Church as the *Family of God*. As such, therefore, it is commissioned not only to make its members holy, but to guide, support, challenge, educate and encourage them to grow integrally and is theologically as a family; brothers and sisters engaged in genuine interpersonal relationships. These are deepened through the Sacraments, especially *Baptism* and *The Eucharist*: All members, the hierarchy included, are called upon to serve one another as children of the same family. In, *African Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3. Tony Bellingham defines the Church as:

> A Divine reality and a human institution: it is mystery and history; it has its origin in the Trinity, and its life in the world; it deals with supernatural realities, using natural signs and symbols; it has a mysterious existence, and a human face; it is holy and sinful; it exists beyond the visible, and within it: it is constituted of a vertical dimension, and a horizontal one: it is part of the kingdom, and it is called to epitomize it: it is a community to promote communion: it is servant at times dressed up in regal clothes: it opts for the poor, and it is imbued with many values of the rich: it is synthesis of opposites and, at times, a contradiction.

But, according to Brian Hearne, "The Church is a learning Church. Mission is based on listening, on humility. *Humility* means being in touch with the *humus*, the earth, reality. There is even need for a *theology of manure*."

**The Church as Family of God's people**

Christ sanctified the institution of *the family* by choosing to enter into human history as Saviour and Redeemer through the Holy Family of Nazareth. Therefore, the Church (*the Family of God*) should be a place where all are welcome, with each family becoming a *domestic church*: a church endowed with, and nurtured by fundamental redemptive and salvific elements of *salvation*. The African Synod (1994) will be remembered for enriching the entire Church with the image of the *Family*. This is the model which has motivated people to paraphrase the pop song, "*We are the world*" to read "*We are the Church*": It is a profound contribution to the
universal Church, especially during this time when people's consciousness is focused towards creating a global village.

A person attains salvation within the community, for the community and in relation to the community. Therefore, an individual's salvation becomes the community's and vice versa, unless one cuts oneself away from the community through sin. Within this familial framework, therefore, one may not just talk of "my Saviour", "my salvation", "I-myself-am saved". Instead, one should talk of "our Saviour", "our Salvation", "we-ourselves-are saved". Even the Eucharist, which is the life-giver of the Church, is a community-centred celebration. At Consecration, the priest (the ordained community representative) raises the Sacred Host solemnly saying:

This is my Body which will be given for you... In the same way he raises the chalice with wine in it saying: This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven and he then adds: "Do this in memory of me".

As a Family of God's people this is a wonderful church remembrance that our Saviour and Redeemer is our Emmanuel (God-with-us). Consequently, when the Church gathers as a worshiping community, the Lord is in their midst.

The Blessed Virgin Mary's Position in the Church

The Church highly honours the Blessed Virgin Mary as Mother of God (Theotokos) because she is Mother of the Redeemer and Saviour, Jesus Christ. According to St. Philip Neri, "There is no more excellent way to obtain graces from God than to seek them through Mary, because her Divine Son cannot refuse her anything." She is, therefore, a great salvific Mother whose prominence in the Church has been confirmed by Pope John Paul II when he acknowledged Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer of all as the gift of Christian proclamation within the context of evangelization.

If devotion to Mary is rightly understood, it will bring people to a deeper understanding of her Son, Jesus Christ, because she was His first disciple. As a mother, she knew Jesus more than anyone else. Therefore, she is the best guide to make Him known to our modern world. The Church must, therefore, safeguard against practices that will undermine people's reverence for her as they venerate her. It should also be on the lookout for extremist who tend to worship her through exaggerated fanaticism and fundamentalism.

Theological reflections on the axiom, "Outside the Church, No Salvation"

The axiom, "Extra Ecclesiam Nulius Salus" (Outside the Church, No Salvation) was championed by St. Cyprian (d. 549) and Fulgentius of Ruspe (468-533) a disciple of St. Augustine although its ruthlessness and harshness do not correspond to God's universal Plan of Salvation. The following remarks attributed to Pope Eugenius IV to the General Council of Florence (1442) confirm that the axiom negates God's universal Plan of Salvation:

The holy Roman Church firmly believes, professes and proclaims that none of those who are outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but Jews also, heretics and schismatics can have part in eternal life, but will go into eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels unless they are gathered into that Church before the end of life.

Besides the above, there is also the following: "Extra Ecclesiam Nulius Concilium Gratiae" (No Grace is Granted Outside the Church). Both of them condemn those outside the Church as massa damnata (an abandoned heap) as far as Salvation is concerned. Hans Kung strongly reacted to the axiom by stating that:

It is an axiom which, in its negative and exclusive formulation was highly dubious right from the beginning, has resulted in more or less serious errors, and has proved open to
misunderstanding in its application to non-Christians and impossible to understand at all in its application to non-Catholic Christians.16

He went on to suggest that:

If we wish to insist upon the negative axiom "no salvation outside the Church", then we must not use it to threaten or damn those outside the Church, but interpret it as a hope and a promise for ourselves and our community: it is true for me, we are able to say with joy, there is no salvation outside the Church for me personally. As far as others are concerned, we do better to use a positive formulation: "Salvation Inside the Church!" and so emphasize the positive truth at the heart of the easily misunderstood negative axiom.17

He stresses that:

The catholicity of the Church has to hold good therefore for those outside the Church as well as those inside it. But the test is not whether the whole world can be brought into the Church in some way or other. Of course the whole world is in the hand of God, who is the God of all men and not just of Jews or Christians, as both the Old and the New Testaments testify. 18

He insists that:

In Christ the whole world receives God's grace. If we could see God's plan of salvation there would be no outside, only an inside as stated in Scripture: "God our Saviour desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:4-6). And yet this does not mean that the whole world or even the world of believers is part of the Church. 18

In his view:

The Church exists in the world. But it can lay no exclusive claim to certainty of salvation vis-à-vis the world nor to spiritual authority. What it wants is quite different: to give selfless and unpretentious service to the salvation of the world.17

As stated in, Lumen Gentium:

The Church is a sign and instrument . . . of communion with God and unity among all human beings, and not just the general instrument of salvation but, above all, the instrument of salvation for all.18

Therefore, the Church is the principal agent of Salvation with a specific mission to minister to all, irrespective of their races, ethnicity, cultural orientations, religious loyalty, situation in life and geographical locality. These renewed reflections open up new horizon on Salvation in the light of orthodoxy and Evangelisation.

In his book, Towards A Christian Theology of Pluralism, Jacques Dupuis explains the controversial axiom of the Church in the light of a Biblical foundation, its historical evolution among the Fathers of the Church prior to St. Augustine, how it was upheld by St. Augustine and those after him, among the Popes and Councils (the integration in Church's Magisterium) its hermeneutical significance in interpreting it in the historical context and relevance for today and positive attitudes towards religions while maintaining or rejecting it. Quoting Jerome P. Theisen he clarifies any queries regarding a Biblical foundation of the axiom by suggesting that:

It would be better to conclude that the scriptures do not consider our precise question, namely, that any salvation that there is in the world comes through the Church, that the Church is necessary for the salvation of every person who is in fact being saved.18
Karl Rahner, however, minimizes the scandal of the untenable ecclesial assertion in the axiom through his renowned, yet controversial theory of “Anonymous Christianity” which was an enormous pastoral inspiration. According to Dupuis:

This theory is founded on his theological anthropology, that is, on a philosophical-theological analysis of humankind in the concrete historical condition in which it is created by God and destined to union with God.16 But, in, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 6, Rahner himself explains his theory by identifying a pastoral anxiety, problem and fears. In his view, all people are inspired in their unique life situations to respond to God’s universal redemptive revelation (thanks to God’s salvific will for all) as propagated by Christianity.22 He affirms a basic Christian doctrine that there is only One God, the Triune God, of whom the Logos (the Word, Second Person of the Trinity) has become Incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth through whom all authentic Salvation comes.23 He further stresses the fact that Salvation is not automatic. Personal effort or one’s conscious commitment are necessary for the ongoing process of God’s redemption Plan of Salvation. In Rahner’s own words:

Whether man explicitly recognizes it or not, whether he can or cannot reflect upon it in itself and in isolation, man is, in virtue of the grace offered him and implicated in him as his freedom in the mode of a formal object and of a spiritual perspective of an prior kind, orientated towards the immediacy of God as his final end. As such, a conscious acceptance is demanded from the individual concerned for the gratuitous union and re-union with God.

In the acceptance of himself, man is accepting Christ as the absolute perfection and guarantee of his own anonymous movement towards God by grace, and the acceptance of this belief is again not an act of man alone but the work of God’s grace which is the grace of Christ and this means in its turn the grace of his Church which is only the continuation of the mystery of Christ, his permanent visible presence in our history.24 He maintains that a person as an existential being is fulfilled by going beyond oneself towards the transcendentnal incomprehensible which is not exclusively for explicit Christians. There is redemptive revelation also outside of explicit Christianity, Salvation included.25 The vast majority of people (some living in nominally “Christian cultures”) have not encountered God in explicit Christian terms26 through Christian missionary enterprise, *Catechesis* and *Evangelisation*. Faced with such a situation in which numerous people are so disadvantaged with regard to Christianity, it would be absurd not to accept that there is a possibility of Salvation outside the explicit Christianity. The gratuitous, merciful, loving, compassionate, generous and forgiving God cannot deviate from His Divine Plan of Salvation for all (1 Tim 2:4) by condemning and damning so many people, some of whom are not to blame. Based on this, Rahner formulated his theory of “Anonymous Christians”.27 Through it, Rahner calls on Christians to understand the Salvation situation of those with no access to the explicit and effective proclamation of the Gospel. He stresses that all authentic Salvation emanates from the One Triune God through Jesus Christ (God-Incarnate)28 as is expressed in the following Scripture text:

... God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. The reason being that there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all (1 Tim 2:5).

According to him, it is not necessary for Salvation to come through explicit Christian symbols since God-in-Christ can also contact people through other religions and genuine humanistic symbols29 manifested in authentic humanitarian values and truths by asserting that:
With an ecumenical bend which acknowledges, honours and respects religious convergences as well as their respective divergences in perspectives owing to the pluriiformity involved, Kung asserts:

The will of those who are outside is not to be “interpreted” in the light of our own interests, but quite simply respected. And it would be impossible to find anywhere in the world a sincere Jew, Muslim or atheist who would not regard the assertion that he is an “anonymous Christian” as presumptuous. To bring the partner to the discussion into our own circle in this way closes the dialogue before it has even begun."

He argues further that:

A pseudo-orthodox stretching of the meaning of Christian concepts like “Church” and “salvation” is no answer to the challenge of the world religions. It is an evasion of the challenge and we may easily be caught by it from behind. Are we not thus in danger, without noticing it, of diminishing the reality of Christianity merely to save an infallible formula? Without wanting to do so, are we not making the Church equivalent to the world, Christendom to humanity? Does not Christianity thus become a religious luxury and the Christian ethos superfluous? As a result of such a conception, does not Jesus in the last resort become all too easily an avatar for the Hindus, a bodhisattva for the Buddhists, one of the prophets for the Muslims? The above theological arguments lead to questions like:

Why do Christians spend so much energy in aggressively evangelizing people for salvation if implicit faith is adequate? Why should there be so much fuss about salvation, mission and redemption ministry if people in their authentic human values, truths, humanitarian symbols and their upright concrete historical life suffices in salvific matters?

Rahner responds to these questions in, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 6, by appealing for prudence and realism. His theory of “Anonymous Christian”, however, confirms that Africans were already exposed to and had their own experience of *salvation* in their social, religious, cultural and philosophical way of life and living prior to the Christian missionary enterprise. It leads to the assumption that they already have some Christian salvific-cur- redeemptive elements as they strive to be existentially, historically, socially, religiously, philosophically and concretely Godly. Their cultures need not have been condemned as savage, primitive, mythological, repugnant to salvation or repugnant to redemption without having been examined critically.

Therefore, the Church in Africa is greatly indebted to Rahner for his theory which equips the Church with more focused impetus into serious *Inculturation and Liberation Theology*. Its catechising mission and evangelization ministry can now penetrate deeper into African religions, cultures and philosophy to enrich itself with their positive salvific elements and redemptive characteristics. Rahner’s theory also sheds light on the mystery of the Incarnation which gave to all the capacity to have access to *Eternal Salvation*; the highest fulfillment that Teilhard de Chardin refers to as “*Point Omega*”.

The axiom, “Outside the Church, No Salvation” no longer applies. Christianity and other religions have salvific elements which, based on general revelation and religious pluralism, do convey *salvation*. This shift of mentality is important to enhance open dialogue within and without the Church. It justifies the search for salvific characteristics in the African traditions, religions, cultures and philosophy through *Inculturation and Liberation Theology*.

The Church has tremendous power and responsibility to make people aware of God’s *Plan of Salvation and Redemption*. It has to proclaim the *Good News* to all people including heretics, adherents of syncretistic cults and schismatics regardless of their religious affiliations. It must forge ahead, with hope, proclaiming Christ as
Lord and Saviour of all. Each person needs to know that they can be saved. *Salvation* is not a commodity that a chosen few can hoard in their respective churches or work for single-handed, but it is God’s gift to all. The values of: total obedience to the will of God, truth, humility, self-control, justice, mercy, love, forgiveness and peace that Jesus lived and died for, are genuine human values. This means that *salvation* can be found even outside the confines of our churches and hierarchical structures.

The Church’s doors are open to all, even those outside its explicit dominance, control or sphere of influence. As Mother, it protects the weak, guides the youth and nourishes the starving especially those facing major challenges regarding the question of *salvation*. It ought to ensure that the preaching and lived experience with regard to *salvation* is done in Christian families so that the members can receive the blessings of the Church-as-family of God. An on-going self-examination, formation, transformation, restoration and evolution as illuminated, guided and guarded by the Holy Spirit is thus a *conditio sine qua non* (necessary condition) for the Church.

**The progressive evolution and transformation in the Catholic Church towards other religions**

The Roman Catholic Church has undergone a drastic evolution in its approach and attitude towards other religions and cultures (the African Traditional Religion included). The transformation is a healthy move because it will heal the wounds inflicted by, and to the Church throughout history. This is vital for fostering meaningful and fruitful Evangelization as well as catechesis on *salvation*. As Jacques Dupuis points out, the Church’s historical evaluation of other religions consisted of the following fourfold progressive attitudes:

The first is a negative attitude, characterized by a disparaging evaluation of the other religions, symbolized by the adage “Outside the Church no salvation”. The second is a guarded, partial acceptance and limited openness toward the other religions which, besides recognizing — with greater or lesser conviction — the possibility of salvation for their adherents, sees the religions themselves as the recipients of a “primordial” (natural) divine revelation which can be the source in their adherents of an innate desire for union with the absolute. A third standpoint developed later and prevailed at the time of Vatican II. It recognized in the religious traditions themselves the existence of positive values which, however, are subject to different interpretations ranging from natural endowments to elements of truth and grace in some way conducive to the salvation of their members. A fourth perspective — that in which we find ourselves today — is characterized by a more positive approach to the religious traditions themselves. It asks what positive significance these traditions have in God’s plan of salvation for humankind in the context of the universal value which Christian faith attributes to the Jesus Christ event in the historical unfolding of that plan.

Based on the above attitudes, Dupuis formulates four basic problematics which he summarizes as follows:

- A first problematic is restricted to the question of the possibility of salvation for individual persons who lived outside the Christian dispensation, either before the Christ-event or outside the Christian fold after it. That stage questions the possibility that such persons may have had faith in Jesus Christ without which there is no salvation.
- A second problematic raises the question of possible substitutes for faith in Jesus Christ leading to salvation. The horizon remains that of the possibility of salvation for individual persons outside the Christian fold; but the concept of salvific faith is broadened to include a variety of substitutes . . .
- The third problematic recognizes that the religious traditions are not devoid of positive values, though the exact
significance of these remains open to question. The problem then becomes the role which such values may or may not play in the salvation of the adherents of those traditions. The fundamental perspective still remains that of the modality in which salvation in Jesus Christ becomes available to persons outside the Christian fold.

- The fourth model, which our own time has recently entered, goes beyond the question of individual salvation to resolutely inquire into the significance and value — in God’s own design and in the unfolding of that design in history — of the religious traditions themselves. The problematic then becomes how to interpret the religious pluralism inscribed in the concrete reality of the present world.14

The Church’s self-examination, growth, on-going formation, transformation, change of attitude, aspirations, broad-mindedness and ecumenical bend is crucial for theological interpretation of other religions within the framework of Salvation. Consequently, it is now possible to examine and test the hypothesis that African traditional religiosity and worldview when properly explored, critically investigated and authentically integrated can be fundamental in enhancing Inculturation, Liberation Theology, Examenism and useful inter-disciplinary dialogue. There is also hope that the African traditions, religion, cultures and philosophy of life will have an impact on the Christian conception, formulation and propagation of the doctrine of Salvation and being saved. In his book, *Towards A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Dupuis identifies the following three evolutionary, yet constructive ecclesial shifts on Salvation, redemption, interreligious/interfaith and interpersonal relationships in dialogue towards religious pluralism:

- The first quarter of this century remained dominated by an apologetic attitude, mostly negative. In such a climate, the question which continued to retain the attention of theologians was the problem of the possibility of salvation for the members of other religions . . .

- The middle of the century and the years leading to and immediately following Vatican II witnessed a gradual change of climate, to which the council gave a powerful impetus. During this second period, the approach became less defensive and more positive: in the wake of the council, theology became more affirmative and optimistic with regard to the salvation of the members of other religions; the traditions themselves were progressively considered as containing positive values or even as playing a positive role in the salvation of their members. With this new approach . . . the theology of religions was born.

- The third period is that which we have entered in recent years; it can be traced to the beginning of the 1980s. A broader perspective, as we have noted above, is now being advocated, which is giving birth to a ‘theology of religious pluralism’. Going beyond the problematic of people’s salvation in and through their religious traditions, the new perspective seeks to penetrate more deeply into God’s plan for humankind. It asks about the significance of the plurality of religious traditions in that plan — and consequently in the unfolding of the history of God’s dealings with humankind which we call the history of salvation. This problematic will characterize the years ahead leading us into the twenty-first century.15

He also points out that the remarkable ongoing third phase is not immune to ‘oscillation from theological integralism to eclectic liberalism’16 There is pressure on people to abandon the newly achieved interreligious dialogue, sincere conversion, charitable co-existence, distinctive reciprocity and lawfully honest mingling and return to the religious intolerance and salvific exclusivism in spite of the fact that being on pilgrimage, the Church is subject to continuous changes. As Peter Lwaminda emphasizes in *The Local Church With A Human Face*.
With Vatican II, the Catholic Church, however, accepting and building on the decades of work of theologians, admitted its pilgrim status, journeying alongside the rest of humankind. It is in a continual exodus, making its way through temptation and tribulation, till by way of the cross it comes to the light which knows no setting.²⁴ It is interesting to note that during the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops in Rome in 1994 (The African Synod), the participants were not only the clergy, but also the laity, unlike during the old confrontational apologetical days. They were not only Roman Catholics, but also non-Catholics. They were not only delegates identified with spiritual realm, but also those competent in the worldly sphere and disciplines. The theme of the Synod: The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000; 'You will be My Witnesses' (Acts 1:8) is also very inspiring. Since the term synod (derived from synodos which is a Greek word consisting of syn i.e. "together" and hodos meaning "journeying") means "journeying together". It challenges and provides the direction in which the Church in Africa is to move together on this journey of life towards redemption and Salvation while focusing on the salvific and redemptive aspects of Proclamation, Inculturation, Dialogue, Justice and Peace and Means of Social Communication. It has to do this as the Family of God's people rooted on Small Christian communities (SCCs) which are already pastoral priorities in the AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa) Region. These communities (the Family of God's people) must welcome all and challenge them to be involved and to participate in the Family's affairs and spiritual wellbeing. The communities are, therefore, an extremely useful means for effective Evangelisation and propagation of Salvation.

As stated in, Eclesia In Africa, the African Synod was "an occasion of hope and resurrection, at the very moment when human events seemed to be tempting Africa to discouragement and despair."²⁵ The Kenya Episcopal Conference confirmed this in its Pastoral Letter entitled: Pastoral Instructions and Information Prior to the Synod for Africa, where the Holy Father's reasons for convoking the African Synod were outlined thus:

- To affirm, assert and, even transform the Second Vatican Council;
- To have a re-enactment and restructuring of the Council as a follow-up;
- To conscientise and empower the Africans to think and act pastorally as a Family imbued with solidarity;
- To promote inter-religious belief and inter-cultural dialogue with a genuine and acceptable ecumenical disposition;
- To provoke the Church in Africa to courageously encounter contemporary challenges and to have an orthodox praxis in view of the Christian Millennium."²⁶

By diligently, cautiously and prudently implementing the above reasons under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Church in Africa will become more effective in Catechesis, Evangelisation and Religious Pluralism. It will be forging in the right direction towards being self-supporting, self-propagating and self-administering. Its journey of faith and determination will unite it as a Family in union with the Blessed Trinity, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Ancestors and all the Saints. The interpersonal relationships developed as people journey together towards the ideal Family are well expressed by Cecil MacGarry as follows:

The priority of ecclesial communion is the reason why the Church is synodal by nature: we walk together towards the Lord in the joy of a shared life and shared responsibility. Our communion in the Church, our walking together, is not our initiative or our doing. We are people called together by our Father, in Jesus His Son, to whom He has given the gift of His Spirit. We are one not because we desire or decide to be one; in baptism
we become a people made one in the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.30

Sin, however, is a major stumbling block in this communion. It is only God’s gratuitous grace that can enable human beings to overcome their sinful tendencies and commit themselves to Christ as a family of believers. Referring to the particularity and universality of the family, Pope John Paul II points out that:

Tension between the particular and the universal can be considered immanent in human beings. By virtue of sharing in the same human nature, people automatically feel that they are members of one great family, as is in fact the case. But as a result of the concrete historical conditioning of this same nature, they are necessarily bound in a more intense way to particular human groups, beginning with the family and going on to various groups to which they belong and up to the whole of their ethnic and cultural group, which is called, not by accident, a “nation”, from the Latin word “natura”: “to be born”. This term, enriched with another one, “patria” (fatherland/motherland), evokes the reality of the family. The human condition thus finds itself between these two poles — universality and particularity — with a vital tension between them; an inevitable tension, but singularly fruitful if they are lived in a calm and balanced way.31

Salvation is not a private affair. Through the waters of Baptism, we have become members of God’s Family which often gathers together for the Eucharistic Meal. Any attempt to become individualistic will lead to spiritual suicide. It is in community, as brothers and sisters that we shall encounter Christ in His Body (the Church). As expressed in the Our Father (Mt 6:9-15) we are all God’s children. The Church (Family of God’s people) has a communitarian aspect which cannot be lived in solitude. Hence, the need to unise God’s Family (the Church).

But, the Family image should not be misused, misunderstood or even distorted by overemphasizing paternalism and maternalism.

This can result in some people remaining immature, irresponsible and totally dependent on the family. The need to create unity and the care and concern for the welfare of all must not become an escape mechanism whereby individuals avoid to take responsibility for their actions and refuse to perform their duties or utilize God-given talents. Instead, it should develop a spirit of loyalty, commitment, concern and dedication in serving others so as to create a favourable environment for the common good. This Family image needs to be studied thoroughly so that its strengths can lead to real transformation, growth and maturity for all. If it is misused, however, it will annihilate humanity from its very roots/source and jeopardise Salvation.

The United Nations highlighted the central role of the family in human history when it proclaimed 1994, The International Year of the Family. This was endorsed by the Roman Catholic Church when it declared the same year, The Universal Year of the Family, thereby enhancing the importance and inviolability of the Family in the Church for redemptive and salvific purposes. Therefore, to adopt the dynamic, communal, relational and vitalistic image of the Family in reference to the Church is to recognize that human beings are brothers and sisters; members of God’s Family. Thus, the need to uphold all qualities of the human family that are genuine, authentic and Godly.

Symposium on: “The Dialogue Between Faith and Culture”

A Symposium on, Dialogue Between Faith and Culture, was held at CUEA (Catholic University of Eastern Africa) Nairobi from 16th February to 18th February 1997 on the theme: The Gospel as Good News for African Cultures — A Symposium on Dialogue Between Faith and Culture. In his Opening Address entitled, Fully Christian, the President of the Pontifical Council for Culture highlighted the importance of the theme for Africa. His following concluding remarks reveal the openness with which the Church is ready to listen to other cultures including those from Africa:
When the Symposium is over, I hope the Pontifical Council for Culture will be able to work with the local churches in their double task of evangelization and inculturation. Many Bishops’ Conferences throughout the world have a committee responsible for issues linking faith and culture in their own area. Contact with them keeps the Pontifical Council informed and up-to-date, and the Pontifical Council is often able to share its expertise and information through these committees. Similar sentiments are stated in Redemptoris Missio as follows:

From now on, the Church opens her doors and becomes the house which all may enter, and in which all can feel at home, while keeping their own cultures and traditions provided these are not contrary to the Gospel.

Conclusion

There is a strong wind of change sweeping throughout the world, the mainstream churches included. They are being challenged to have an open, though oftentimes uncomfortable disposition in understanding, formulating, interpreting and propagating Salvation. They must encourage a democratic approach to new ways of being Church according to the signs of the times. New developments in technology have turned the world into a global village; a home to the entire family of God, thereby reinforcing the Family of God’s people image. In this Global Family of God there are no blacks or whites; all are members of the same family. This does not, however, deny the fact that they live in more than one culture and express their religious beliefs and philosophies in different ways. They can, however, still journey together to the next world as long as there is sincere openness, active participation and dialogical discussions that lead to Salvation. This is the Church’s mission as it endeavours to establish the Kingdom of God here on earth and lead all to Salvation. This must be inculturated into people’s cultures, religions, philosophy of life and concrete existence. Such a redemptive and salvific task calls for the wholehearted cooperation of all, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Endnotes

2. Lumen Gentium, p. 48.
9. Redemptoris Missio, 44.
12. D 1379.
15. Ibid., p. 318.
17. Ibid., p. 319.
18. LG 7.
23. Ibid., p. 390.
25. Ibid., p. 394.
30. Ibid., p. 394.
31. Ibid., p. 394.
39. Ibid., p. 98.
40. Ibid., p. 98.
41. Ibid., p. 98.