

**THE CALL OF MOSES (Ex. 3: 7 - 8) AND THE NIGERIAN SITUATION: OUR
RESPONSE AS CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Fr. President, Frs. and Srs. Official, fellow priests, and beloved religious, it is an honour for me to stand before you today to initiate this discussion. It is an honour because, first, I do not deserve it; secondly, you know better than I do on this topic; and thirdly, it could have been better delivered by others more capable than I am. Nevertheless, I thank you for your willingness to listen to me.

I do not want this discussion to be too academic. I want it to be as down to earth as possible. This is because meaningful messages are often miscommunicated in the attempt to be too academic, philosophical or theological as the case may be.

I chose to do what I am doing today because of the necessity of reminding ourselves that we can no longer fold our hands and watch things go wrong in our country. We may not be able to do much, but we can do something and that is all we need to change our country. We need to prepare for the future. Whatever we may tell ourselves, this place (Germany) is not our country. Whatever we contribute towards building up this country, (and we are indeed contributing so much) will remain here and not follow us back to Nigeria when we travel back. It is what we help to establish in Nigeria that will go a long way in alleviating the problems of our nation and the sufferings of our people.

This forum will not be an opportunity for one voice to be heard but one in which many voices can contribute and be heard. So, the questions and contributions after this discussion will be like a round table discussion and I hope the officials of NARAC can produce a communiqué out of the discussions of today. We can send it to our individual dioceses, to CBCN, to the Press in Nigeria, etc. We must let our voices be heard on this issue. Priests and religious belong to the group with most contacts in the world. There is nowhere we cannot penetrate if we choose to do so. And it is an added advantage that people listen to us. Let us make use of the opportunity and make our voices heard.

There is no way I can touch all the relevant sub topics. I will try to talk about the ones I remembered and hope that you will raise the ones you have in your minds when the time comes.

2.0 THE NIGERIAN PREDICAMENT

It is not my intention to dwell too long on the situation in our nation Nigeria. All of us are well informed regarding such. I would rather dwell more on what our response to such a situation ought to be. However, I will mention briefly some of the disturbing statistics of negativity which seem to define our nation at the moment. They are indeed appalling to say the least.

2.1 A LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY

Nigeria is a land blessed with so much and yet possesses so little. The great expectations of the citizens of Nigeria have been severally disappointed.

2.1.1 NATURAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Nigeria is generously endowed with abundant natural resources. With its reserves of human and natural resources, Nigeria has the potential to build a prosperous economy and provide for the basic needs of the population. Nigeria's rich human and material resource endowments give it the potential to become Africa's largest economy and a major player in the global economy. Besides oil, the major strength of the Nigerian economy is its rich agricultural resource base, its human resource base and its huge market (cf. Muhammad-Lawal and Atte, 2006).

Nigeria is endowed with vast oil wealth (8th largest oil exporter in the world while some statistics has Nigeria as 6th largest world oil exporter). With almost 40 billion barrels of proven oil reserves (as of January 2011 according to International Energy Agency) and a daily production of about 2.46 million barrels of crude oil, the country is one of the major petroleum exporters in the world.

The country is equally blessed with other natural resources such as natural gas, tin, iron ore, and timber, etc. And all these have been researched to exist in good commercial quantities. The country is also blessed with a vast expanse of arable land good for growing different kinds of crops like groundnuts, cocoa, cashew, oil-palm and other agricultural products that can sustain the teeming population of the nation. It is indeed unfortunate that a sizeable portion of these arable lands are been destroyed through oil spill which constitutes another disaster in the making giving the nonchalant attitude of our leaders in this regard.

It is time to ask ourselves the question: how much do we make as a nation from oil annually? It is estimated at more than 60 Billion dollars annually, according to National Bureau of Statistics. Daily Times reported in February 2012 while quoting Funso Kupolokun (former Group Managing Director of NNPC) that

Nigeria earned 800 Billion dollars from oil in the last 50 years. Nevertheless, Nigeria remains one of the countries whose populace wallows in poverty.

Nigeria is the largest country in Sub-Sahara Africa, a country with a population of 180 Million. Think of the large number of professionals produced by our many universities each year. Think of what other countries could have done with such a number. Nigeria is not lacking in intelligence. Some of the best students in the world come from Nigeria. Each year we read of the exploits of Nigerian students around the world. So, we are indeed a land flowing with milk and honey, a land capable of taking care of itself and its own, a land blessed with everything it needs to make it a great nation.

Let us now transfer our attention to how we have fared as a nation after 52 years of independence.

2.2 THE SUFFERINGS OF A NATION

These are uncountable. It is true that every nation has problems and difficulties it must deal with each day, but those of Nigeria seem to be the products of our selfish ambitions. This is a country spared the natural catastrophes besieging other nations and continents. We do not experience earthquakes, volcanoes, fire outbreaks, etc. And we still do not make best use of the opportunity to develop as a nation. I will not go into all the sufferings of our nation. I will simply mention some of them briefly. There is no particular order of listing.

2.2.1 KIDNAPPING

Kidnapping has become a booming trade in Nigeria. People are been kidnapped at random and security agents seem to be at a loss on how to curb this evil. Initially it was foreign nationals working in the oil companies who were been kidnapped; now it is anybody who can afford to pay as little as 50,000 naira. Before it was about resource control, now it has become a question of criminality. It is now the trade of people who wish to make millions over night. Nigeria is today one of the top 10 kidnap countries in the world. And the recruiting options are many. The millions of unemployed youths are ready to join these gangs willingly. The statistics of the number of people kidnapped in the last two years is quite alarming. You can imagine the burden such a practice imposes on a nation already hurting.

It makes no sense to talk about the justifications for this evil. There are none. It is a phenomenon that makes people live in fear and to live in fear is the greatest hindrance to progress in any society. Free movement is an incentive to economic power. And the spate of kidnappings limits our free movement considerably.

2.2.2 POOR BASIC FACILITIES

How many deaths through road accident have been witnessed in the last two years in Nigeria? The Federal Road Safety Commission recorded 3000 deaths in 2011. If you multiply it by five, you will be near the actual number of people who died in 2011 due to the nature of our roads. Some reports indicate that more than 17,000 people died in about 31,000 road accidents across Nigeria between 2007 and 2009, according to official statistics by the federal government road safety agency. More than 73,000 were injured in these accidents during the period under review, said the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), which added that it hopes to achieve a 50 percent reduction in road traffic fatality. Undisciplined and reckless driving, illiteracy, bad road networks and poor vehicle maintenance are often cited as reasons for road crashes and fatalities in Nigeria.

We do not need anyone to tell us that bad roads are responsible for most of these deaths. It is the bad roads that destroy the cars and when one thinks of the fact that the cars will spoil after repairs, the readiness to maintain the cars dwindle. It is because of bad roads that people drive carelessly and dangerously in the bid to get to their destinations as soon as possible. Nigeria is a country without road signs. I experienced the disadvantage when I tried to get my driver's license. Think of the amount of money we spent in securing these licenses even when we have been driving for such a long time in Nigeria before coming to Europe. Nationals of other countries pay a token to have their licenses validated and we pay so much to get our own. So, we pay each day the price of coming from a country that refuses to organize itself. Nothing that comes out of Nigeria is seen as meeting the world standard. What an insult!

Statistics have shown that mortality in road traffic accidents is very high among young adults in their prime and who also constitute the workforce (cf. Posada et al. 2000). These are usually the breadwinners in many cultures. Over 75 per cent of road traffic casualties in Africa are in the economic productive age bracket of between 16 and 65 years. (cf. Adekunle 2012)

Think of the many hours wasted on the roads. A journey that should take two hours takes the whole day. And none of these hours can be recovered. They are simply wasted. Think of the goods we could have transported by rail but cannot simply because we do not have railways. It is even worse in the area of power supply. Think of the many deaths Nigeria has witnessed as a nation through exhaust pollution from generators. What of the noise pollution? The different sounds of different generators make people jumpy and once you get used to noise,

the relevance and necessity of silence disappear. Thoughts that shape nations are mostly the products of silent meditations on the facts and events of life.

2.2.3 POVERTY

World Bank data shows that more than 70% of Nigerians live below the poverty line (which is less than a dollar/ day). Over the past decades, corruption and mismanagement have robbed the people of any real benefits from the substantial revenues and profits accruing to Nigerian governments and transnational oil companies. Many are hungry, poor, disenchanting, angry and prone to violence. How often have we heard that poverty is a disease? If that is true, then more than 70 percent of 180 Million people are sick. Can a nation survive under such a condition?

2.2.4 POPULATION EXPLOSION

Nigeria is almost 180 million and growing daily. Some of us do not see this as a problem yet, but I can assure you that it will definitely be one. At this growth rate, schools and hospitals cannot cope, and there will not be enough housing for all. We are not feeling it so much at the moment because Nigerians can be found in all parts of the world. They spread themselves. But think of what it will be like to have the whole 180 million living in Nigeria at the same time. It will be an uncomfortable situation.

Another consequence of bloat population is that economic growth will be unrealistic and the burden on those who can sustain the rest will be enormous leading to early death and avoidable ailments. Our culture is such that you do not fold your hands and look away from the sufferings of your relatives. Even as priests and religious, some of us are overstretched with having to pay the school fees of many cousins, nephews and nieces, and acquaintances, etc. So, the burden could be relatively high.

We need then to get involved in helping to reduce the growth rate of the Nigerian population. Proper education can help to manage the situation and afford people the wisdom to understand the need for small families one can cater for.

2.2.5 VIOLENCE

How many deaths has Nigeria witnessed through armed robbery in the last two years? In Nigeria today, the potential for violent outbreaks and armed attacks is very high. Robberies and muggings are often conducted by large, well-armed groups, and some have been committed by persons posing as police or military

personnel. House robberies remain a serious concern in every part of Nigeria. Petty crime is common in crowded places, especially public markets. Incidents of armed robbery and carjacking have occurred along main routes to international and domestic airports. The problem of armed violence has become a national tragedy and a source of great concern to well meaning citizens of our nation.

The issue of Boko Haram is a completely different story of its own. The worrisome trend is that violence has taken up every part of Nigeria. Nigeria's eastern region, particularly the states of Abia, Imo, and Anambra, has seen an increase in kidnappings for ransom as well as violent acts. Recent events have demonstrated that attacks, often perpetrated by small groups of armed individuals, are indiscriminate. In other words, violence seems to have eaten deep into the fabric of our nation. It is so bad that even family members rise against their blood. The wanton destruction of lives and property resulting from armed violence in Nigeria is enough to destabilize any nation.

2.2.6 STATISTICS OF UNEMPLOYED YOUTHS

Nigeria has a population of almost 180 million and 60 percent of this total population is between the ages of 13 and 45. This age bracket constitutes the work force of any nation. If the work force of a nation remains unemployed, the country is lost.

There are, as at 2011, 117 federal, state and private universities accredited in Nigeria as degree-granting institutions. In addition to universities, there are 59 federal and state polytechnic colleges and several privately owned polytechnics, monotronics and colleges of education across the country (cf. Onyukwu 2011). These universities churn out millions of employable youths annually. But there are no jobs for them. The New York Times puts National unemployment rate at nearly 50 percent in 2012. This is a great incentive for violence and insecurity.

2.2.7 CONFUSED LEADERSHIP (POLITICIANS)

We do not need any prophet to tell us that our leaders are confused but clever. They have no idea of what the country needs, but they have an idea of what they want for themselves.

2.2.8 INSECURITY

This is a direct consequence of a failed nation. Security ought to be a basic human right but it is a luxury in Nigeria. How many of us feel safe when we go home? How many of us have heard of their family members sleeping in the bush at night? How

many of our young girls are been raped indiscriminately? It is not just these girls who have been raped, our future and the future of our nation are been raped. How many of us can take a walk in the village at night? How many can undertake a journey at night? These are worrisome trends that present our country in a bad light.

2.2.9 CORRUPTION (EVEN AMONG CLERGY)

Politics in Nigeria is now a gold mine. A politician who is officially paid one naira as salary is likely to accumulate one million naira unofficially. Politics has become a do or die affair. Illiterates vie for offices and actually occupy them without having to present any manifesto. People drop out of school to become politicians.

I promised not to dwell so much on the sufferings of our nation. I will move straight away to our contributions in the face of all these sufferings.

3.0 GOD'S CHOICE OF US

God told Moses: I have seen the sufferings of my people and I have heard their cry and I will save them (**Ex. 3:7-8**). We are the Moses of our time, called to liberate our people from the shackles of bondage and to give them new hope and an opportunity for a new life.

3.1 AS PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS

God's choice of us as priests and religious is not coincidental. He purposely chose us for this mission, at this time and in our nation. The rigors of formation, the experience of working with people and the mission of following Christ who came to bring salvation to His people (Luke 4:18) have adequately prepared us for the task before us.

We priests and religious are among the most educated group of people in Nigeria. Every priest has at least two bachelor degrees. In modern times, one in every 10 priests has a master's degree and one in every 15 priests can boast of a doctorate degree. The statistic may not be exact, but it is as near as one could project.

We have access to the people. We can talk to the people and they listen. We have their attention and it is often surprising how much people want to be led and how willing they are to be directed on important decisions in life.

4.0 OUR RESPONSE TO THE NIGERIAN PREDICAMENT

I wish to discuss in this section two possible responses to the Nigerian predicament: our response to ourselves and our response to our environment.

4.1 OUR RESPONSE TO OURSELVES

4.1.1 BEING WHO WE ARE

Our first response to ourselves is to be who we are. Let us be who and what we are – priests and religious. We have to expunge the desire to be *them* or *like them*. Even among us priests and religious, let Victor be Victor and Paul be Paul, and Philomena be Philomena. The desire to be other than who we are has done us a lot of harm. Such a desire is a sign of dissatisfaction with who and what one is and what God wants one to achieve. God knows why He created me as me and you as you. There is a mission or task you can accomplish which I cannot and vice versa.

It is sometimes disappointing to see priests or religious quarrelling among themselves over status and positions or experiencing identity crisis. If we truly understand the meaning of priesthood and religious life, we will know that the gifts and talents of one person belong to all. If we pool our resources and gifts as priests and religious together, nothing can overcome us. But we are easily subdued and our talents become powerless when selfish ambitions are allowed to have the upper hand and people ply their trade individually.

We are the change needed in our country. If we lose hope, if we stop striving, if we stop pushing for change, if we stop being us, we lose our country and all the opportunities involved.

4.1.2 TRAIN OURSELVES FOR THE CHALLENGES AT HOME

The first step towards training ourselves for the challenges at home is through education. Education is the gateway to opportunity. It is not enough to come to this country and do mission work. We must create avenues to get ourselves educated. We can combine our mission work with our studies. I know it is not easy but it is worth it. Let us not miss the opportunities we have in this country to prepare ourselves for the task at home.

I have always been an apostle of diversification when it comes to education of priests. We must not all study theology or philosophy, we can also major in other disciplines. The group in Nigeria that has the greatest number of PhDs is the priestly family. Imagine what impact we will make in our society and nation if we

have priests with PhD in Engineering, political science, sociology, hospital management, psychology, mass communication, biology, physics, education, law, electrical electronics, etc.

The policy of having every priest major in theology or philosophy is outdated. How many PhDs in theology are lying waste at home today? I am not saying that a priest with PhD working in the parish is a waste. I am saying that we have too many priests who are content with having a PhD attached to their names. That is not enough if we wish to be useful. So, we must diversify our study interests to incorporate other aspects of life and society.

4.1.3 MAXIMIZATION OF OPPORTUNITIES

The third response to ourselves is to propagate and advocate the policy of maximization of opportunities and talents. Some of us here will have a say in the running of diocesan policies. If you have that opportunity, you must fight for something and that is this: There are many young very intelligent priests who should not be allowed to stay too long at home before furthering their studies. My experience before coming out was not an easy one. Some elderly priests were against such a move on the part of the bishop but my bishop insisted that I must go. I came to Europe with the notion that I am very young only to find myself in class with children. Some of my professors were even younger than me.

We must take control of our young stars, train them and put them to effective use at home. No society or institution can develop on quota system or on the policy of “as it was in the beginning, so must it remain”.

4.1.4 STRONG PRAYER LIFE

The fourth response is to develop a strong prayer life and absolute trust in Divine Providence. Priests and religious have been led astray by soothsayers, prophets and visionaries. Some of us have been led into believing nonsense because we lack confidence in an area we should know better. We have heard of priests and religious consulting dibias (traditional medicine men) or inviting prayer warriors of non-catholic backgrounds to pray and conduct healing sessions for their families and parishioners. What an insult and a shame!

A priest and a religious are already prayer warriors. Their status makes them experts in the spiritual life. We ought to be telling others what the spiritual life is all about and not the other way round. We have to gain back that confidence once more that the spiritual life is our area of jurisprudence. A strong prayer life relieves us of the burden of concentrating on things that do not matter.

4.1.5 POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS EACH OTHER

We need to develop a healthy and positive attitude towards each other. Let us not spread the impression that there is somebody among us lacking completely in goodness and positive qualities.

4.1.6 REFRAIN FROM GOSSIPS ABOUT EACH OTHER

To talk ill about each other is to talk ill about the priesthood and the religious life. Some of us simply gossip away about other priests and religious even to lay people and it is surprising that it does not occur to such people that they are equally destroying themselves before those lay people who are now their confidants. We hurt the priesthood and the religious life each time we take what happens to us and among us to an outside group. If lay people know all our secrets, then there will be no mystery about the priesthood and any group that has no mystery about it ceases to be a group.

4.1.7 UNITY OF PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS

When Christ prayed for the unity of the church, it was not just the coming together of different religions under the pope; it was for the unity of priests and religious, the visible symbols of the church, which He prayed for. The church can survive in the midst of different religions but she cannot survive when her priests and religious are not united with one heart and mind, purpose and mission in the spreading of the Gospel

If we are united as priests and religious, we will love sincerely and without deceit. We will pool our resources together and be more useful. There no will be no fierce negative competitions among us. Everyone knows his or her talents and puts them to effective use. No one will feel that the other person *erilaghala ya*.

4.2 OUR RESPONSE TO OUR ENVIRONMENT

4.2.1 THE CHURCH, PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS, AND POLITICS

To what extent can we get involved in politics in our nation? How can we influence the outcome of people's votes for the good of our nation? Do we not think that the policy of the church not mixing in politics or influencing the political environment of our nation is outdated? The church has a powerful voice and influence and should use the means at her disposal to correct the evils of our nation. That is actually my position. Think about it.

4.2.2 PROVISION OF QUALITY EDUCATION

Education is the gateway to opportunity. Quality education is the greatest response to poverty, corruption and inferiority complex. It does not matter where you are coming from but it matters where you are going to. As priests and religious, we can empower a lot of people by establishing scholarships in our local communities, by trying our best to make sure no child is left behind.

We must not have to help with conditions attached; otherwise there will be no difference between us and those destroying our country at the moment. It is unfortunate that some of us have destroyed young people's dreams and values because our help to them is conditional. How many of us sleep with young girls and young boys we purport to be helping? How many of us try to regulate and control their lives simply because we are helping them? How many determine who they should see and who they should not simply because they rely on us and depend on us? How many lives have been ruined this way? How many relationships have been destroyed this way or made not to see the light of day? And such young people grow up not knowing the value of helping others unconditionally. They help you only when they can get something out of you. And they end up ruining other lives because their own were ruined. It becomes a chain reaction and a vicious circle that destroy the fabric of the society. In the end one gets a society of conditional helpers. That is what Nigeria seems to have become – a country of conditional helpers. We ought to be different if we want to make a difference.

People speak so much of the American dream – that if you work hard, you are entitled to success; that it is possible to make dreams come true. Many of our young ones in Nigeria have dreams and we can help them make them come true. Let us support the stories of people in whatever way we can. What makes for a successful life story? It is support, encouragement, good planning, resources, and conducive environment.

We want to change our society, our country, our homes and our environment. We must remember that change does not come without sacrifice. If we want to change anything, we must be ready to sacrifice our time, energy, comfort, and even personal resources. A priest once boasted of having built two story buildings in his family home and of having bought two cars before returning from Europe to Nigeria. I will rather boast of the many children I gave a future and hope, of the many families I assured their existence by training their children, of the many sick people I offered the opportunity to be treated of their illnesses especially when they could not pay their bills, of the many I gave the opportunity to have clear

drinking water, and of the many I gave the hope of having food on their tables. Let us learn from the example of St. Lawrence who presented the poor, the sick and the less privileged as the treasures of the church. The joys we derive in life are not as a result of how many buildings we erected in our family homes, but rather traceable to how often we have lived up to our vocation of love and care.

I still recall the words of Mrs. Obama during the last Democratic convention (2012) in America. Talking at some point about their youthful days, she said: "We learned about dignity and decency -- that how hard you work matters more than how much you make, that helping others means more than just getting ahead yourself. We learned about honesty and integrity; that the truth matters; that you don't take shortcuts or play by your own set of rules, and success doesn't count unless you earn it fair and square," she said. "We learned about gratitude and humility; that so many people had a hand in our success, from the teachers who inspired us to the janitors who kept our school clean, and we were taught to value everyone's contribution and treat everyone with respect."

Let us afford our youths the opportunity to learn such values. When we invest in people, we are investing in prosperity, in success stories, in life and society building ventures, in fact, we are investing in the future and all its prospects and promises.

4.2.3 PROVISION OF HEALTH CARE

We can help to equip our diocesan hospitals and make sure the management is not simply interested in money. The poor must be treated and cared for. In the past, souls were converted by being cared for. There was this story of Mother Theresa and a leper. She cared so much for this leper that when she began to talk to him about Jesus, he interrupted her and told her clearly that if her Jesus is like her, he will believe in Him. That care is often missing in our dioceses. People are turned away because they cannot pay hospital bills, etc. Such occurrences need to change.

4.2.4 LEADERSHIP BY EXAMPLE (MORALITY)

If we are to change our society, morality and fear of God must top the scale on our priorities. Our morals have gone so low that people read meanings into every movement of a priest and a religious these days. Our relationships are sometimes too individual oriented. This total concentration on individuals hurts the group and what we stand for. It can sicken the mind and harm the tendency for positive thoughts.

The church is called to be the custodian of morality. Technology alone cannot

build a healthy society; rather, men and women with morals use technology to organize the world. And the best way to impart morals is by example. It is a difficult way of life and can only be transmitted by one who lives it.

4.2.5 PUBLICATIONS

How many of us write articles in magazines, journals, newspapers, etc? Our intelligence is simply allowed to go moribund. We have more time for reflection than most average people: the times we say our breviary, our holy hour activities, when preparing for our homilies, etc. These are times of reflection that can produce wonderful and life changing thoughts.

4.2.6 ESTABLISHMENT OF DEVELOPMENT CENTRES IN THE DIOCESES

These centres can be concerned with youth development projects, conduct seminars on development and economic independence, develop skills acquisition centres, organize water schemes for villages, undertake programs attending to teenage pregnancy, build homes for widows/poor/homeless, extend non-profit loans to petty traders, engage in education projects and scholarships, and support small scale enterprises, etc.

4.2.7 PROTECTING OUR CULTURAL VALUES

One of the greatest problems afflicting us today is the gradual loss of identity which results in our inability to take a stand on the basis of our cultural values. It is unfortunate that in the rush to be somebody or something else, some of us have lost sense of who we are. This is the reason why our leaders behave in ways *foreign* to us and our values.

The cultural activities that hold us and our people together are gradually disappearing. We must have to do something to make sure our people do not forget their cultures. If priests and religious support such cultural activities and participate in them, the people will follow suit. It is unfortunate that some of us only think of how to modernize these cultural activities. Modernize here means actually to make them look acceptable to Europe and Rome.

Our culture is one where the human person plays a central role and not the economic interest. But things have changed, what matters today is the economy and not the human person. How can we help to change the constellation and revert it to its former position?

Most of us have read Chinua Achebe's work *Things fall apart*. Some may not agree with me but the central theme of Chinua Achebe's literary masterpiece *Things*

Fall Apart is not primarily that of the fall of one man *Okonkwo*, rather it is the total upsetting of the religious, social and political order in *Umuofia* clan. It is about the systematic destruction and disintegration of the people's traditions by the missionaries. It was a disintegration marked by its recklessness and insensitivity as well as its total disregard for the sacred traditions of a people, mostly executed in the attempt to win converts to a supposedly better way of life or religion. The extent of the harm done to the people's sacred traditions and values could be seen in the fact that they (i.e. missionaries and colonial government officials) accorded recognition to the *worthless* members of the society. Achebe observes that "none of their converts was a man whose word was heeded in the assembly of the people, none of the converts 'was a man of title'; rather, 'they were mostly the kind of people that were *efulefu*, worthless empty men'" (Achebe 1967:130).

It is difficult to understand how a society built upon the basis of *worthless empty men* could be expected to witness normal, responsible and meaningful development. To make matters worse, these social rejects, who have been made lords and rulers of the land by the foreigner, became agents of atrocious offenses against their own people and their traditions and values. Thus, the tragedy of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is that of the fall of the clan of Umuofia, its culture and its traditions and values.

This same tragedy is still resting heavily upon us today. We are losing our cultural values and our identity. We have taken the things important to the West to become important to us, and we tend to forget that the cultural background is different.

Development, as I mentioned earlier, is not just about technological advancement. It is equally about values. Technological advancements are, of course, made possible by the human person but the human person is refined by the values she allows to shape her destiny and determine her courses of action. A simple example that underscores the need to presuppose technological advancements and development policies on values is taken from the Igbo. This example consists in the Igbo conception of the human person.

The Igbo define the human person as *nma ndu* (sometimes combined to form the simple word *nmadu*) which may variously be interpreted to mean *the beauty of life; the centre or focus of life; the essence of life; or the defining characteristic of life*. This conception of the human person has several significant implications. The first of these is the recognition accorded the ontological status of the human person as the prime of creation who should be given all the care, attention and consideration he deserves. The thinking here is that the human person is the sum of creation and

it would be absurd to talk about creation in the absence of the human person. Therefore, this beauty of creation must be preserved, respected and appreciated. The traditional Igbo will more likely preserve life than take it. Such aphorisms as *nwakaego* i.e. a child is greater than wealth, *nwamaka* i.e. a child is wonderful, *nwabuchi* i.e. a child is god, *nwakanma*, i.e. a child is preferred (to other things of life) capture this preeminent status accorded the human person in Igbo cosmology.

A second implication is the attendant respect for human life and human dignity following from the preeminent status of the human person among the Igbo. An example is the strong Igbo belief in the guiding principle – *i biri ka m biri*, i.e. live and let live.

In the original Igbo cosmology, there is no ideological space for wanton destruction of lives and property. The other is allowed to live and work out his existence. The existence of the other was never a threat to one's own existence and well-being. Neither was the success of another a reason for envy or jealousy. Rather, they (existence and success of the other) were motivational factors and things to be proud of for every member of the community. In the above mentioned principle or aphorism is acknowledged the conviction that nature has enough space and enough resources for all, such that one person's success and well-being can never hinder or militate against another's success and well-being. It not only assures individual freedom but equally reminds the individual of the limitations of such freedom. A person, though free, does not live alone and must recognize the existence of others. This recognition entails refraining from actions that may threaten or impact negatively on the existence of others as well as their freedom.

A third implication of the Igbo conception of the human person is the sorrow expressed at the loss of life, irrespective of the age or health status of the dead person. This sorrow signifies the struggle against the inevitable. Dying belongs to the normal development stages of the human person. Hence, the conviction among the Igbo is that *onwuamaeze* (i.e. death respects no one, even the King). In other words, death is not anyone's friend and everyone, regardless of status, gender and age, must reckon with it. Nevertheless, the Igbo (likewise, every human person) struggles against and fears the reality of this inevitable stage of human development. It is regarded as an evil. Not even the thought that death is the only way to communion with the ancestors diminishes the undesirability of death among the Igbo. This struggle with the reality of death is captured in such aphorisms as *onwubiko* i.e, pleading with death to leave us alone; *onwuegbule* – i.e. let death not kill (this encapsulates the desperation to escape this *evil*).

The underlying point here is that the Igbo not only want to go on living, they

would also want their beloved ones to remain alive. Again, because the sorrow that accompanies death is not limited to the immediate family members of the dead one but spreads across the entire community, it could be said that the Igbo have interest in the continued existence of other members of the community and beyond.

The fourth implication consists in the efforts to remain alive and make the best out of tomorrow. These goals are captured in such aphorisms/proverbs as *echi di ime* which literally translated means *tomorrow is pregnant*; *aguu nwere olile anya anaghi egbu egbu*, i.e., hunger that has the hope of being satisfied does not result in death of the hungry one. The above aphorisms encapsulate the belief of the Igbo that the possibilities of tomorrow are limitless. But one would need to be alive to have access to such possibilities. Hence, the Igbo do not believe in taking their lives or encouraging others to do so because of the misfortunes of today. It is seldom to witness the Igbo committing suicide.

A fifth implication is the maintenance of one's dignity and reputation as captured in the aphorism or proverb *ezigbo aha ka ego*, i.e., a good name or reputation is worth more than wealth. In the traditional Igbo cosmology, a person is respected primarily for his integrity, wisdom, good name, and honesty and less for his wealth. It was the above mentioned qualities that determined his worth in the society and his position among his people. His integrity, wisdom, good name and honesty were more of an asset to the community than his wealth. Hence, such qualities were better valued.

We seem at the moment to be living in the ashes of these cultural values. We seem to be at the crossroads. What a wonderful thing it will be if priests and religious could lead the Cultural Revolution needed to get our nation back on her feet.

5.0 CONCLUSION

What I have tried to portray above is a brief appraisal of the situation in our country Nigeria and what we could do about it. I know that many of us are itching to put their questions to us and to contribute to the discussion. I thank you for your attention.

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Other Resource Materials

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National Bureau of Statistics

Federal Road Safety Commission

Daily Times Newspaper

New York Times

This paper was delivered to members of Nigerian association of priests and religious in Frankfurt on the occasion of the annual meeting of the association on the 28th September, 2012.

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28th September, 2012