

**IGWEBIUIKE PHILOSOPHY AND THE CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER
EVANGELII GAUDIUM**

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Abstract

The dignity of the human person and the common good are the two cornerstones of social life. These are not possible without advancement in the construction of peace, justice and brotherhood. Pope Francis in Evangelii Gaudium proposed four principles necessary for the achievement of human dignity and common good. This paper has discussed aspects that seem very important to these principles in relation to Igwebuike philosophy. This philosophy is based on the Igbo-African worldview of complementarity, that is, the manner of being in African ontology. It is a worldview in which individuating differences must work towards a corporate existence where the 'I' does not stand as the 'I' but as a 'We', where life and living makes meaning. In a scenario of this kind, difference does not divide neither does it constitute a threat, but rather unites and gives hope that future existence would have meaning. In a cosmogony of this kind, while the ontology of the person is founded on the particularity of the individual, implying that it is the metaphysics of the particular that founds identity, it is the community that gives meaning to such an existence and grounds such an identity. This is a culture of encounter; it is a call to dialogue between all peoples.

Keywords: Igwebuike, Philosophy, Culture, Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium

Introduction

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*¹ of November 24, 2013, in Chapter 4, titled, *the social dimension of evangelisation*, Pope Francis speaks of many themes: the care of the weaker people; the common good; dialogue between faith and reason; ecumenical dialogue and interreligious dialogue. The third part of this chapter titled, *The common good and peace in society*, n° 217-237², specifically highlights the issue of common good because, the dignity of the human person and the common good are the two cornerstones of social life, the Pope stops by to propose four principles needed to advance in the construction of peace, justice

¹Cf. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

² Other citations of the documents with the initials EG and the number.

and brotherhood. These four principles are: *Time is greater than the space*³, it emphasizes the importance of process to build a community, knowing that this allows us to work in long term without obsession over immediate results; *Unity prevails over conflict*⁴, for the Pope, in the society conflict cannot be ignored or concealed, but that has to be assumed, without stopping in the conflictive situation but perceiving the sense of unity, a profound reality; *Realities are more important than ideas*⁵, for Francisco, there is a bipolar tension between the idea and reality and points out that it is dangerous to live in the realm of the word, the image of sophism and therefore concludes that the reality is superior to the idea⁶; *The whole is greater than the part*⁷, picking up the tension between globalization and localization, the Pope speaks of working in the small, in the near, but with a broader perspective, following the model of the polyhedron which reflects the confluence of all the installments that preserved its originality.

This paper will point out aspects that seems very important to these principles in relation to the Igwebuike philosophy. This philosophy is based on the Igbo-African worldview of complementarity, that is, the manner of being in African ontology. It is a worldview in which individuating differences must work towards a corporate existence where the 'I' does not stand as the 'I' but as a 'We', where life and living makes meaning. In a scenario of this kind, difference does not divide neither does it constitute a threat, but rather unites and gives hope that future existence would have meaning. In a cosmogony of this kind, while the ontology of the person is founded on the particularity of the individual, implying that it is the metaphysics of the particular that founds identity, it is the community that gives meaning to such an existence and grounds such an identity⁸. The culture of the encounter is a call to a dialogue between all people. Pope Francis call all to a dialogue and solidarity as human persons, to work for the common good of all⁹.

Time is greater than space

The first principle says that *time is greater than the space*¹⁰, that is, if we have to do something, the important thing is to work so well because practically and objectively, the results of things done very well are the most important and

³ Cf. EG 222-225.

⁴ Cf. EG 226-230.

⁵ Cf. EG 231-233.

⁶ Cf. EG 231.

⁷ Cf. EG 234-237.

⁸ Cf. https://www.academia.edu/34910747/SOURCES_OF_IGWEBUIKE_PHILOSOPHY_TOWARDS_A_SOCIO-CULTURAL_FOUNDATION, accessed 01/06/2019.

⁹ Cf. EG 217-237.

¹⁰ Cf. EG 222-225.

durable than those made in a hurry. Obviously, it is necessary and convenient and it is very logical and fair to always do things very well based on the common good. It is obvious that in life, experience is always the best teacher of all. It is therefore advisable to learn from experience because having experienced things personally, one easily learns of the past and this makes us do better than what was done previously.

In the same line to this, is the need to always make reference to the history of what happened in the past for better results in the present. The Pope calls attention to the importance of this memory against the current trend of obtaining quick immediate results that can produce an easy, quick and fleeting revenue, but do not build human fullness, he stress the need to make memory, taking a little bit time to listen to the voice of our ancestors in order not to make the same mistakes of the past. And he adds that without this memory, there is no hope and the soul is lost and diluted, making us unable to undertake projects that involves costs and sacrifices¹¹. An example is the current situation of Nigeria in relation to our politics, the current situation of lack of agreement for selfish political interest, must be overcome if we take time to watch the action of the ancestors in the same situation who, for the common good, had to make a good decision.

Another aspect is related to communication. Technology has today led to heavy loss in physical contact between person. Despite the importance of social networks in aspects of increased communication and connection, at the same time it has so many negative aspects. Today, it is not enough to be connected: it is necessary that the connection is accompanied by a true encounter, and this is almost impossible without time, silence and ability to listen. To be interconnected by these media technologicals like the internet does not resolve the challenge of communication which continues to be an issue so important in relation to the cultivation of the human relationships. This phenomenon not only caused a breach, but has also caused unemployment because everything is now done by machine and the people are left with nothing to do, no work¹².

¹¹ Cf. EG 224.

¹² The Pope also speak about this in his encyclical letter *Laudato si'*. There is a growing awareness that scientific and technological progress cannot be equated with the progress of humanity and history, a growing sense that the way to a better future lies elsewhere. This is not to reject the possibilities which technology continues to offer us. But humanity has changed profoundly, and the accumulation of constant novelties exalts a superficiality which pulls us in one direction. It becomes difficult to pause and recover depth in life. Cf. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html, accessed 10/06/2019.

Against all these, it is necessary to ask about the sense and the purpose of human existence. Everyone is called to do something for the common good of all, having a common sense. We should participate all in improving the culture of encounter. And it requires the participation of all. To participate is to take responsibility and this takes time. This principle of the superiority of the time over space invites to the great question of participation as one of the keys to give consistency and viability to the culture of encounter and dialogue, this culture will be possible if all participate in its development and construction. The current situation does not allow mere observers of unrelated fights. Political participation requests attitudes and civic habits of provision to meet, share, and contribute in a multitude of opportunities afforded by social life and this requires time.

For this reason, the Pope insists on the need for education for all especially children and young people and to awareness, raising and mobilization of the citizenry. On the other hand is the need for transparency in Government at all levels, performance of all in accounts assessment, listening to the diversity of opinions, responding to questions, public advertisement of the deliberations and constant communication, training, and the implementation of methods of mass participation, are requirements which increasingly ensure good governance because ultimately the political community is to serve the civil society, from which it derives its power and authority¹³.

Unity prevails over conflict

The second principle states: *Unity prevails over conflict*¹⁴. Logically, conflict is not good and should always be avoided. However, obviously, conflict happens always. But even if conflict is to be assumed, because it is part of life and human relationships, we can not afford to get caught in it. It is necessary to transform it into mutual understanding, looking for what unites us in diversity, harmonizing differences, without falling into breakdown and lack of communication or syncretism¹⁵.

This idea of harmony goes in line with the idea of pluralism treated well in the Second Vatican Council in the document *Gaudium et spes*¹⁶. In modern day

¹³ Cf. Martinez, J. L., *La cultura del encuentro. Desafío e interperación para Europa*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 2017, 97-107.

¹⁴ Cf. EG 226-230.

¹⁵ Cf. Martinez, J. L., *La cultura del encuentro. Desafío e interperación para Europa*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 2017, 109-110.

¹⁶ Cf. GS, 73-75.

democracy, is very important the issue of diversity and management of pluralism. Pluralism which is a condition of possibility of democracy, cannot be any type of pluralism, it can not be an agnostic pluralism. It cannot be a pluralism that has more to do with the confusion and the vacuum with the richness of diversity. Or a pluralism of opposing and incompatibles views which is a sign of the disintegration of the lack of consciousness and the inability of synthesis. Pluralism should be a pluralism that encourages a culture capable of generating unity in the midst of the diversity of opinions¹⁷.

Because diversity is expression of the richness and fullness, which is so large that it cannot be gathered under a single concept or verbalize in single sentence. Pope Francis advocates a healthy pluralism, one which genuinely respects differences and values them as such, and this does not entails privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual's conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques. This would represent, in effect, a new form of discrimination and authoritarianism. The respect due to the agnostic or non-believing minority should not be arbitrarily imposed in a way that silences the convictions of the believing majority or ignores the wealth of religious traditions. In the long run, this would feed resentment rather than tolerance and peace. That eventually would foster more resentment than tolerance and peace. It is impossible -in his opinion- to imagine a future for society without a vigorous contribution of moral energy in a democracy that avoids the risk of being closed on the pure logic of the representation of interests constituted¹⁸.

Therefore, this principle of unity over conflict calls for reconciliation, in the middle of a broken world. Reconcile not just with God, but with others and to keep building relationships. Where there is conflict or divisions, reunion and reconciliation processes are needed and hopefully the Church has a role to play in facilitating this reconciliation¹⁹. The question here is whether Christians can play a role in this reconciliation, that is as reconcilers of the wounds of society and conflicts of public life. It is it suppose to be the main task of the Christian following Christ. God was in Christ reconciling himself to the world and

¹⁷ Cf. Martinez, J. L., *La cultura del encuentro. Desafío e interperlación para Europa*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 2017, 110-111.

¹⁸ Cf. EG, 255.

¹⁹ Cf. Martinez, J. L., *La cultura del encuentro. Desafío e interperlación para Europa*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 2017, 123-125.

entrusted to us the word of reconciliation²⁰. Reconciliation is, therefore, a mission which the Lord entrusted to all.

To present and future serious disagreements that occurs we need to carve a public culture to treat them properly. It is important to deepen the experience of disagreement without any break of communion and legitimate disagreements while continuing to search together for the common good.

We have that experience in Christian communities where we celebrate together the same faith, being of different ideologies and political opinions. It is key that in spite of the arguments and differences it is not broken the bridges of encounter and dialogue but that coexistence is protected as the most valuable asset, above any idea or belief. For this purpose we must make a special effort to understand the motives, intentions and experiences of the other and try to make the best possible interpretation, what separates us will not impede that we grow. We must treat each other with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated²¹. Look for others the same opportunities that we want for ourselves. Accompany the growth of others as we want to be accompanied without denying the complexity, this sense of integration is in line and will be of great help in keeping with the culture of encounter.

[Realities are more important than ideas](#)

The third principle states that *reality is more important than the idea*²² (and calls to not sit in the angelic purism or intellectualism that separates us from reality). Two tasks come from this principle and intimately connected with the culture of encuentro: dialogue and discernment. And together with them several others related: interdisciplinarity and the indispensable role of the truth in politics²³.

The task of dialogue means being convinced that the other has something good to say, welcome other points of view, their proposals. Dialogue does not mean giving ideas and traditions that claim to be absolute and unique. In dialogue, it is always possible to approach the truth, which is God's gift, and enrich each other, without falling, obviously in relativism. And for dialogue it is necessary to lower the defenses and open the doors²⁴.

²⁰ Cf. 2Cor 5,19-21.

²¹ Cf. Mat 7,21.

²² Cf. EG 231-232.

²³ Cf. Cf. Martinez, J. L., *La cultura del encuentro. Desafío e interperlación para Europa*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 2017,165-171.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid*.

As for the task of discerning, this requires knowledge of the matter involved, collecting good data, weighing reasons and looking for the truth and humbly, the good result; all to arrive at a good decision²⁵. Is not all about giving a blank cheque to relativism or self-will. For believers, it means to go beyond the surface of things and appearances to lovingly attend to what God expects of one in their circumstances. As a result, it requires a spirit of openness to the complexity and ambiguity of all reality. It does not request for a simple distinction between pure and impure, good and bad, nor in rigidities, narcissistic indulgence or catastrophic convictions, that end up being a doctrine without life. This is not discernment. The discernment that is needed here does not call for any separation from the requirements of truth and love. Therefore with humble and open intelligence, we are expected to search and find God in all things, in all fields of knowledge, of art, of science, politics, social and economic aspects. is needed study, avoiding self-reference spiritual disease²⁶.

As regards the theme of freedom and truth in politics. Genuine democracy is not only the result of a formal respect for rules, but is the result of the acceptance, convinced of the values that inspire democratic procedures: the dignity of every human person, respect for the human rights and the assumption of the common good as purpose and regulatory criteria of political life. A democracy without values is converted with ease in a visible or concealed totalitarianism, as evidenced by the history. The bases of these values cannot be provisional or changing perceptions of the majority, but a search of Dialogue of the respectful truth with the pluralism and differences. Obviously, this issue of dialogue today seem to bother much in the political struggle or in the elaboration of laws.

In this aspect of politics we can make reference to the issue of leadership within the context of Igwebuike philosophy which is understood as an inclusive enterprise. The leader does not see himself as a separate entity from the people, but as leading from among the people; while the individual is a potent and viable being, as such a force, it is potent and viable in a limited way; however, when there is a conglomeration of forces, the human potency can be extraordinary. Leadership is not about power but about service. The leader sees himself as part of a group and not as a person different from the group or better than the people he is serving. He or she understands that there are no leaders without followers, and leadership always involves interpersonal influence or

²⁵ Ibid., 184-185.

²⁶ Ibid.

persuasion. In the absence of followership, interpersonal influence and persuasion, the person is only taking a walk and not leading²⁷

The whole is greater than the part

The last and the fourth principle says *that the whole is greater than the part*²⁸, that is, that without vision and commitment to the whole community or group one cannot really be free or happy, one needs to pay attention to the whole group. Here lies the reason for the policy that responds to the imperative need to live together to build together the possible common good, a community that resigned interests to share, with justice and peace, their property, their interests, their social lives. This is precisely the idea of the Igwebiuke philosophy. It is a worldview in which individuating differences must work towards a corporate existence where the 'I' does not stand as the 'I' but as a 'We', where life and living makes meaning. In a scenario of this kind, difference does not divide neither does it constitute a threat, but rather unites and gives hope that future existence would have meaning. In a cosmogony of this kind, while the ontology of the person is founded on the particularity of the individual, implying that it is the metaphysics of the particular that founds identity, it is the community that gives meaning to such an existence and grounds such an identity²⁹

What is here, is mainly the issue of the common good, the set of conditions for a coexistence of all freedom is what constitutes the common good, that is responsibility of all, but in a more direct way of those who legitimately exercised political power. They are not to succumb to the temptation of appropriating money or goods that are meant for all, but in the search for relationships, alliances and collaborations that most benefit the community and also to citizenship care resources, facilities or means which relates to all man and all men. The conditions for a dignified life through the guarantee of freedoms and rights, the promotion of the fundamental relations with God, with oneself, with others and the satisfaction of the basic needs of health, energy, water, food, space urban or natural, education, culture and information.

²⁷ Cf. *Igwebiuke as an igbo-african philosophy of inclusive leadership*, https://www.academia.edu/34910742/IGWEBUIKE_AS_AN_IGBO-AFRICAN_PHILOSOPHY_OF_INCLUSIVE_LEADERSHIP, accessed 25/06/2019.

²⁸ Cf. EG 234-237.

²⁹ Cf. *Sources of igwebiuke philosophy: towards a socio-cultural foundation*, https://www.academia.edu/34910747/SOURCES_OF_IGWEBUIKE_PHILOSOPHY_TOWARDS_A_SOCIO-CULTURAL_FOUNDATION, accessed 25/06/2019.

This takes the set of institutions that structure the legal, civil, political and cultural and social life. The interest for the common good does not mean a utilitarian principle of the greatest good for the greatest number, but it goes beyond that: it implies the need to remember and have in mind everybody (the centrality and worth of each person), recognize and care for minorities and the assets of the community, as a valuable part of the diversity of the society. And especially in our present world where there are so many inequities with many people deprived of basic human rights. As a result, striving for the common good means solidarity.

To worry about the common good and work for it is to the Social doctrine of the Church demands of Justice and charity. We love our neighbor more effectively, the more we work for a common good that respond also to their real needs. Every Christian is called to this charity, according to their vocation and their possibilities within the society. Pope Francis spares no praise to the exercise of politics: politics is a high calling, is one of the most precious act of charity, because it seeks the common good. We have to be convinced that charity is not only the beginning of the micro-relaciones, like in friends, family, small group, but also of the macro-relaciones, such as social, economic and political relationships.

We must clarify that in line with this, Vatican II council in the Declaration *Dignitatis humanae* speaks on religious freedom and the common good within a plot that is for the State to care for and protect; that part of the common good is called public order. If responsibility for the common good of the entire society with the richness and diversity of communities and institutions, is for the whole society, then the responsibility for public order mainly corresponds to the State. Within this essential distinction, the appreciation by the public does not mean that everything is publicly owned or that the conditions of the common good shall be cared for and favored only by public administrations. It is at the same time the responsibility of the whole society.

Then, speaking of the whole and the part, one of the major concerns of the Pope is the disease of self-referentiality, and prevailing individualism which is a companion to the growing culture of materialism and consumption considered by Francis as the greatest evils of the contemporary world. Superficial and egocentric perceptions of reality make it almost impossible to feel compassion for the suffering of others, and prevent people to connect with reality, in a process of dehumanization that can be gradual and silent but is very real. We need exercises that make us experience our qualities but also our limits, our strengths

to overcome the selfish spirit, but also our shortcomings. We need a personal experience that we relocate continuously. It is experience and its something we all need, because we are not Islands, but parts of the whole³⁰.

Conclusion

Against the problems of lack of confidence today, Francis gives us a guide to advance and a halt to give the opportunity to feel that it is possible to live in harmony, as human beings in peace. The Pope calls us to promote a culture of encounter. This culture is necessary for mankind because according to the Pope: is time to stop all hatreds, and renounce revenges, and be open to coexistence based on justice, truth and the creation of a true culture of the fraternal encounter. That we can live in harmony and fraternity.

For the Holy Father, this culture of encounter does not signify to think, live, or react all in the same way, the culture of the encounter is to know that, beyond our differences, we are all part of something big that unites us and transcends us, we are part of God's creation. Creating this culture is the responsibility of all, because it is constructed in each encounter everyday in our home, our work, in our city, if we begin to apply what has been learned will be achieve great progress.

In relation to the Igwebiukwe philosophy, its obvious that the idea of unity is important and prime to the life of the human being. Man by nature is a social being and it entails that he must necessarily live in the society with others. This philosophy that emphasies the need for unity in his society is rightly in line with the Christian theology especially in the present day world that seems to be so individualists. We live together yet we can notice, and its obvious, that inspite of the growth in technolgy that makes the world more a global village, it has at the same time many negative effects. Its important to have this in mind and work more rather to connect with each other. That is why Pope Francis calls attention to this culture of encounter between persons.

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³⁰ Cf. EG 2 y 63.

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