

Event: Pope Paul VI Memorial Lecture 2013

Title of Lecture: A billion reasons to believe in Africa – The long march from ‘the hopeless continent’ to the ‘spiritual lung’ of humanity

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Popular perception and imagination of Africa would dismiss as fanciful or delusive a disquisition that purports to adduce “a billion reasons to believe in Africa.” The Coca Cola Company, whose global advertising campaign inspired this lecture’s title, contests the generalised pessimism regarding the fate and fortune of Africa. “Africa,” the Company argues, “has found the most reasons to believe — a billion, in fact — by inspiring people to see the brighter side of a continent that's often portrayed as dark, hopeless and stricken with disease, conflict and poverty.”¹ Let me be clear: I don’t drink coke. The Coca-Cola Company has not offered me any incentive, monetary or otherwise, to indulge their craving for strategic product placement at this distinguished forum. My fascination with Coca Cola derives from the creativity and originality of its advertisement, which fascination dates back to my childhood. Curiously, however, I find the advertisement in question to be one of the least innovative and effective, and this for two reasons. First, although Coca Cola alleges a billion reasons “in fact,” it offers no more than a handful; they include music, dance, Mobile phones, beauty pageant, Nelson Mandela.... Second, the colourful billion-reasons billboards strategically planted in cities across Africa present a montage of Africa in stark dissonance with stereotypical imagery of the continent. Look at it this way: smiling and well-nourished Africans in affluent, safe and secure environment – where in Africa, you might query? In which Africa? Africa of the BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera? Africa of Al Qaeda, Al Shabaab, Boko Haram ... Africa of M23? The daily diet of headline news stuffed with plentiful servings of war, violence, corruption, rape and similar vices from the so-called “dark continent” bears contrary testimony to the tantalising promise of the billion-reasons campaign to lift the burden of stigma and enigma that hangs over the continent. It might be conjectured that Coca Cola speaks but figuratively. Yet, to allege a billion reasons only metaphorically is to run the risk of reinforcing widespread incredulity and pessimism about Africa. If, in fact, there are a billion reasons to believe in Africa, credibility demands our painstaking effort to enumerate and name them.

In the sense that I have just described it, the advertisement in question serves a useful, dual purpose. Tactfully, it combines two vital reasons why some still perceive a glimmer of hope in Africa. First, the continent's economic potential. Imagine a billion Africans drinking a can of coke daily, as alleges one of Coca Cola's YouTube postings! That would translate into a phenomenal windfall for the Company. Second, it alludes to a religious idiom, belief, which, for the purposes of tonight's conversation, elicits questions about the status and function of religion on the continent, whose spectacular growth is attested by multiple statistics. Rather than merely computing yet another fact book about Africa, my primary task is to examine both facets critically before making them the basis of a renewed optimism and belief in Africa. Crucially, however, I would like to invite this audience to consider other aspects of the continent that hold out some potential for its future and how, as a global community, we might engage in the birthing of what *The Daily Telegraph* Chief Foreign Correspondent David Blair believes is "a new Africa [that] is slowly coming into being."ⁱⁱ

Let's go back in time. Writing in 1847, in a book titled, *Sierra Leone: The Principal British Colony on the Western Coast of Africa*, the Acting First Writer to Her Majesty's Britannic Commissioners, a man named William Whitaker Shreeve, offered a somber account of Africa's religious identity and a frightful prognosis of Christianity's missionary adventure on the continent:

Africa, like all countries where Christianity has not penetrated, or where it progresses but slowly, is doomed to the darkness of pagan superstition, or of idolatrous rites . . . polygamy, lust, licentiousness, and all the vices.... [F]or, until some great revolution in nature or some great and gradual human exertion takes place, it must ever prove the "white man's grave".... [A]nd truly may it – be said that "Africa's shores are paved with the white man's bones, and its grave-yards filled with monuments of lost exertions...."ⁱⁱⁱ

Shreeve's assessment of the fate of an entire race pivots on clichéd sociological and philosophical constructs. Shreeve, of course, as we know, was no alone in this ignoble project of racially prejudicial taxonomy of Africa. His epistemological ancestor, Immanuel Kant, and philosophical heir, Georg W. F. Hegel indulged in convoluted argumentation to prove the anthropological "stupidity" of Africans who are but pitiable specimen of "the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state"^{iv} and "the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in

the conditions of mere nature.”^v I choose not to dignify their idiosyncratic hallucination with any serious commentary. Sadly, though, the colonial enterprise of myth-making and racial stereotyping continues to yield a repertoire of nicknames and aliases gratuitously conferred upon Africa. Without exception, such nicknames denote primitiveness and savagery – from Joseph Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness” to Henry Morton Stanley’s “Dark Continent” and *The Economist* magazine’s “Hopeless Continent.” This patronizing pastime of name-calling or nicknaming Africa reinforces a stereotypical thinking embedded deeply in mythical colonial portrayal of the continent’s complex identity and history. This, as I have mentioned, is what The Coca Cola Company invites us to counteract with brighter, more hopeful images and narratives of Africa.

The historical and geographical context of Shreeve’s macabre assessment would have justified his dark projections. Nineteenth-century Africa was an intimidating terrain even for the most intrepid of missionaries, traders, explorers and other colonial adventurers. High mortality rates, harsh tropical climate, rampant diseases and poor sanitation guaranteed the certain demise of missionaries and colonialists and accentuated the futility of their evangelical exertions and political ambitions.^{vi}

The habit of nicknaming Africa has persisted into the 21st century, although it has evolved into a slightly more benign nomenclature. Accordingly, more than a century and a half after Shreeve, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI coined another pseudonym for the continent: “Africa,” he declared, “constitutes an immense spiritual ‘lung’ for a humanity that appears to be in a crisis of faith and hope.”^{vii} This flattering designation expresses an explicit belief in the capability of the religious fortunes of Africa to oxygenate a spiritually asphyxiated humanity. More importantly, the evolution of nomenclature from Shreeve’s “white man’s grave” to Benedict’s “immense spiritual ‘lung’” is symptomatic not only of the trajectory of progress of religion in Africa but also of the historical receptiveness of the continent to change and new opportunities.

Why, we must wonder, did Benedict flatter Africa with such an affirmative appellation? Here’s my guess. Viewed from the perspective of religious adherence and affiliation, beliefs and practices, Africa lies on an axis of demographic growth, variously characterized as astronomical,

phenomenal and spectacular. American aficionado of the Vatican John Allen, Jr., once remarked that “if I were asked to offer a history of Roman Catholicism in the twentieth century in one sentence, I would reply: ‘The center of gravity shifted from North to South’.”^{viii} Such shift or incontrovertible evidence of religious growth in Africa is interpreted by Benedict XVI as a sign of hope for the rest of the world. Africa holds a significant piece of the future of Christianity or, crucially, the future of Christianity passes through Africa. And statistics don’t lie! Take, as one example, statistics of the growth of Christianity in Africa:

One-in-five of all the Christians in the world (21%) now lives in sub-Saharan Africa.^{ix}

Over a period of one hundred years Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa has recorded an astronomical 70-fold increase in membership, from 7 million to 470 million.^x

Sub-Saharan Africa has more than 500 million Christians, which makes it the region with the third-largest number of Christians worldwide. Collectively, the region’s 51 countries and territories are home to nearly a quarter of the world’s Christians (24%).^{xi}

Within the wider context of religious growth in Africa, Catholicism has recorded significant proportionate demographic expansion over the last one hundred years, climbing from 1,220,000, or less than 1% of the total global population of Catholics in 1910, to 171.48 million, or 16% of Catholics worldwide, in 2010.^{xii} These figures show the rapid growth of Catholicism on the continent in the span of a century, a fact that recently prompted an imaginative Spanish journalist to nickname Africa “a factory of Catholic souls.”^{xiii}

Sad to say, glowing accounts of religious effervescence on the continent contain a dark side. On account of past and recent events, but without overlooking the significant contribution of Christianity to healthcare and education, for example, it can no longer be plausibly maintained that religion in Africa is nothing but a force for good. There are those like Nobel Peace Laureate Wole Soyinka who repeatedly indict Islam and Christianity as “guilty not merely of physical atrocities on African soil, including enslavement of the indigenes, but of systematic assault on African spirituality in their contest for religious hegemony.”^{xiv} Thus caution is advised against

the temptation to trumpet statistics and demographics of religious growth as adequate and sufficient reason to believe in the pneumatic significance of Africa for the rest of humanity.

As recently as the bloody siege of Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, and the brutal murder of 50 students in their sleep in Yobe, Nigeria, event after event point to the escalating bellicosity of religiosity and the emergence of sectarian cleavages in key areas of the continent. With frightening intensity, these cleavages have unleashed deadly religious and tribal passions in different parts of Africa, turning them into “a warring ground.”^{xv} However, it should be said, whether in Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania, Egypt, Somalia, Mali, Nigeria or Zanzibar, such ferocious proclivities that brutalize innocent humanity do not qualify as religion, no matter how stridently the chevaliers of religious separatism and theological irredentism declaim the righteousness of their cause, recruit and goad others into war, and sink their flag post deeper into the souls of Africans. Soyinka is right: there is religion and there is fanaticism.^{xvi} We may neither confuse nor conflate the two. What we are witnessing in Africa with increasing distress is the religious bigotry and mindless zealotry of “seasoned manipulators of irrational sentiment of faith”^{xvii} and revellers “in the orgy of pietistic homicide,”^{xviii} who daily sharpen their blunt weapons of mass destruction at the clay feet of idols dressed as supreme deities. Should it surprise us, then, that when these “deities are co-opted to lend authority to human sentiments and proclivities, humanity becomes disposable to usurpers of divine authority and custodians of mere dogma”^{xix}

In making this assessment it is not my intention to focus exclusively on those Kalashnikov-waving zealots clad in suicide vests at Westgate Mall or elsewhere in Africa as the sole perpetrators of sectarian intolerance. Emeritus Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams has described an extremist as “someone who has simply fixed on a moment in the living tradition and frozen it.”^{xx} There is a subtle form of extremism orchestrated by those on the continent who operate a kind of religious economy that preys on the gullibility of desperate Africans. With entrepreneurial sophistication and cunning, jet-setting preachers and their army of evangelical clones have devised a brand of Christianity that spiritualizes Africa’s real challenges. Little doubt exists in my mind that such spiritualization inevitably degenerates into a trivialization and instrumentalization of religion. With evangelical certitude, this phenomenon evacuates concrete

challenges of any real substance, while simultaneously either attributing their causes to personal failing and ancestral malediction or presenting dubious options as the panacea for all of the continent's crises. In the bogus exegesis of this sophisticated spiritual diagnosis the cost of deliverance or healing is a dose of faith wrapped in lavish monetary offerings to Africa's merchants of prosperity gospel.^{xxi} Here again, I contend, we are witnessing a phenomenon that beggars belief and militates strongly against the progress of Africa.

If Benedict XVI has divined correctly the status of Africa as the lung of humanity, religious zealotry and evangelical bigotry connive to asphyxiate this lung. However, what I think this situation allows us to discover and consider seriously is another source of spiritual revivification, albeit one that has consistently been dismissed and combatted by Islam and Christianity, namely the spirit of African religion. In this regard, I would like to make two points.

First, with Soyinka, but avoiding his penchant for romanticizing the phenomenon, I believe that African religion serves a critical purpose as bulwark against extremist attempts to dissolve the essence and value of religion in the pool of sectarian ideology and hypocrisy. Liberated from the zero-sum game of mutually assured destruction that characterizes Africa's two dominant religions in some places, the spirit of African religion is a vital repository of humanity that can sustain belief in the future of the continent and school its people in the art of dignified existence. If this were not the case, why do Africans time and again resort to agents of their ancestral religion, routinely castigated as witchdoctors?

Second, a shorthand for the conceptualization of the core of African religion is the notion of *Ubuntu*. In its unencumbered sense, *Ubuntu* is a simple idea that prioritizes inclusivity over exclusivity, community over competition, hospitality over hostility, dialogue over confrontation and respect over domination: “*ubuntu* means we cannot turn our backs on anyone who genuinely wants to be part of our community.... *Ubuntu* in this sense places dialogue at the center of what it means to be fully human. It involves a future that seeks to rise above exclusion and alienation.”^{xxii}

In light of the foregoing, I wish to suggest that the gift of African religion to the world lies not in the hubris of sectarianism and extremism but in its deep wells of humanizing values alive and active in the spirit of African religion. Here is one in a billion reasons for believing in Africa: devoid of hegemonic pretensions and proselytizing strategies, this ‘spirit’ “is peculiarly concerned with the aspiration to be human in a particular form and, therefore, with living satisfactory and responsible lives, both singular and in common, reflectively and actively.”^{xxiii} Thus understood, Benedict stands vindicated, for the authentic spirituality of this continent is a profound repository of resources for the renewal of humanity. What I am arguing here is that belief in Africa entails a commitment to safeguard the spirit of tolerance and inclusivity that characterises African religion, as a global heritage in the face of the reign of sectarian terror. Consequently, as Soyinka argues, “if Africa falls to the will of the fanatic, then the insecurity of the world should be accepted as its future and permanent condition. There are no other options.”^{xxiv}

Let us now consider the second most ubiquitous reason for the newfound belief in Africa: economics. As I have already stated, if The Coca Cola Company sees a billion reasons to believe in Africa, such reasons cannot be detached from anticipated real or perceived economic dividend. Many experts and organizations share this belief in the economic possibilities and potential of Africa.

In 2000 (May 11th), *The Economist* magazine christened Africa “the hopeless continent.” Interestingly, however, in the intervening years that followed this stigmatization, the magazine has revised and reversed its appraisal of the fortunes of the African continent twice: first in 2011 (December 3rd – 9th) and again in 2013 (March 2nd). Both editions painted a picture of “Africa Rising,” “Africa Aspiring” to greater heights as “a hopeful continent.”^{xxv} The catalogue of signs and grounds for this unusual about-turn and its measured optimism is impressive: drums of civil wars and internecine conflicts falling silent, laboured but reassuring strides towards democratization, infrastructural development of unprecedented scope, mobile telecommunication boom, rising income levels and middle class, falling disease rates, resurging life expectancy, improved enabling environment for investment and business, declining child mortality rates,

growing foreign direct investment.... It is a dizzying accumulation of data in support of the claim that “Africa is the world’s fastest-growing continent just now”^{xxvi} and that “something fundamental has changed” on the continent.^{xxvii} Whereas in the past expert analyses dredged a reservoir of grim statistics to demonize Africa as a moribund continent, today, myriad specialist reports find reasons to lionize the continent^{xxviii} – in much the same way that Asian economies acquired their stripes as “tigers” – and tout the status and significance of Africa as an unstoppable force in the phenomenal “rise of the south.”^{xxix}

Without intending to play the devil’s advocate, I think we ought not to overplay the economic prospects of the continent. And here is why I elect to be somewhat parsimonious in my attitude towards glowing statistics of Africa’s economic development. To put it simply, development is not a single strand; it is a multiplicity of interconnected and interacting strands relative to the economic needs, political opportunities, cultural creativity and social well-being of people. To rely on one strand alone is to stake our belief in Africa on a tenuous foundation, making us liable for telling “a single story,” a pitfall that award-winning Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie incessantly warns against. Besides, Amartya Sen has demonstrated convincingly the futility of relying exclusively on macroeconomics as yardstick for measuring development.^{xxx} If we content ourselves with judging the quality of life in Africa only by statistical variables we run the risk of creating an economic avatar, where only a few possess the means to acquire and enjoy a life of perks and privileges, while expediently shielded and distanced from the daily drudgery of millions of dispossessed and impoverished Africans. Sen states the argument clearly: “Gross domestic product (GDP) is much easier to see and measure than the quality of human life that people have. But human well-being and freedom, and their connection with fairness and justice in the world, cannot be reduced simply to the measurement of GDP and its growth rate....”^{xxxi} For those who think only in absolute economic terms, Africa is rising. But, why, we must ask loud and clear, why are so many young Africans fleeing a continent that we are told is among the fastest-growing in the world only for them to be washed up as thousands of cadavers on the shores of Lampedusa and accorded state funeral in Sicily?

Economic predictions that offer a positive assessment and project a hopeful future of Africa raise two concerns. First, the sparse translation of these benefits into improved standard of living for the most number of people. This reality of a gaping chasm between the rich and the poor represents a social iniquity that Paul VI decried 46 years ago in his revolutionary encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* (nos. 8 and 29). Second, we may not overlook the fact that, besides protestations of a genuine catalyst of belief, Africa's economic resurgence also evokes the spectre of a modern-day scramble for Africa by local and international agents. Why does the rest of the world really, fervently believe in the economic potential of this erstwhile "hopeless continent" and who is benefitting from the continent's revival?

I would like indulge a brief parenthesis to examine more critically the prevailing orthodoxy of belief in Africa's economic renaissance by comparing and contrasting general attitudes towards the continent in matters of development by the West, using as convenient model the United States of America, and by the East, using the People's Republic of China, as another exemplar. My aim is to understand not why but how the rest of the world believes in Africa.

A particularity of what I shall, for the sake of argument, label "the Western system" is that it operates under the banner of "compassion and ethics" as primary motivating factors in its dealings with Africa, hence the tendency to focus predominantly on issues of welfare, social empowerment and ethics. The concomitant discourse covers fields as disparate as same-sex marriage, gay rights, election monitoring, governance, capital punishment, HIV/AIDS, malaria, Tuberculosis, child mortality and maternal health. Typically, historically, this system disburses grants and aid that require an increasingly complex portfolio of due diligence to secure and account for. Besides, the size and consistency of humanitarian largess are predicated implicitly and explicitly on Africa's performance vis-à-vis a pre-established scorecard of ethical issues. This model has recorded phenomenal success in improving the lives of millions of Africans. The frequently cited examples show how polio has been all but eradicated in Africa, how access to Anti-Retroviral drugs continues to rise, even as malaria infection rates, child mortality and Female Genital Cutting decline. Does this approach satisfy Africa's vast developmental needs?

For want of a better term, let's call the second approach "the Eastern system." Its particularity could be labeled as "business and infrastructure." This system adopts as issues for priority exchange in commodities and infrastructural development. The popular code of this system is oftentimes encapsulated in the innocuous designation "friendship". Visitors to sub-Saharan Africa may notice temporary and permanent monuments and billboards at roundabouts and pedestrian bridges proclaiming, as one author has phrased it: "The Chinese Are Our Friends"!^{xxxii} Unlike the Western system, the Eastern system operates the so-called Angola Model or "oil-for-infrastructure" arrangement. A more accurate term for this arrangement would be "trade by barter."^{xxxiii} Zambian-born economist Dambisa Moyo's assessment of this model as a "win-win" situation^{xxxiv} seems to me facile and naïve. The visibility of the infrastructural outcomes of this model lies beyond doubt: the Chinese build railway lines, supply locomotives and wagons; they build airports, seaports, highways, bridges and hydro-electric power plants ... in exchange for commodities and mining concessions. Yet, when it comes to dealing with Africa, mystery surrounds the relative value of commodities vis-à-vis infrastructural development. In other words, how do you quantify the value of a mineral concession right relative to say a road or a hospital? Besides, in this Eastern system, the commodities on offer are not restricted to traditional energy needs or mineral resources. Thousands of acres of arable land are being ceded to foreign nations such as China, India and South Korea as economic development concession whose direct benefit to the people forced to give up meager but hugely symbolic ancestral tracts of land remains questionable.

In assessing the impact of these two systems of economic transaction between Africa and the rest of the world, some analysts commonly assume that the Eastern system is currently delivering more wealth and opportunities for Africa, along with – of course – friendship and cooperation. Yet it is difficult to shake the belief that the Eastern system shows little interest in governance and human rights issues, and only pays lip service to environmental concerns.^{xxxv} Evidently, there are exceptions to this broad categorization and mixing of motives happens concurrently. Furthermore, both systems would prefer trade and investment as more accurate tags for their motives and objectives in Africa. Notwithstanding, my point is simple: whether from the East or from the West, those who profess belief in Africa under the banner of "development" do so on

the basis of entrenched economic and geopolitical self-interest. Belief in Africa comes at a price to Africans. My questioning of the genuineness of the belief of the rest of the world in Africa is not to lay the blame for Africa's challenges at the doorsteps of other people. I am convinced of the futility of a certain brand of scholarship that narrows the analysis of Africa's challenges to a limited set of historical issues, such as slavery, colonialism and the Cold War. I say this without any intention of denigrating the insidious effects, past and present, of these evil schemes on the life and psyche Africans. But from where I stand, today, I am convinced that those who make belief in Africa a difficult proposition are primarily people of our own race. I agree that the assessment of Africa's economic fortunes ought not to be disconnected from structures, such as leadership and governance, that control and allocate its dividends, which structures, as I shall now demonstrate, surreptitiously undermine belief in Africa.

I am reminded of a proverb from Benin City, Nigeria, which goes thus: "The insect says it can sing and dance, but it is the chicken that prevents it from displaying its skills in broad daylight." Here's the point: many are the homegrown agents that prevent Africa from realizing its full potential. I know of a country where only four out of 10 children attend school: Somalia. I know of another country that holds the unenviable record of the largest number of out-of-school children, at 10.5 million children and counting: Nigeria. The statistics of out-of-school Somali children may be excusable, considering prevailing conditions of instability and insecurity that have bedeviled that most failed state on earth. But, Nigeria? The difference, ladies and gentlemen, lies in leadership or the lack of it. This reference to out-of-school children is but one example of the calamitous consequences that the culpable ineptitude of many African leaders can have on the lot of an entire continent.

Speaking of which, there is no shortage of leadership credential in Africa. Take the example of *The Elders*: an assemblage of iconic "global leaders who work together for peace and human rights."^{xxxvi} Two Africans form part of this august body of twelve; another two are honorary Elders, one of whom is the world's most archetypal icon of leadership, Madiba Nelson Mandela, who, coincidentally, is celebrated by The Coca Cola Company as the world's most admired person and, therefore, duly recorded as one vital reason to believe in Africa. Shriveled and

incapacitated by ill-health and decades of struggle and sacrifice, Mandela can seem a study in undiluted selflessness genuinely dedicated to the cause and service of humanity; a man possessed of a rare leadership DNA that seems alien to many others who usurp exalted positions in Africa but lack credibility, conscience, compassion and character. Mandela stands – a lone icon and a unique reason for believing in Africa – surrounded by a cohort of charlatans parading as heads of state, presidents and prime ministers, who are bereft of moral matter, skilled in the art of manipulation, impunity and kleptocracy, and possessed of a conscience so amoral it could easily serve as substitute matter for Teflon. Such is the totality of their inurement to shame and scandal that even the minutest speck of morality struggles to stick on their conscience.

Names, they say, bring division. If we are allowed to name Nelson Mandela (RSA), Kofi Annan (Ghana), Graça Machel (RSA/Mozambique), Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Liberia), Joyce Banda (Malawi), Wangari Maathai (Kenya), Desmond Tutu (RSA), Pedro Pires (Cape Verde), Festus Mogae (Botswana), Joaquim Chissano (Mozambique) ... as reasons for believing in Africa, fairness obliges that we also name those among us who undermine belief in Africa: Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe), Yaya Jameh (Gambia), King Mswati III (Swaziland), Omar el-Bashir (Sudan), Andry Rajoelina (Madagascar), Paul Biya (Cameroon), Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo (Guinea), Denis Sassou Nguesso (Congo), Isaias Afewerki (Eritrea).... I could continue. The sight of the socio-economic carnage and political havoc that this latter and lesser group of men – they are almost always men – have visited on their respective countries beggars belief and should allow us a better appreciation of the challenge that The Mo Ibrahim Foundation faces year in year out trying to find a worthy honoree for its lucrative Prize for Achievement in African Leadership. Just listen to a recent BBC news headline: “For the fourth time in five years, the world's most valuable individual prize – the Mo Ibrahim prize for good governance in Africa – has gone unclaimed!”

The ramifications of the chronic leadership deficit that bedevils Africa are serious and momentous. They militate against a key driver of development and transformation, namely, “A strong, proactive and responsible state [that] develops policies for both public and private sectors—based on a long-term vision and leadership, shared norms and values, and rules and

institutions that build trust and cohesion.^{xxxvii} Oftentimes, Africa's problems are categorized as structural.^{xxxviii} This label is not a stealth code for attenuating culpability for Africa's challenges. Speaking as a Catholic, I believe that structures don't go to confession, people do! And therein lies the problem: the people who govern Africa are an integral part of the continent's trials and tribulations.

Giving the widespread vacancy of credible and competent leadership capable of driving development and transformation, the quest for a recovery of belief in Africa demands that we cast our gaze elsewhere, even downward. I am convinced that there exist myriad reasons for believing in Africa among the continent's ordinary folk, in particular its womenfolk. To quote the Second African Synod: "Women in Africa make a great contribution to the family, society and the Church with their many talents and resources. However, not only are their dignity and contributions not fully recognized and appreciated, but are often deprived of their rights" (African Synod, 2009: Proposition, no. 47; "Message of the Synod," no. 25; *Africae Munus*: Post-Apostolic Exhortation, no. 55).

Consider, therefore, African women like Burundian Marguerite "Maggy" Barankitse, who has dedicated her life to the task of bridging atavistic ethnic divide and reconciling mortal enemies long separated by mutual hatred, prejudice and antagonism with compassion and love;^{xxxix} look at CNN Heroes Award winner, Sr. Rosemary Nyirumbe, of St. Monica's Tailoring School, Gulu, and Angelina Atyam, also of Gulu, Uganda, who are creating new opportunities for children battered and traumatized by rebel insurgency and government recklessness; look at 2013 UN Nansen Refugee Award recipient, Sister Angelique Namaika, in DR Congo, whose personal and religious vocation is to rescue, rebuild and restore the dignity of women victims of violence and war. I could multiply examples, but this crucial point does not stand on the strength of numbers: Africa is worth believing in if we believe and invest in the advancement of its most underestimated and untapped resource: women – those heroic foot soldiers of hope, transformation and change! The sobering assessment of the Second African Synod reminds us that "unfortunately, the evolution of ways of thinking in this area is much too slow" (*Africae Munus*, no. 57). Thus,

While it is undeniable that in certain African countries progress has been made towards the advancement of women and their education, it remains the case that, overall, women's dignity and rights as well as their essential contribution to the family and to society have not been fully acknowledged or appreciated. Thus women and girls are often afforded fewer opportunities than men and boys. There are still too many practices that debase and degrade women in the name of ancestral tradition (*Africae Munus*, no. 56).

There is another demographic constituency that compels belief in Africa. By all calculations, Africa is a youthful continent, with the majority of its population under 25 years old. In an ideal situation concomitant adjectives for describing a continent with this record would include: enviable, energetic, passionate, creative, vibrant, hopeful.... To be sure, all these are predicated of Africa. What should disturb global conscience is how a collusion of internal and external actors militates against this important variable of Africa's survival. So, against the backdrop of statistical assertion of Africa's economic rising, consider statistics that attribute the highest proportion of binge drinkers, the highest rate of youth unemployment, the lowest education intake, etc. to Africa. I raise these facts not to elicit lamentation and commiseration but to make the point that, in addition to investing in women, the long-neglected investment in Africa's children and youth, is a fundamental precondition for restoring belief in the future of the continent.

In addition to my earlier point regarding attitudes towards Africa's economic potential, this point about investing in people raises the question of aid – humanitarian, foreign and investment aid – and will constitute my final consideration. It is not my intention to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the politics of aid. A brief excursus would suffice to identify some terms of the aid debate and point a way forward for Africa and its partners-in-aid, by drawing on the tenets of Catholic Social Tradition.

There are vociferous protagonists and antagonists in the frequently acrimonious debate about the perils and promises of aid to Africa. If we believe the most vocal anti-aid campaigner, Dambisa Moyo, there are many things wrong with aid as it is presently conceived and delivered in relation

to Africa. For Moyo, aid is not a problem; “Aid is the problem;”^{xli} it is the most effective retardant of Africa’s development.^{xlii} What is more, aid is a potent contributor to the continent’s “cycle of dysfunction,”^{xliii} its chronic dependence on and addiction to foreign assistance,^{xliii} which in turn is the “greatest aides” of corruption.^{xliv} Her strident rhetoric aside, central to Moyo’s argument is a simple and compelling fact: Brazil, China and India have lifted an unprecedented number of people from poverty without relying on aid.^{xlv} Why should it be different for Africa?

Global patrons of private philanthropy, such as Bill Gates, but also the prominent economist of development, Jeffery Sachs, hold opposing viewpoint. As I understand it and to simplify Sachs’s argument, for less-developed countries, poverty is a trap compounded by geographical, cultural, fiscal and demographic factors that disempower and paralyze the poor. Simply put: the poor are too poor to help themselves. “When poverty is very extreme, the poor do not have the ability—by themselves—to get out of the mess.”^{xlvi} Thus, Sachs argues, if development were akin to climbing a ladder, where poor countries face the prospect of permanent relegation to the lowest rung, all it takes “to gain a foothold on the ladder” is a little push: “The rich countries do not have to invest enough in the poorest countries to make them rich; they need to invest enough so that these countries can get their foot on the ladder. After that, the tremendous dynamism of self-sustaining economic growth can take hold.”^{xlvii}

If we distilled their respective argumentations to simple jingles, Moyo’s would read: “Aid kills!” and Gates’ would proclaim: “Aid saves!”

What solutions do these economic gladiators propose? While Moyo proposes “systematic aid,” Sachs recommends “clinical economics.” Without tarrying over details and differences, it would seem to me that both approaches highlight particular aspects of development assistance that actually converge in their wider objective of a more effective development strategy. However, both lines of thought also seem problematic if detached from the lived experience of the subjects of their analyses. On the one hand, branding the poor – however we determine the constituents of this category – as incapable of helping themselves impugns their agency and capability, potentially leaving the door open to fatalism and debilitating dependency. For far too long Africa

has endured the deleterious effects of such conditions. In reality, this opinion cannot be sustained in the face of multiple examples of creative and transformative initiatives towards economic empowerment of the poor and by the poor that run the gamut from Grameen-Bank-style micro-credit schemes to neighbourhood self-help savings schemes popularly known as “Susu” in some parts of West Africa. Therefore, David Blair is right: “The world may not have noticed, but most of Africa has spent this century gradually hauling itself out of poverty.”^{xlvi} On the other hand, to simply claim that aid is antithetic to development skews empirical evidence. Through foreign aid several African countries have made considerable gains against diseases such as river blindness, polio, guinea worm, Tuberculosis and malaria, and expanded educational opportunities for millions of children, where such opportunities did not previously exist.

Polemics apart, in regard to development assistance, to give or not to give, that is not the question. What some development experts overlook is the simple truth that in our increasingly globalized world, nobody succeeds alone – communities, societies and countries develop either with the help or at the expense of others. Therefore, the crucial task is to rethink and redefine the terms of relationships that depend on the transfer of aid from one entity to the other, bilaterally or multilaterally. I believe that Paul VI struck the right balance when he proposed the idea of holistic development. That is what Africa needs. Anybody who knows Africa understands that the essence of life is the vital connection between the individual, community, God and the environment – what I previously in shorthand described as *ubuntu*. Development is not development if it merely turns people into interesting statistics and fails to comprise “a joint effort for the development of the human race as a whole” (*Populorum Progressio*, no. 43). Thus stated, I believe that Paul VI also resolves the deadlock that Moyo and Sachs create in a manner that rhymes with African sensibility when he outlined a triptych of obligations deriving from the principle of solidarity that must regulate relationships at communal, country and international levels. First of all, argues Paul VI, privileged nations must support the developmental goals of less-privileged nations; second, economic relations and transactions must be founded on equity and justice; and, third, we must practice a mutually beneficial global charity that empowers all partners to “give and receive, and where the progress of some is not bought at the expense of others” (*Populorum Progressio*, no 44). In light of the insight of Paul VI, in what concerns

Africa, individuals and organizations that believe in Africa and seek to engage in its transformation and development, need a refocusing of strategies and interests away from purely theoretical and technical considerations towards key principles of the Catholic Social Tradition. I present an abridged list of these principles relative to the subject of this lecture in no particular order of importance.

The first principle is *solidarity* which I would define as movement from treating Africa as an object of charity addicted to aid towards engaging the continent as partner. This entails, as Paul was concerned to point out, the ethical imperative to hear the cry of our brothers or sisters and answer it *together* with love (*Populorum Progressio*, no. 3; emphasis mine). Solidarity is antithetical to a mindset that would treat Africa as an arriviste whose place at the gathering of the development of peoples is conferred as a favour rather recognised as a right.

The second principle is *subsidiarity*. The lifecycle of aid can be fickle, pegged explicitly as it is not only on the circumstances and disposition of the givers, but also oftentimes implicitly on a mentality of noblesse oblige. Genuine belief in the development of Africa necessitates the empowerment of people to take charge of their future themselves in a manner that is dignified and sustainable. As the first president of the United States of America of African descent declared on his maiden presidential visit to Africa, “We must start from the simple premise that Africa’s future is up to Africans.”

The third principle is *mutuality*. It would be dishonest to project an exclusively altruistic motivation for believing and engaging in Africa. Historically speaking, nothing could be farther from the truth. Those who seek to engage in the developmental process of Africa must assume the courage and conviction of critical self-interrogation, starting with a simple question: what’s in it for me? It is questionable to reduce aid to disinterested transactional affairs of transfer and receipt of funds, no matter how well intentioned, without honoring the right to “give and receive, and where the progress of some is not bought at the expense of others” (*Populorum Progressio*, no 44).

All of the foregoing presupposes, as a fourth and final principle, *relationality*. In the final analysis, no matter how sophisticated and efficient the measures applied to engage Africa in a process of development, the truth remains: development is about people – their dignity, their humanity, their rights, their values, their gifts. As Paul VI has insisted, in a language that Africa understands, “[People] must meet [people], nation must meet nation, as brothers and sisters, as children of God. In this mutual understanding and friendship, in this sacred communion, we must also begin to work together to build the common future of the human race” (*Populorum Progressio*, no. 43).

Let me conclude by thanking Chris Bain, Matthew Sanderson and the entire team, sponsors and partners of CAFOD for the invitation to deliver this prestigious lecture, and acknowledging with gratitude CAFOD’s role in sustaining belief in the future of Africa. A crucial task facing the continent of Africa is to construct an image of itself and generate an agenda of development worthy of the belief, trust and investment of Africans and the global geopolitical fraternity. In spite of harmful stigmatization and stereotypical portrayal, Africa has defied formidable odds and demonstrated resilience and resolve borne on the courage and hope of a billion people. As should be clear, belief in Africa is first and foremost belief by Africans in Africa! To pretend otherwise is to fall prey to a self-defeatist moral alibi. The obstacles to progress are many; I have outlined only a few in the course of this lecture. Yet the claim of a billion reasons to believe in Africa is not, as might at first be feared, fanciful and delusive; there is ground for “a future full of hope,” as promised in the Christian Scripture (Jeremiah 29:11). For a continent whose image is desecrated by conflict and poverty, chaos and crisis, it would take more than a can of coke to redeem its fate, revive its fortunes and restore its self-belief. The Coca Cola Company, that self-appointed global purveyor of carbonated happiness, dares us to try.

I thank you for your kind and patient attention!

ⁱ <http://www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/coca-cola-offers-consumers-reasons-to-believe>.

ⁱⁱ David Blair, “Africa is now more peaceful than at any time since colonial powers left,” *The Tablet* (5 October 2013).

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- iii William Whitaker Shreeve, *Sierra Leone: the principal British Colony on the Western Coast of Africa* (1847), 2-3.
- iv G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover, 1956), 93; see Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764).
- v Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 99.
- vi For this reason, the Bishops at the first African Synod paid glowing tribute to missionaries: "The effort made by missionaries, men and women, who worked for generations on end on the African continent, deserves our praise and gratitude. They worked very hard, endured much pain, discomfort, hunger, thirst, illness, the certainty of a very short life span and death itself, in order to give us what was most dear to them: Jesus Christ. They paid a very high price to make us the children of God. Their faith and commitment, the dynamism and the ardour of their zeal have made it possible for us to exist today as Church-Family to the praise and glory of God. Very early they were joined in their witness by great numbers of the sons and daughters of the land of Africa as Catechists, interpreters and collaborators of all kinds" ("Message of the Synod," no. 10).
- vii http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20091004_sinodo-africa_en.html.
- viii John L. Allen, Jr, *The Future Church: How Ten Trends are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 17.
- ix The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa" (April 2010), <http://www.pewforum.org/>.
- x Ibid.
- xi Ibid.
- xii World Christian Database (<http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/>) and The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population" (December 2011; corrected February 2013), <http://www.pewforum.org/>.
- xiii Joana Socías, "Una 'fábrica' de almas para la Iglesia" in *El Mundo* (6 March 2013).
- xiv Wole Soyinka, *Of Africa* (New Haven and London: Yale, 2012), xi.
- xv Ibid, 129.
- xvi Ibid.
- xvii Ibid, 141.
- xviii Ibid, 197.
- xix Ibid, 198.
- xx Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 83.
- xxi See Allen, *The Future Church*, 438; Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 39-40.
- xxii Gabriel Setiloane, quoted in Charles Villa-Vincencio, *Walk with Us and Listen: Political Reconciliation in Africa* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 113; see Cedric Mayson, *Why Africa Matters* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2010), 31-33.
- xxiii Timothy Jenkins, *Religion in English Everyday Life: An Ethnographic Approach* (New York: Berghahn Book, 1999), 14.
- xxiv Soyinka, *Of Africa*, 130.

^{xxv} TIME magazine has twice published cover articles with the title ‘Africa rising’ in March 1998 and December 2012.

^{xxvi} <http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21572377-african-lives-have-already-greatly-improved-over-past-decade-says-oliver-august>

^{xxvii} Blair, “Africa is now more peaceful.”

^{xxviii} The McKinsey Global Institute, “Lions on the move: The progress and potential of African economies” (June 2010), http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/africa/lions_on_the_move.

^{xxix} The 2013 Human Development Report, “The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World” (March 2013), <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/human-development-report-2013/>.

^{xxx} See The 2013 Human Development Report, “The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World” (March 2013), <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/human-development-report-2013/>.

^{xxxi} Ibid.

^{xxxii} Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid is no working and how there is a better way for Africa* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), 103.

^{xxxiii} Moyo, *Dead Aid*, 111; *Winner Take All: China’s race for resources and what it means for the world* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 82, 96.

^{xxxiv} Moyo, *Dead Aid*, 112; *Winner Take All*, 85.

^{xxxv} Moyo, *Winner Take All*, 157.

^{xxxvi} <http://www.theelders.org/about>.

^{xxxvii} Amartya Sen, in “The 2013 Human Development Report (Summary),” 5.

^{xxxviii} Moyo, *Winner Take All*, 184.

^{xxxix} Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2011), 148-192.

^{xl} Moyo, *Dead Aid*, 47.

^{xli} Ibid, 28, 49.

^{xlii} Ibid, 6.

^{xliii} Ibid, 75, 143.

^{xliv} Ibid, 48.

^{xlv} Moyo, *Winner Take All*, 19.

^{xlvi} Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Times* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), 56.

^{xlvi} Ibid, 73.

^{xlvi} Blair, “Africa is now more peaceful.”