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**Religious freedom: A choice between terror and liberty**

Your Excellencies, dear colleagues, dear students!

Let me take Saint Mark the Evangelist as testimonial and guideline for our work. Mark wrote: “See, I am sending my messenger, the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord.”

We Christians in Europe and all over the world turned to be silent in our voice, doing a lot of educational and social work in all countries, but we integrate totally in the respective surroundings. We accept being spit at, tolerate everything else, but shut up when it would be the time to stand up and speak about our faith. For a free and hopeful society Christianity is indispensable.

A short look back by sociology will testify this:

Societies can be organized in two different ways. The first is a monolithic society, the second a plural society. Which seems to be the choice between two alternating models is in reality the choice between terror and liberty.

1. **The monolithic society:**   
   The idea is that one specific ideology determines a whole society. We had this since ancient times in Sparta, Rome or Egypt. And this idea has been determining societies through the last 3000 years, including the European middle ages, and also the Reformation, which changed only one religious identity towards another one. The main idea has been: Cuius regio, eius religio: Who rules determines the religion of all people in his society. And we´ve seen this system also in Stalinism, Nazism, in Ruanda genocide of Hutu against Tutsi. We see it today in Chinas, Myanmars and Saudi-Arabs societies like we´ve seen it in atheist Albania. No matter if the unifying idea is political, ethical or religious. The concept is always the identity of the society that determines the personal conscience.

The more individual thinking grows under the population, the more repression takes place to bring the society in line. Terror is often the answer, till today as we see it in many Islamic societies and also in repressive administrations like Northern Korea. And last, but not least we can imagine such a monolithic structure in our European secular society growing up. We hear the high priests of negative religion claiming for a secular society in which, hidden under a flag of liberty, intolerance is the goal. The cross becomes a symbol to be not longer tolerated in public and the Muslims headscarf shall be extinguished.

1. **The plural society** is the total contrary to this monolithic idea of society. Its roots are
   1. the Christian idea of personal vocation through God,
   2. the concept of personal responsibility for conscience and life,
   3. and its development in the Enlightment,
   4. followed by radical secularization today.

These are the fundaments of the modern idea of religious peace and tolerance (Locke, Rousseau, Mendelssohn, Kant). The main difference is that not a society any longer determines the belief of the people, but each individual itself decides about its beliefs - in religion as in politics and in economics.   
  
This concept of individuality made it necessary to invent new ideas of society building. Democracy woke up and majority votes came to life. To prevent majority from terror against minorities, minority rights was declared. In modern history these minority rights started with the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and today are internationally anchored in the UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.   
  
The most important step has been to dedicate these minority rights not only to groups, but essentially also to individuals.

**To weaken the human rights**, under which we find the right of religious freedom (art. 18 UN Human Rights Declaration), means to remove the whole concept of a plural society and leads us back to the times of monolithic societies. That´s the reason why all attempts of Islamic states or Asian governments, to reduce the right of religious freedom to a right only for a religion as community and not for the individuals has to be answered strictly by defending the individual right of religious freedom.

The European nations after the end of ideological regimes decided to build up secular societies without ideology. This led to the EU. But crisis like financial crisis told us, that a pure secular society without values, moral instances and ethic fundaments cannot live and develop a sustainable system. We are confronted by our young people with the hunger of our young generation for values more than for a life in illusion and with lots of money. And in Nigeria? A multicultural society exists, with a strong democratic fundament – but exactly this is ignored by northern federal states turning back to Sharia right – excluding Christians from equal participation. Or shall I remember the Boko Haram, which you and moderate Muslims are suffering from? Let us start standing up and reaching our hands for a true dialogue.

But if our hands are rejected, then we are obliged by Saint Markus´ example to defend our faith and our public worship according to the Constitution. You as Christian academics are in the first row to intensify the dialogue - and to strengthen the faith of the Christians in your country against all enemies. Never let you be silenced by attacks on your Catholic faith, as Pope Francis told us recently (Angelus 17.11.2013): “Rather understand such challenges as an opportunity for Christian witness. In the end, Christ will win.”

That’s the same task we have in Europe: to strengthen our faith. Shout out loudly what we believe in and force our politicians into action against terror and ideological intolerance – in Europe as in Nigeria.

By this it is obvious that politics without religious ethics go wrong. That´s the chance for our world to develop a religious fundament - not in an ideological way, but in a plural way. The only way to implement this is the dialogue of religions in a political and economical dimension.

Europe is going the opposite way: Towards a society of pure secularization and negation of religions, in the meaning of forbidding religious values and traditions in public. We call this the negative religious freedom.

The great chance for Nigeria is to give a best practice example for Africa, born out of the experience of cohabitation of various religious denominations. The example of an intolerant ideology you can experience in the neighborhood of the Tchad, Sudan or Saudi Arabia. Such systems must fail. In modern history all ideologies developed and based on intolerant ideologies failed in building up a tolerant and successful society with social justice. I believe this is what President Jonathan Goodluck meant when he received the 2013 Africa Peace Award from the *United Religions Initiatives* some weeks ago*: „Even when countries are fighting, at the end of the day, they will still come to the dialogue table to resolve their differences. They have hardly solved any crisis through the barrel of the gun. Even if you had the most sophisticated weapon to fight, they would still come to negotiate, otherwise, you can never live in peace. So, let me call on all Nigerians, especially the young people. ... For us to develop our country, we must all embrace peace.”*

All this dialogue of religions together AND with politics will lead to a **“political theology”**. In the past we have seen mainly negative examples of political theologies in the way of a theological legitimization of political violence and totalitarism (Carl Schmitt). As a catholic theologian I can only evoke the bad times of crusades and pogroms against Muslims and Jews. In times of secular societies and human right chartas these dark times of religion and politics have passed by. So we need to develop a new, modern and deeply value- and spirituality-oriented **“new political theology”** (Metz, Böckenförde), which underlines the necessity of transcendence as limit and correction of politics against the instrumentalization of religion in the so called “clash of civilizations” (Huntington). In such a new political theology central human dimensions as human dignity and human rights become the path towards more social justice and economical responsibility.

This overview has been necessary for understanding, why there is **no alternative to religious freedom in modern societies**.

**But how to establish religious freedom?**

* By inter religious **tolerance**,
* By inter religious **respect**,

There is no tolerance without respect, nor respect without knowing the other, and no knowing of the others religious denomination without **education**.

Or said in the words of Cardinal John Onaiyekan, Bishop of Abuja, spoken a few days ago in Vienna: *“We have to concentrate more on seeking common grounds, rather than differences between each other. If you know each other, enemy images are degraded more rapidly. Religious leaders often emphasize too much on religious differences! In NIGERIA we are aware of our differences. We live a national unity with different ethnics and languages. We are 80 million Muslims and 80 million Christians laughing and suffering together.”*

**Ways of education:**

1. Education by values (ethics, religions)
2. education has to be followed by personal contacts, open-mindedness and by joining each other’s hands
3. followed by real dialogue, because there is no understanding without dialogue
4. followed by integrated actions
5. followed by alliances of conveniencefor political initiatives

Without these interdependent steps no multicultural society will be able to exist.

On the contrary, if only **tolerance without mutual respect** is realized, a secular society with intellectual apathy and no values inside will be bound to increase. Such a society creates a plurality of groups – ethical, religious, political, sexual… - living side by side but without anything in common concerning values. This development we find in the European Union, where in the field of religion a negative religious freedom cuts off all public signs of religious beliefs. A society, and also any kind of political system, is aseptic, bloodless and unattractive to live in, without integrating and respecting people based on religious values.

By this a multicultural society needs more than any other society the active and positive religious freedom, the interreligious dialogue, the interreligious information and the visibility in public of religious beliefs in its plurality.

***Obstacles:***

* *Religious rules are more important than secular law (Sharia, treatment of women)*
* *No interaction of religious groups*
* *Enemy image of the other’s religions in society*
* *No participation in democratic systems*

***Steering competence of government***

* *Grassroot mediation inside the minority groups*
* *Living information about other groups and political process*
* *Cultural and democratic mediation*
* ***deeper religious knowledge****, areas of agreement between religions, respecting the other, learning from one another*
* *active respect for traditions of the religions – on both sides: toward Islam and toward Christianity*

If no dialogue takes place, neither between religious communities nor between politics and religions, there are only two options left:

**Either you murder your dialogue partners or you ignore them totally.**

Religious genozide will lead to monolithic societies as shown above.

Ignoring leads to parallel-societies in a nation, perverting the building up of a peaceful and integrated society.

Allow me a subjective look from Europe to Nigeria: When about three years ago in Nigeria religious Islamic terrorism started, this was a phenomenon previously unknown in the country. From our European point of view this started not as a singular break out of Islamic terror. We see it also in Egypt, Pakistan, Syria and Iraq and slowly expanding in almost all Islamic countries and groups worldwide. It is the attempt to renew Islam by a minority concept of wahabit-salafist Islam, based on an absolute intolerant understanding of Qur’an, denying all positive words inside the Qur’an to the people of the Book (ahl-ul-kitab). All this attempts to destabilize traditional Islam and by this also the politics of the Sunnite countries are an assault to destroy 1400 years of traditional Islamic worship. Muslims and Christians lived together in the middle east for centuries, in Syria, Iraq, Egypt and also in Nigeria. Till today such a living and working together is practiced in Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, the United Arab Republic and other countries. Salafite theology tries to change all this. A new Islamic caliphate should be erected and not only the Christians are called enemies of the true faith. Also Imams and tolerant, open-minded Muslims cooperating with Christians are persecuted and killed. This changing of Islam to a salafite way of belief is the goal of the Saudi-Arab dynasty. Every Muslim should follow their idea of wahabite Islam and establish a pure Muslim society without any freedom, with suppression of women and extermination of all rationality. Boko Haram is only the Nigerian part of the game. We face worldwide the attempt to create a new, Saudi-Arab dominated Islam, bringing wahabite Sunnism to power. Shiite Islam too should be destroyed like Christianity, Judaism and all other religions. Recently the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Abdulaziz Bin Abdullah, has once again called for the destruction of all Churches on the Arabian Peninsula. They want to create a real “clash of civilization” and an Islamic empire under rule of Saudi-Arab leaders. The Muslim community has to be aware of this attempt. Therefore it is our duty to come into dialogue with them, not only for interreligious tolerance, but also for the future of a modern, upright Islam in loyalty to the 1400 years of tradition, philosophy and dialogue grounded in the Qur’an. Pope Francis´ encyclical “Evangelii Gaudium” (“The Joy of the Gospel”) guides us the way: *“Our respect for true followers of Islam should lead us to avoid hateful generalizations, for authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Koran are opposed to every form of violence.”* It is a fight against wahabite imperialism and an understanding of Islam created by political concepts for ruling the Islamic world.

**So an intense and true dialogue is the only way to a prosperous future and for surviving of Islam as a religion, not as a method of political ruling and oppression of thoughts.**

But politics need religions in an open minded, respectful and tolerant way. That’s the difference between the old model of tyrannical politics with legitimization by an ignorant religion on one side and the model of a new political theology in transparency, tolerance and respectful dialogue on the other side.

For such a new political theology we need Christians stand up like roaring lions as Saint Mark the Evangelist was, speaking loudly about our savior Jesus Christ and offering his open hands and his commandments for a free society, in which a dialogue of faith always is possible without the need to convince the other side – but to present our social and spiritual competence as a service to the society – not excluding anyone. That´s also the work, the European Academy of Science and Arts and my class, my faculty, of world religions is dedicated to. We are very glad that with Prof. Msgr. Obiora Ike a new member of our class is elected. His expertise will be enriching our dialogue for a peaceful and tolerant world as he did it in the past.

In a nation, in which religious dialogue and freedom of religious expression is not properly integrated, this will end up in a dead end of an intolerant ideology in which the values of human beliefs and faiths will be ignored. To avoid this, Politics need religions to establish a strong, value-orientated society giving hope to the young generation. Never again one religious denomination should be allowed to destroy the societies’ liberty and peace by intolerant behavior. **We have to resist**. And we have to fight for a tolerant and respectful nation. All religious leaders should understand the urgency of this.

God bless you on your way.