

UNITY IN DIVERSITY: ESSENTIAL DYNAMICS FOR SOCIETY

MEANING AND NATURE

“*Unity in diversity*”, as a concept, is an age-old phenomenon. It has been with mankind throughout history and continues to characterize the tensions that are usually associated with an organization and even families. Often when the word “*unity*” is used to describe a group of persons who have come together in an organisation, some people mistakenly take it to be a “oneness of mind” or “unification of thoughts”. Such people forget that each human being has a different cognitive make-up which makes him or her a unique entity. Unity, in real sense, is not another name for similarity. It is not synonymous with uniformity or oneness of thought pattern. It goes beyond mere togetherness. That each one of us exudes difference in characteristics is not an abomination but rather a providential gift. Difference is generally an accident of birth and that renders each one unique in the scheme or pursuit of our purpose here on earth. Indeed, individual uniqueness is a great source of complementarity of our humanity. The sense of unity should, therefore, dispose us to accepting and respecting each one’s difference and to working to harmonise our differences for the good of the group or society. That is the essence of the term “unity in diversity”. We have no choice but to practise it. As children of God, we must recognise that the *Imago Dei* itself is cast in “unity-in-diversity” mode. Many a time too, when we use the word “*diversity*” to describe the richness of individual capacities, some people assume it to be exclusive self-promotion. No! Such persons forget that each human being is relevant, complete and valuable only in the context of his fellow human being or society.

So when we talk about *Unity* it should not be conceived as **collectivism** because collectivism does not give much room for the individual to maximize his or her God-given talents. Unity seen in the light of collectivism would rather render human growth impossible. Similarly, the fact that we exhibit diverse background does not mean that “diversity” should be looked at as **individualism** because individualism does not make it easy for the community to benefit from the unique and special endowments each one possesses. Where individualism exists, it breeds injustice.

Therefore, while the human person needs to grow to perfect his uniquely-endowed capacities, he must also ensure that his personal talents flow lovingly to positively affect his fellow human being. The general picture of “*unity in diversity*” is that we see ourselves as moving along separate paths and at the same time we are in harmonious union with our colleagues on the same journey. This is the general nature of the concept of “unity in diversity”. This dual-propensity is experienced by all human groupings and societies and it is always possible, feasible and successful when it is consciously managed.

Human groupings, wherever they are found, ought to consciously internalize and practice the essence of *unity-in-diversity*. How we are able to organise ourselves into viable, separate entities, and yet remain harmonious with each other, depends to a

greater extent on the ingenuity and creativity as well as courage and purposefulness of the leaders.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL “UNITY IN DIVERSITY “

A successful practice of “unity in diversity” calls for some strategies and basic understanding. **First**, let us recognize that Unity is desirable but it is never imposed. It can be achieved in an appreciable measure when we understand each other’s perspective. Unity does not come into existence by word of mouth; neither is it achieved by laws. Rather, Unity is cultivated and nurtured through goodwill and love. In this respect, we must avoid the temptation of putting in place any **over-arching structure** to bind ourselves. So, as each group moves freely to chart its own course within the general framework of basic human needs they would naturally find a common ground from where they can collaborate towards achieving their ultimate purpose. In this case, we can say that *diversity* enriches unity of people and it does not breed **fragmentation**. Therefore, we must of necessity adopt the strategy of learning to make autonomy exist but within the parameters of the big family.

Secondly, as Christians, when we speak of unity we are looking at unity in Faith as professed by the Church: unity in obedience to God’s law of Charity, unity in the understanding of dogma and doctrine of the Church, unity in the understanding of the purpose of the Church, of liturgy, Eucharist, Sacraments, and unity in the hope that Christ the Redeemer will come again. These fundamentals are the essentials that should engage our attention and they can be achieved in greater dimensions when we are in separate, smaller groupings proclaiming and witnessing to the same Gospel message. It has been said philosophically that “it is when we diminish that Christ increases”. In this respect, *diversity* should not be looked at as “disunity” but as a sprinkler which enables the gardener reach all corners of the field with water.

Thirdly, “unity in diversity” exposes effects of difference and plurality. While we cannot erase difference, we can control its negativity. If we do not control it, it can wreak irreparable damage to our purpose as pilgrims marching along the redemptive path of Christ. Plurality has a tendency to destroy unity. It tends to promote shortcomings such as complacency, insufficient knowledge of one another, suspicion, jealousy, greed, malice, ill-will and unhealthy competition. Though plurality can threaten our common purpose and sense of unity, if properly managed, plurality can be a great source of zeal, knowledge, courage and God’s love. In John 14: 2, we read: “In

my father's house, there are many mansions". This biblical verse shows plurality of existence. It gives meaning to *Unity in Diversity*. Let us remember that we are several "mansions" in our "Father's House". Pope Francis, in his weekly audience on 24 August, 2013, said that unity in diversity can thrive when virtues such as "humility, gentleness, magnanimity, and love are practiced". They are "like the pillars that support and hold together the single great edifice of the Church". Let us make this papal teaching our strategy.

Lastly, *unity in diversity* requires that we become **resourceful**. We must become more knowledgeable about the Christian purpose that brings us together. If you do not know what you claim to follow, any spurious or false presentation can lead you astray. Let the societies and associations in the Church set in motion programmes of instruction that will make all of us sufficiently knowledgeable about the faith, the Church and the State. Do not only ask the priests to say Mass for you; ask them to also shed light on issues, processes and challenges facing the Church of our time. Also, demand of the leaders of the lay organisations valid instructions about the role of the laity and how to remove the aberrant practices. You must also commit yourselves to making funds available for the work of the Church. When you bring your resourcefulness of knowledge to the benefit of the Church and fellow lay people you obviously succeed in building confidence of the laity to defend the Church at all times.

CONCLUSION

The critical interface subsisting in the *unity-in-diversity* dynamics is the element of inclusion. Inclusion means not excluding others and also bringing others from outside to share or participate in your programmes and activities. It means making all feel welcome. Let us rekindle in ourselves the basic tenets of our calling, especially Charity which is nothing but loving God for his own sake and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. Let us continue to uphold that God is the Truth and that everything is subordinate to Him and with Him we are always united against the enemy, even if we are divided into several groupings.

In all this, responsible leadership is a key factor in the search for the right path of engagement. Let the leaders be in constant consultation with each other so that useful practices can be shared to enrich the lay apostolate in Ghana. Let our leaders rise above themselves to realize that they are in positions of service and that they must at all times allow the power of love to overcome the love of power in their ways. Our new leaders should be determined to confront challenges and prejudices that draw back progress

and be bold enough to throw away strange practices and methods that, for instance, make a few of our leaders remain leaders and decision makers in perpetuity. Any Organisation that, directly or indirectly, creates perpetual positional leaders promotes disservice to itself. Let us ask the Holy Spirit for a vision that inspires in everyone a renewed willingness to love one another so that in our diversity we can still be united to proclaim Christ the Saviour without whom all of us are nothing.

Thank You and God Bless

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