

# Preface

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As a network of Catholic institutions of higher learning dedicated to teaching and research in philosophy, the *Conférence Mondiale des Institutions Universitaires Catholiques de Philosophie* (COMIUCAP) exists since April 1999. The creation of the network was a direct consequence of the publication in 1998 of the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* by Pope John Paul II, the most recent magisterial document of the Church entirely dedicated to philosophy.

The creation of COMIUCAP was officialised during an event that took place at the headquarters of UNESCO in Paris, in March of 2000. The institutional goals of the network can be expressed in the following points: 1) promote quality and diversity in the fields of philosophical research within the diversified context of catholic higher education around the world; 2) promote sustainable development in the diverse fields of research and of study in philosophy as deemed relevant for the development, mission and identity of Catholic Universities around the world; 3) identify situations and problems in contemporary societies and cultures that may generate, or simply demand, new ways of thinking in accordance with the values of the Gospel and the teachings of the Christian tradition(s), especially within the many different contexts of Catholic Higher Education today; 4) Promote collaborative exchanges of information and services among Catholic men and women dedicated to professional research and teaching in the diverse fields of Philosophy; 5) Facilitate the exchange of students and teachers among Catholic Institutions of higher education on a global scale; 6) Develop collaborative strategies among persons in positions of leadership within Catholic institutions of higher education; 7) Promote the ever more vital and dialogical relationship between philosophy and theology as well as between these two disciplines and the other sciences, particularly the ones more directly dedicated to the study of the human condition. Indeed, we believe that the educational mission of the Church in the globalized world of today demands from philosophy a most serious engagement in the search for ever new ways and strategies capable of

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enabling a more effective dialogue between spheres apparently so heterogeneous as the ones of science and religion, of faith and reason, of ethics and economics, of person and society, of plural culture(s) and the unity of truth.<sup>1</sup>

In Africa as elsewhere, philosophers consider as particularly meaningful the development of the ability to work within a frame of mind that allows for a deep hermeneutics of the meaning expressed in the traditional forms of popular wisdom, i.e., the wisdom expressed, e.g., in rituals, practices of medicine, storytelling, and many other narrative processes. This, however, does not mean that the philosopher of today, as of the future, can abandon the search for those universal structures that sustain our metaphysical presence in the world. Hence, the importance that COMIUCAP places in the development of structures that facilitate the philosophical praxis of any Catholic intellectual authentically in search of adequate ways to foster the integration of traditional wisdom as inscribed in the plurality of contemporary cultural forms.

We consider, therefore, that one of the main tasks for Philosophy is to contribute to a phenomenological clarification of the diverse and different manifestations of the religious spirit present in the cultures of the world. In the case of Africa, for example, this could mean an investigation into the authentic relationship between the Christian faith and the traditional forms of religion. As such, the presence of COMIUCAP in a continent such as Africa is called to become an instrument destined to assist Catholic institutions of higher learning in the process of the academic formation of the future pastoral agents of the Church and the formation of the cadres that shall assist entire societies in the process of governing themselves and, in doing so, facing the challenges of the future with growing dignity and efficacy. As philosophers, we have the special responsibility of assisting others, as well as one another, in the process of finding proper and rigorous ways of bringing into adequate flourishing the *Life in Christ* constitutive of our gathering as Church.<sup>2</sup>

Hence, the importance of the event that took place at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in April of 2017. We gathered in Nairobi asking questions such as the following: What is the role and value of philosophy in contemporary Africa? What is the relationship between philosophy and understanding within African culture(s)? Furthermore, we also realized that a key aspect of the discourse on philosophy in Africa entails the tendency to attribute the title *philosopher* just to people trained in Philosophy, while ignoring other rational and critical thinkers. Even today, African philosophers must fight for their proper position and the awareness of the proper role

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J.J. VILA-CHÃ, *Serving Catholicity and the Causes of Philosophy: Mission and Identity of a Network (COMIUCAP)*, in J. EHRET – E. MÖDE (eds.), *The Challenge of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition: Making a Difference in Contemporary Academic Settings*, Lit Verlag, Berlin, DE – Wien, AT 2011, 71-88.

<sup>2</sup> *Ivi.*

they can play. Whenever the discipline is perceived as inapplicable, then philosophy must find ways for gathering *momentum*. Regardless of the fact that it has been condemned many times in the past, fact is, as we witnessed in Nairobi, that philosophy keeps inventing the role it has to play. After all, our beautiful gathering at CUEA in Nairobi was a clear demonstration of a deep belief in the role that Philosophy has to play in the Africa of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, most particularly as the many tasks ahead are demanding forms of sustainable development.

Thanks to the efforts of Rev. Dr. Stephen Okello and the many contributors that submitted their papers, we are now able to find in print many of the presentations that we had in Nairobi. The event showed once again how big the interest for Africa is and how noble the mobilization of African intellectuals towards a deep reflection on the conditions of the continent can be. More than anything else, perhaps, the event at CUEA demonstrated the urgency of putting on the international table what should amount to a true philosophical agenda for Africa. According to one of the keynote speakers, as I recall, the idea is that philosophy in an African perspective must be not just theoretical. Hence the importance of a notion such as *Ubuntu*, that is, the understanding that no human being can exist in isolation. Indeed, notions such as *Ubuntu* are a demonstration of the fact that Africa has a major philosophical contribution to make. In a time in which there are so many, and painful, crisis of identity, the Wisdom rooted in Africa can be a major contribution to the amelioration of the entire world.

Our network lives out the call to look at the situation of the Universities in the diverse parts of the world. In the case of Africa, the issue is certainly one of understanding how universities in general, but catholic ones in particular, can contribute towards a sound, and rigorous, transmission of that fabulous treasure of wisdom and knowledge embedded in the African cultures. The chance that the event in Nairobi gave us of witnessing how African intellectuals are capable and willing to look in a disarmed way into the major problems and the possible solutions to the many problems of the entire continent was an experience that filled me with joy and grateful admiration. In Nairobi, we gathered people convinced that the problems of our time, including in their socio-political dimension, demand to be addressed, among many other venues, by the philosophical activity of our schools and academies as well as by the depths of human thought present in figures such as the keynote speakers of our congress. The relevance of philosophy for life, perhaps, is one of the marks of African Philosophy as such. The question about the nature and mission of African Philosophy remains open. Nevertheless, this book puts together already some interesting answers to the question as well.

As Professor Justus Mbae said during the proceedings of the Conference, "what is African is human; what is human is universal." In this sense, an authentic African philosophy in no way contradicts universality. On the con-

trary, the more African philosophy becomes in Africa, the more universal it should be. As the continent faces so many issues of corruption and bad governance, my hope is that this volume will stimulate many across the continent and beyond to look in a philosophical way to the real problems that humanity as such is facing in our time. However, perhaps no other field should be more touched by the contributions such as the ones here present as the one of Education across Africa. As repeated during the Conference, we believe that philosophy must not be separated from the many, diverse, tasks of education across the continent. And as *Ubuntu* means that the African thinker is particularly vacationed to develop and promote a rather holistic vision of the world, so is our desire and hope that this beautiful book will seriously contribute towards the many challenges inherent to the tasks of rethinking and restructuring the many human challenges, especially the ones concerned with the processes leading to better Justice and greater Peace across the entire continent.

In my name but also in the name of the entire network I represent, I want to thank in a heartfelt manner all the persons that contributed to the success of our meeting in Nairobi. A project that now, with the happy and competent publication of this book, reaches its final stage. Special thanks go therefore to the academic authorities of CUEA for their support in all the stages of the process, but also to the *Università Urbaniana* in Rome for the support granted to this publication. Professor Stephen Okello and whoever assisted in the process of publication deserve our special gratitude for the careful dedication and competence put into the publication of this volume. Finally, I thank professor Joseph Agbakoba for his assistance in all things related to the continent of Africa, but in this case, especially for bringing to the attention of all the participants in the event of Nairobi the awareness of complexity that always remains associated with history and, in particular, with the mixing of different cultures, in Africa and beyond. As he said during the conference, the end of colonization brings about a situation of *hybridity* in Africa, a process in which Christianity, African cultures and modernity intermingle in a rather lively way. Hence the promise that we shall continue to look at the intercultural aspect of the problem of philosophy in Africa as in the other continents, indeed, well aware of the fact that the *hybrids* always tend to do better. As we face the many tasks of philosophy, let us gather momentum and increase our work of international cooperation. As we look ahead for an increasing in the integration of faith and reason, of philosophy and education, of freedom and self-determination, we at COMIUCAP remain hopeful that the contributions coming out of Africa will continue to grow for the enrichment of the life of the Church and, needless to say, for a better Africa for all and the beauty of the Life that Christ is for the entire world.