

Universities for Knowledge and Mercy: An African Perspective



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Abstract

More than Fifty years after state independence the African continent still strives to move towards integral development. Despite the many efforts by states, the church and non-governmental institutions, the continent apparently continues to experience quite a number of challenges like conflicts, poverty and disease among many others. From the premise that universities play a significant role in providing solutions for promoting human integral development, this paper investigates how knowledge and mercy are integral to the mission of the African university. The paper proposes sharing knowledge and practicing mercy as an alternative to the conventional way of teaching and learning practised in universities.

Key words: Education for mercy; knowledge generation; universities

Paper type: literature review

Introduction

Universities play increasingly important roles in the modern society and contribute to the growth and development of any country and of humanity worldwide. It is for this reason that many states and especially in Africa have not only invested in higher education but have also opened doors for private, church and foreign investors to start, own and run universities. The move has been fuelled by the increased number of students who after completion of secondary school wish to continue with university education. This is an indicator of a promising future especially if the students can eventually be informed, formed and transformed into transformative leaders who can share knowledge and practice mercy in favour of integral development.

In all this, Catholic universities remain unique in the sense that they engage in dialogue with other universities and indeed with all centers of teaching and learning in order to promote intellectual charity and sharing, hence outreaching through knowledge and mercy. This is because in their very nature Catholic universities should promote that truth which is capable of transcending human standards of measure. As Pope Benedict says, it is this



truth, not conditioned by human limitations, that brings peace to individuals and reconciliation to societies (AM, 135). Thus, before discussing the role of Catholic Universities let us first illustrate, though briefly, what universities are expected to do especially in the African context. In our final section before conclusion, we shall propose some concrete ways on how to realize knowledge and mercy as integral to the mission of universities today.



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The Experience and Role of Universities

In Africa like elsewhere in the world, universities play very important roles in the society. In fact, they are seen as crucial national assets in addressing policy priorities, and sources of new knowledge and innovative thinking. Universities are also providers of skilled personnel and credible credentials, contributors to innovation, attractors of international talent and business investment, agents of social justice and mobility, contributors to social and cultural vitality, and determinants of health and well-being (Boulton, 2009). They are credited for being creators of economically valuable intellectual resources who engage in different fields. Though the central aim of university is education without which a society fails to exploit new intellectual capital and is unable to make decisive decisions, they are to play an integral role in furthering economic growth and thereby pursuing socio-economic goals.

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By engaging them in such noble duties, the universities are consequently expected to transform the society through the different academic programmes that they offer. In Africa universities have the critical role of transforming the society to transcend the dependency syndrome and instead become self-reliant. Programs that universities offer must respond to the challenges of poverty, conflicts, diseases and to promote development at all levels. The development envisaged is the kind which makes people think and act in a manner consistent to their being, enabling them to use their faculties, talents and skills for the good of each and every person. These aspects conform to the meaning of the term 'university' which President per Holten-Andersen, speaking on the role of universities says the word university originates from the Latin word 'universitas': simply meaning 'a whole', thereby signifying that the role of universities is to pursue balanced knowledge about virtually everything (Role of universities, n.d.).

In our case there must be a balance between knowledge and mercy for it is based on intellectual charity. For this to happen, it is the responsibility of the administration to ensure that the structures infuse the informative and transformative aspect of education in the curriculum. This idea already explains why universities have frequently been regarded as key institutions that bring about social change and development, and producers of highly skilled labor and research output that meets perceived economic needs (Brennan, et al, 2004). By doing this, the universities will be fulfilling their major functions as posited by Castells (2009) that "universities play a major role as ideological machinery, expressing the ideological struggles present in all societies, mechanisms of selection and socialization, the generation of knowledge through scientific research and training of a skilled labor force thus contributing to the growth and development of the entire human society.

It is imperative for all universities both private and public to embrace



their roles seriously which include; to bring forth an educated populace that is vital in today's world, with the convergent impacts of globalization, the increasing importance of knowledge as a main driver of growth, and the information and communication revolution. Universities can be able to achieve these because they are "the centres of learning and the search for truth which is essentially linked to the process of knowing and acting in a responsible manner (Castells, 2001)." Unfortunately what we find in many African universities is a disconnect between what is taught and what is lived and experienced.

There is a focus on individualized knowledge which does not consider the other probably because of the materialistic and consumerist mentality. This apparently defies the African aspect of communal sharing as well as of peaceful coexistence and love which distorts integral development of the entire society and humanity. There is no wonder then that the gap between the rich and the poor keeps on widening, a sign that the African values of caring for one another have been discarded. The curriculum is not human centered but rather focuses on accumulation of wealth, there is no respect for the human person and to the environment too. It is little wonder then that in a continent that is meant to be very peaceful because of the virtues and values it embraces has ended up being ravaged by some of the most violent conflicts the world has experienced

This reality begs the question, what the catholic universities can offer to the society owing to the fact that the education they provide must seek to teach the truth, thus focus on knowledge and mercy and intellectual charity. To understand this role then it is critical for us at this point to explain what catholic universities are and how the African values can add value to their mission.

Catholic Universities: Identity and Mission

Like the other universities, a catholic university, is an academic community which educates in a rigorous and critical fashion. However, a catholic university has a higher calling which is to assist in the protection and advancement of human dignity and of a cultural heritage through research, teaching and various services offered to the local, national and international communities by way of community service. It is guided by the search for truth and therefore has a strong commitment to and concern for academic excellence and effective teaching and research. To do this all members of the university community must revisit their vision and mission so as to align it with the mission of Christ. Pope Benedict XVI, emphasized this when he said that education is integral to the mission of the church to proclaim the Good News hence every catholic educational institute should be a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth (spe Salvi,4).

The knowledge acquired should therefore move the recipients to understand the mercy of God and in turn share it with the ones who may not have had the opportunity to learn. This will be possible if universities embrace Pope Francis' call of knowledge, mercy and intellectual charity. Education that does not embrace these three may be lacking in its holistic formation of humanity and indeed its evangelization Mandate. Pope Benedict while praising the Catholic universities and higher education institutes in Africa pointed out that the need to evangelize education. Perhaps, in his thinking Pope Benedict already realized that despite the presence of many catholic universities in the continent, the



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transformation that is borne out of a mix of intellect and evangelization was lacking. He perhaps already was hinting at this lack of evangelizing education as the real reason as to why the continent has not experienced healing and reconciliation.

Real evangelization constitutes these three elements of knowledge, mercy and intellectual charity which if well understood and infused into the curricula of Catholic Universities in the African continent, will see Africa not just have persons with book knowledge as is currently witnessed but have persons who will be able to bring authentic development and transformation of the its people. Knowledge and mercy taught in the perspectives of the church's social teaching will lead to intellectual charity which will be expressed in different ways. This will eventually improve relationships among the conflicting nations and communities, transform leadership which has crippled most of the African countries and enhance principles of good governance which the continent direly needs.

The church's concern for education is in deed evidenced by the many investments it has made in education both at elementary and tertiary levels. Most of these institutions have stood the test of time and have had very rich history and traditions. In recognition of the great role they play in the society John Paul II in his apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* expressed his great love and respect for the unique and increasingly critical mission of Catholic universities (No.35) which must always be promoted. This is for the reason that in the words of Cardinal Newman, a Catholic university should seek to explain the harmony between faith and reason as two complimentary paths to knowledge

Today just as in the past, the Catholic universities must continue to be the leaven of the society by shaping the rapid developments that are characterised by technological advancement and discoveries. Such discoveries "require the correspondingly necessary search for meaning in order to guarantee that the new discoveries are used for the authentic good of individuals and of human society as a whole." It is therefore the responsibility of every University to search for this meaning and enable all those within a catholic university to understand that meaning and live that meaning authentically. A Catholic University is called in a particular way to respond to this need: its Christian inspiration enables it to include the moral, spiritual and religious dimension in its research, and to evaluate the attainments of science and technology in the perspective of the totality of the human person (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, No.7). All these developments should have the human person at the centre and thrive for their good. To do this, the universities must not only concentrate on the traditional way of teaching, research and community service but must embrace mercy and integrate it in all the academic and extra-curricular programmes.

Pope Benedict XVI in addressing catholic educators took cognizance of the crucial role and critical role educators play in announcing the Good News and fostering the presence of the kingdom of God. In essence Catholic universities, through their educating model are called to know and share the truth as it is revealed by Jesus Christ the teacher per excellence. The good news as is presented by the Gospels embraces knowledge and mercy. It is from this address of Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI that this paper examines catholic universities as agents of educating for mercy. The Good News and fostering of the presence of the



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kingdom of God is in essence a tale of God's mercy and is the reason why Pope Benedict notes that the hallmark of a Catholic University or school is not simply a question of a number of catholic students but rather a question of conviction (2008). It is therefore incumbent on a Catholic University to consecrate itself without reserve unto...its free search for the truth about nature, man and God (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, No.4).

Educators must know that education is not simply about imparting information or to provide training in skills intended to deliver some economic benefit to the society. It should never be seen purely from the utilitarianism perspective. Education is about forming the human person, equipping him or her to live life to the full. It means that the life of faith needs to be the driving force behind every activity in the school, so that the church's mission may be served effectively and the young people may discover the joy of entering into Christ's 'being for others'. All catholic universities must discover this crucial role so that their programmes are imbued with truth for the goal of Catholic colleges and universities are to educate men and women who will practice the faith in their respective professions and walks of life.

A Catholic university is supposed to be a place where sacramentality is witnessed by seeing God in all things, mediation is practiced whereby God is seen through the human, the material and the finite" It should also be a place where communion is seen seeking the unity of all mankind. It should also be a place where reason is taught and practiced, analogical imagination encouraged and universality is embraced. Discussing, the Catholic intellectual tradition, a conversation at Boston College (2010) for the Jesuits, "The true catholic university is a community of teachers, scholars, students and administrators sharing an intellectual journey and conversation in the pursuit of truth" promoting knowledge, mercy and intellectual charity.

These values and virtues practiced in the catholic universities makes them distinct from other universities. One must also understand that a Catholic University "pursues its objectives through its formation of an authentic human community animated by the spirit of Christ. The source of its unity springs from a common dedication to the truth, a common vision of the dignity of the human person and, ultimately, the person and message of Christ which gives the Institution its distinctive character (Ex Corde Ecclesiae No 21)."

To do this then catholic universities must focus on the provision of catholic education which "consists essentially in preparing man for what he must do here on earth and for what he must do here below, in order to attain the sublime end for which he was created" (Divini-Illius-magistri no 7). For him to be what he was created to be must work for harmony between him and God, with self and with the environment. Larry (1998) notes that it is education that provides learning that is holistic and links moral and spiritual development to the life experiences of the learner and also promotes a way of life rooted in the Christian call to discipleship and service". By integral education we mean education that caters for social, political, economic, cultural, religious, spiritual, physical and emotional growth. It is an all round education and this type of education is the one that would mould citizens who are not only patriotic but peaceful and God fearing. This is the kind of education that will transform the African continent.



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The catholic university is charged with preparations of professionals for service to humanity and it is incumbent upon it to ensure that these professionals are able to live the Gospel in a manner characterized by all that is beautiful, good and true. A life of Christian witnessed nurtured and strengthened within the community of our Lords disciples, the church.

According to Bollinge (2003) universities are very important institutions due to the fact that they are meant to respond to the deepest of human needs and desire to understand and to explain that understanding to others. Institutions of higher learning therefore have the capacity to fashion in learners a spirited curiosity, a desire to care for others and an unquenchable human drive to serve others. This makes it incumbent for Catholic Universities to be able to integrate Mercy into its teaching and extra curricular activities.

Modern University education seems to be lacking in providing the learners with an experience of human suffering. Present day curriculum seems to illustrate to the learners of human successes without learning of human pain, or learning about conquerors without learning about the exploited and the conquered, learning about the leaders and their ideas without learning about the marginalized and the poor, led and still may lead to the estrangement of an educated elite from the lives of the desperate and from the world-wide (Farley,2006). Catholic Universities are presented with a higher calling. They are called to promote new cultural values, and to train and socialize society to a new thinking. This new thinking is one that is imbued in the ideals of Mercy. To understand how universities can integrate mercy in their curriculum, it is imperative for us to understand what catholic education is for this is their identity.

Catholic education includes all the deliberate, systematic, and sustained efforts of the Church community, in both formal and informal educational settings, to develop the skills, knowledge, and values needed for life. Catholic education sees all knowledge as sacred when human insight is combined with divine revelation in the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty (<http://archstl.org/education/page/philosophy-total-catholic-education>)

In *Gravisimus Educationis*, it is clear that a catholic school and consequently catholic education is one that is inspired by a supernatural vision, founded on Christian anthropology, animated by communion and community, imbued with a Catholic worldview throughout its curriculum, and sustained by gospel witness. It offers “a true education that aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which he as man is a member and in whose obligations as an adult he will share”

It is value-based and stresses on appreciation, respect and promotion of human dignity which is not determined by wealth, power, or social prestige but by God’s constant love for us. It is based on the fact that the person is created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26) and proclaims that Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise. Catholic education is the one that aims at developing all the latent talents for the good of the entire community Catholic education addresses the development of the whole person through spiritual and academic formation based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It teaches that what human beings are called to become which can be found in the life, message, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Such an education



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encourages creative and critical thinking for deeper understanding guided by truth. Catholic Education is person-centred. It promotes the dignity, self-esteem and full development of each person who is made in God's image and uniquely loved by God. It is inclusive and is respectful of, and engages with people of all beliefs; it encourages the religious development of all in their own faith. Catholic Education is rooted in the Gospel values of Respect for Life, Love, Solidarity, Truth and Justice; it aims to harmonize faith and culture, build a better society and pursue the Common Good. (<http://catholiceducation-ni.com/content/view/33/64>.)

“Those students who are unaware of this religious dimension are deprived of its benefits and they run the risk of living the best years of their lives at a shallow level (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, No. 48). It enkindles a love for the truth that will not be satisfied with superficiality in knowledge or judgment. It awakens a critical sense which examines statements rather than accepting them blindly. It impels the mind to learn with careful order and precise methods, and to work with a sense of responsibility. It provides the strength needed to accept the sacrifices and the perseverance required by intellectual labor. The curriculum should thus focus on developing programmes that answer the needs of the society at all levels but more importantly on the formation of the person in all spheres.

The Catholic Church in its many years of education has laid emphasis on the need of educating in truth in this world that creates fallacies that are science based. Various congregations in the church have successfully been able to educate in this truth. The Dominican model of education, truth should be sought with a pasture of humility, “perhaps the first requirement of a good university teacher is that he or she refuses to be a guru, to be the one who knows. All that the teacher can do is to accompany the students in the process of discovery”(Heather et al,1999).

It helps the learner to actively participate in studying and interpreting human experience in the light of faith, so as to advance God's glory and the dignity of all peoples. This type of education provides opportunities for the learner to explore, reflect, and integrate a Christian understanding of nature, self, society and God, and to manifest this in their lives of love and service(<http://archstl.org/education/page/philosophy-total-catholic-education>) .

Catholic education is “intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person.” An integral education aims to develop gradually every capability of every student: his or her intellectual, physical, psychological, moral, and religious capacities. Vatican documents speak of an education that responds to all the needs of the human person:

The integral formation of the human person, which is the purpose of education, includes the development of all the human faculties of the students, together with preparation for professional life, formation of ethical and social awareness, becoming aware of the transcendental, and religious education. Every school, and every educator in the school, ought to be striving “to form strong and responsible individuals, who are capable of making free and correct choices,” thus preparing young people “to open themselves more and more to reality, and to form in themselves a clear idea of the meaning of life”(The Catholic School, No.31)



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Knowledge and mercy in the light of African Wisdom

Mercy is a concept integral to an understanding of God's dealings with humankind and is a quality intrinsic to the nature of God. The experience of God's people is that God's mercy, unlike human mercy, cannot be exhausted (2 Sam 24:14 ; Lam 3:22). Mercy is a concrete reality through which God reveals his love as that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child. Revealing is about knowledge hence pertains to the faculty of the mind or the intellect. Since the human person is created in the image and likeness of God he is expected to have this virtue. It is in light of this that Pope Francis in *Misericordiae Vultus* saw mercy as a fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. He urges the faithful to "constantly contemplate the mystery of mercy for it is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. He reminds us that our salvation depends on it and it is the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. It is the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness (No. 2). Mercy is compassion combined with forbearance and action.

According to the Catholic theological tradition, mercy is a certain kind of love, a certain expression of love. Love in general might be defined as a sharing and giving of oneself to another, a selfless seeking of the good of another. Traditional Catholic moral theology treats the virtue of mercy as flowing from love of neighbor. Namely, it is that virtue which inclines us to offer assistance to a person suffering from want or misery. This being so, "mercy" in moral theology ... "is not love itself but love's result and extension" (Rozycki as cited in Stackpole, 2003):

It is therefore a call for all to share love through expression of mercy for "It is not enough to experience God's mercy in our lives", the Pope observed. "It is necessary for those who receive it also to be a sign and instrument for others. ... It is not a question of making great efforts or superhuman gestures. The Lord shows us a far easier path, made up of little gestures but which, in His eyes, have great value, to the point of saying that it is on these that we will be judged. ... Jesus says that every time we give something to eat to a hungry person and give something to drink to one who thirsts, we dress the naked and welcome the stranger, or we visit the sick or imprisoned, we do this also to Him (Matthew 25:40). The Church calls these gestures 'corporal works of mercy', as they assist people in their material needs". These are elements that must be considered in the lives of all.

In the African context, mercy is lived and practiced in everyday lives of communities. It is seen in how African families treat their sick family members. That sickness in the African context is not just individual but it is communal. When a family loses its relative the whole community mourns with them and comforts them through their loss. In traditional African societies, it was unheard of that one person died of hunger, food in the African culture was partaken in a communal manner and as such all were able to be fed. Generosity can be said to be the hallmark of the African culture, It is this African generosity that embodies mercy in the African culture. The methods of dispute resolution in the African culture had very strong characteristics of Mercy. Forgiveness, healing and reconciliation of the conflicting parties are all embodiment of mercy.



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“In a world that is unfortunately afflicted by the virus of indifference, works of mercy educate us, indeed, in attention towards the most elementary needs of ‘the least of our brothers’, in whom Jesus is present. ... This enables us always to be vigilant, avoiding that Christ may pass by us without us recognizing Him. They reawaken in us the need and the capacity to make faith live and work through charity. These works of mercy are the features of the countenance of Jesus Christ, Who cares for the least of His brothers to bring God’s tenderness and closeness to every one. Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of her pastoral activity should be wrapped up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church’s very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love (Misericordiae Vultus No 10).

To this extent then, catholic universities must be avenues where mercy is taught and integrated in the curriculum. Unfortunately they have also been immersed in secular outlook and embraced the curriculum that seems to offer education that is detached from the person, knowledge that concentrates on certification and job market. This is a situation that leads to graduate persons who have “Knowledge without values” who do “Business without ethics” and undertake “Science without humanity” as Mahatma Gandhi puts it. It is an education where values are pushed at the periphery and modernism embraced, forgiveness, justice and reconciliation does not exist but revenge and retribution promoted. The human person is the end of everything and there is no concern for the divine. One keeps on wondering whether the catholic institutions that used to offer value based education have changed. Pope John Paul II lamented that far too many in government, business, the media, and even the educational establishment perceive education to be merely an instrument for the acquisition of information that will improve the chances of worldly success and a more comfortable standard of living. Such an impoverished vision of education is not Catholic. It is high time that universities revisit their mission and recapture mercy and its entire works in the curriculum.

A much stronger political voice came from Kofi Annan, the then Secretary General of the United Nations, who strongly promoted the importance of universities for development in Africa (Bloom et al, 2006; 23)

The university must become a primary tool for Africa’s development in the new century. Universities can help develop African expertise; they can enhance the analysis of African problems; strengthen domestic institutions; serve as a model environment for the practice of good governance, conflict resolution and respect for human rights, and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars. Bloom et al, 2006; 23

The nexus between Mercy and the African way of life is so succinct that it makes it very difficult to understand why the African educational curriculum does not inculcate the African virtues in its education system. A curriculum based on mercy is definitely one exemplified with African cultural values so that whether the Church called it a curriculum that educates in mercy would not be a question because the curriculum that has been approved by Government would be a curriculum founded on the African culture of Mercy.

On the other hand, Catholic Universities, more so, those in African



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countries should freely and wholeheartedly embrace a curriculum that is imbued in African culture whose foundation is purely based on the Gospel values. It is unfortunate that they are not seizing the opportunities available to them to be able to graduate people who can live the desires of an education imbued in mercy. Alumni of catholic universities in the African continent would be the first bearers of God's mercy in a continent that is bleeding and yearning for an experience of God's mercy. To this end, African universities have the perfect opportunity to orient their curriculum to reflect African virtues together with knowledge and mercy. Such a curriculum will be one that will intrinsically be able to address most if not all of Africa's problems from poverty and disease to the perennial conflicts that the continent faces.

Towards Realizing Knowledge and Mercy in the Mission of Catholic Universities

The role of universities in the processes of social change and development cannot be overemphasized. It is common knowledge that the most explicit role they have been charged with is the production of highly skilled labour and research output to meet perceived economic needs. Catholic Universities have a higher calling, they are called to present to the world, new culture and to train and socialize society to a new thinking. This new thinking should be embodied in mercy though it poses some issues that universalities must address. These may include the challenge to socialize the students to understand the value of mercy, how to help them experience mercy, live mercy, share mercy and how the curriculum can integrate mercy as well as how research can lead to activities of mercy. To address these issues, the Catholic universities must understand mercy as love in action and make it part of their culture since the Catholic universities are places where the students encounter God in all activities, they are to make the love and mercy of God evident and experienced.

The Catholic universities must endeavour to mount their programmes with the elements of mercy which Pope Francis expresses into two forms namely spiritual and corporal works of mercy. It therefore rests upon the Catholic universities to make mercy a lived reality. They will succeed if they understand what Pope John Paul II meant when he said that "Catholic University is immersed in human society; as an extension of its service to the Church, and always within its proper competence, it is called on to become an ever more effective instrument of cultural progress for individuals as well as for society.

Included among its research activities, therefore, will be a study of serious contemporary problems in areas such as the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing in the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level. University research will seek to discover the roots and causes of the serious problems of our time, paying special attention to their ethical and religious dimensions (*Ex corde ecclesiae* no 32). All these point to love in action thus the essence of mercy which universities must venture to accomplish in them.

Another way for a catholic university to integrate mercy into its educative role is through its long history of community service that has its



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foundation in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. Catholic Universities can use this powerful pillar of community service to inculcate Mercy into its education model. If done in a manner that encourages service learning, community service will become a powerful means through which students in African universities get to learn to serve the most poor and vulnerable in society. It's also a way of bringing the University to the vulnerable people and thus evangelizing and bringing the gospel values to them. This is the type of education that Pope Paul VI affirmed when he stated that "a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share" (*Gravissimus Educationis* no 1).

The chaplaincy too can encourage a greater participation the practice of Mercy on campus and in the local community by supporting those who are in need. They will not only focus on material needs but will pay attention to values that are learned and share them with the different communities. They will also organize reflection and prayer sessions. The students are encouraged to be open to the needs of their brothers and sisters and bridge what they learn with reality. Concretely the universities must educate the students on importance of mercy by embracing Solidarity among themselves and others, being stewards of God's creation, working for the common good and by supporting the vulnerable in the community.

To take care of Gods' creation, extra-curricular programs that promote protection of the environment must be introduced where they are not available. This can be guided by *Laudato Si* where Pope Francis asked the people to reflect on how we take care of our common home the planet. Students should understand that the protection of our common home requires a growing global political consensus for cclimate change is also contributing to the heart-rending refugee crisis and that the world's poor, though least responsible for climate change, are most vulnerable and already suffering its impact. A consciousness about the environment need to be cultivated among all graduates, especially at the universities where the policy makers are being trained. All have to realize that when we mistreat nature, we also mistreat human beings and that each creature has its own intrinsic value that must be respected. "The protection of our common home requires a growing global political consensus." Climate change is also contributing to the heart-rending refugee crisis. The world's poor, though least responsible for climate change, are most vulnerable and already suffering its impact."

Catholic Universities and especially those in Africa, in the wake of rampant destruction of forests, need to inculcate in their curriculum be it in, in class or out of class activities, the need for students to engage in tree planting by encouraging them to find trees that are ecologically suitable for the university communities and then venture out to the communities that surround them planting those trees and encouraging them to nurture those trees with them. In the wake of the extractive industry that is now big business in the continent, but business that is likely to harm and hurt the countries in Africa, Universities should awaken in their students the capacity to find out what these extractive industries mean to their communities and urge them to use their knowledge learned in school to protect the environment but also educate their communities



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on the rights and responsibilities of the industries extracting those minerals and extractives

Teaching and learning has to lay emphasis on the common good which according to the Catechism of Catholic Church, consists of three elements namely respect for the person, social well-being and development and peace. The programmes that are taught in the universities must always aim at outlining issues that pertain to the elements of common good. Opondo and Orobator (2008) opine that students should be made to understand that. "Respect for the human person entails accepting what the person is and the contribution he/she makes to the community". This already calls the students to respect and appreciate diversity by respecting the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person. Lectures should encourage the learners to be critical thinkers able to exercise the "natural freedoms indispensable for the development of the human vocation such as the right to act according to a sound norm of conscience and to safeguard privacy and rightful freedom also in matters of religion (CCC, No 1907)".

The human person created in the image and likeness of God makes human life sacred and worthy of respect. Human person and in particular human dignity transcends any social order setup by the society and therefore all structures in the society should work towards safeguarding this life. It is only possible if each and every person works toward the realization of the common good. Learners are encouraged to seek to be creators of employment taking care of the less privileged groups, maintaining a balance between wages and prices, making accessible the goods and services for a better life to many persons. Pope Pius XII in his address during the golden jubilee of *Rerum Novarum* (1941) noted that the human person cannot do without the material goods that correspond to his primary needs and constitute the basic conditions for his existence; these goods are absolutely indispensable if he is to feed himself, grow, communicate, associate with others, and attain the highest purposes to which he is called. They should be helped to realize that the wealth which they produce must be for the good of all. At the same time, each person must have access to the level of well-being necessary for his full development.

Universities are to help students to appreciate the fact that we are all one human family, and we are responsible for the well-being of each other thus the idea of solidarity. This responsibility reaches across national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Solidarity highlights in a particular way the intrinsic social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards an ever more committed unity (Compendium, No. 413). Africa is home to the now very famous value of Ubuntu' which means I am because we are. Ubuntu speaks to the same ideals that are found in solidarity. It is an expression of love and is based on the understanding that we are all created by God and share in his divinity hence should be able to live and work together in harmony. We are therefore brothers and sisters in Christ and we should be able to work together for our integral development. Since in the universities there are different people from different backgrounds, students must be helped to appreciate one another and begin projects and or programmes that require multidisciplinary approach such that people taking theology, science and humanities can come together and



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each contributes their expertise in accomplishing the programme. Solidarity could also be improved by interdisciplinary researches and seminars. Selfishness which hinders solidarity can be conquered by a commitment to the good of one's neighbour with the readiness of the Gospel to lose oneself for the sake of the other instead of exploiting him/her (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis No. 40).

Solidarity is not to be limited to material goods and therefore must be taught as a value and virtue. Pope John Paul II in his World day of peace address (1986, No.5) challenged educators that in the spirit of solidarity and with the instruments of dialogue the students can learn "respect for every human person, respect for true values and cultures of others, respect for the legitimate autonomy and self determination of others, to look beyond ourselves in order to understand and support the good of others, to contribute to our own resources in social solidarity for the development and growth that come from equity and justice, To built structures that will ensure that social solidarity and dialogue are permanent features of the world we live in". Solidarity or Ubuntu can also be expressed by having the students feel the immediate urgent needs of the other and respond to those needs in a compassionate manner.

In order to overcome today's widespread individualistic mentality, what is required is a concrete commitment to solidarity and charity, beginning in the family with the mutual support of husband and wife. In this sense, the family too can be called a community of work and solidarity (Centesimus Annus, No. 49). Solidarity helps people to feel that they form one family and therefore what they have should be shared and used for the good of the members of the family. This was evident among the traditional African families whereby no member of the family went short of food, shelter or any other basic need in order that personal property may be acquired by another member. All members had a right to share in their property and a right to participate in its production.

Through solidarity all men and women are closely joined to each other as brothers and sisters and their communality is realized. It therefore creates a bond between all people. It creates a spirit of responsibility whereby fortunate members of society feel responsible for the weaker ones and readily share with them their possession. The weaker ones also participate by working hard to improve their conditions and that of the society for example through Harambee spirit as practiced in Kenya. Harambee Literally means all pull together. It was adopted as a rallying call by the Founding father of the Kenyan nation as a way of calling on Kenyans to work/pull together to build the nation. This way they were able to build hospitals, schools and even send their sons and daughters to schools. It enhances cultural tolerance by bringing people of various cultural backgrounds to participate actively at all levels in building up appropriate structures for their integral development. Individual differences, ethnicity, religion and racism are overcome by the promotion of solidarity.

The Catholic universities should encourage the community to be in solidarity with the vulnerable and less privileged through their words, prayers and deeds. They must show solidarity with, and compassion for, the poor. The universities must initiate programmes that support the vulnerable and be willing to take part in the community programs. Pope Benedict XVI has taught that "love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel" (



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Caritas in Veritate). The conscience of the students must be formed so that they are able to see each other with the eye of God. Students should be exposed to real situations affecting the vulnerable and use the appropriate principles and guidelines to solve these issues where in most cases they present ethical dilemma. This can be done by allowing students to respond to human tragedies around them, visit the afflicted such as homes for the elderly or terminally ill to commiserate with them.

Preferential option for the poor is one principle of the Church Social Teaching that speaks to mercy. A catholic University should be able to make its students understand why it is important to promote an economy that takes cognizance of the poor and vulnerable in the society. Graduands should be able to make this option always in the jobs they take up after their jobs. Pope Francis in his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* says Just as the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say “thou shalt not” to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality (*Evangelii Gaudium*, No.53). Students must leave university understanding why it is important for them to say no to economic systems that stifle the poor.

If Catholic universities do this, they will be fulfilling their mission on behalf of the church for she “feels called to take her stand beside the poor, to discern the justice of their requests, and to help satisfy them, without losing sight of the good of groups in the context of the common good.” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, para. 39)

A healthy community can be achieved only if its members give special attention to those who are poor and on the margins of society. We are challenged to make a preferential option for the poor, namely, to create conditions for marginalized voices to be heard, to defend the defenseless, and to assess lifestyles, policies and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor. This can start from the universities where students can engage in clubs that support the less privileged not only materially but also spiritually. The option for the poor does not mean pitting one group against another, but rather, it calls us to strengthen the whole community by assisting those who are most vulnerable. From the Scriptures we learn that the justice of a society is tested and judged by its treatment of the poor. God’s covenant with Israel was dependant on the way the community treated the poor and unprotected. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus proclaims that he has been anointed to bring good news to the poor¹. The university community must see the world through the eyes of the poor and stand with them in solidarity. This should lead to action for justice with and on behalf of those who are poor and marginalized.

Conclusion

We need to understand the problems that affect the continent of Africa, identify the root causes so that the curriculum can address these issues. The that



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we acquire must make us move out of our comfort zone as intellectuals and engage in sorting out the issues that are crippling Africa such as bad governance, corruption, different forms of injustices, unfair distribution of resources, violation of human rights and the suffering of the poor and the marginalized. The knowledge of these must move us to action for instance by doing away with negative ethnicity, educating the citizens to know their rights and be able to live in solidarity with one another by appreciating one another and embracing diversity. The African values of caring, hospitality, sharing, and togetherness must be revived in the catholic universities in Africa. Guided by the words of Kofi Annan, the then Secretary General of United Nations, we can affirm that there is need to promote the importance of universities for development in Africa (quoted in Bloom et al. 2006: 2): The university must become a primary tool for Africa's development in the new century. Universities can help develop African expertise; they can enhance the analysis of African problems; strengthen domestic institutions; serve as a model environment for the practice of good governance, conflict resolution and respect for human rights, and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars



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