



Editorial

The recent military take-over in Nigeria, after 8 years of transition to civil democracy, has aroused genuine fears for the emergence of stable democracies in Africa. And yet the external and internal resistance to military dictatorship in Africa (e.g. in Nigeria and Burundi) is sufficiently a clear signal of the maturing of the democratic ideology in the world and in Africa.

In Nigeria, analysts have proffered reasons for the cancellation of the June 12 1993 elections considered the freest and fairest since the end of the colonial era. The most potent of these reasons appears to be the ethnic bias. Power must always remain in the hands of the northern oligarchy. Primitive fears arising from the multi-ethnic composition of the Nigerian state ensured the sustenance of injustice: an inept and corrupt military dictatorship escapes from the full weight of a merited indictment through the smoke-screen of ethnicity. Crucial national issues like the emasculation of democratic institutions, the reign of terror through decrees, denial of fundamental human rights, generalized poverty and misery exacerbated by graft and corruption unparalleled in the history of Nigeria, are covered up in the dark coat of regionalism and ethnicity: is my region or ethnic group better off under a southern or a northern president?, do we have the "better life" under a Yoruba or a Hausa president? Protected by fears arising from regionalism and ethnicity, a handful of "men under arms", inflict military bad government on the nation: from transitional government, to interim national government, to provisional ruling council. Apathy and disillusionment reign supreme among the mass of Nigerians brutalized by series of military dictatorships.

When our editorial group chose this theme - democratization - we viewed the current process of democratization in Africa as a *kairos* (a sign of the times). For us this process was a hopeful sign for humane living in Africa: the national conference in Benin Republic had been successfully concluded with the installation of an elected president; meaningful dialogue had been concluded in Gabon with a view to presidential elections; an elected president had been installed in Burundi

where ethnicism has murdered peace and justice since independence; Nigeria was experimenting on the democratic process; and multi-racial democracy seemed on-line in South Africa.

These signs of hope encouraged us to commission and search for papers that will isolate the factors which may strengthen or impede the democratic process in contemporary Africa. Unfortunately, these signs of hope have been dampened by events in Nigeria, Burundi, Congo, and the persistent chaos in Zaire. These unhappy events go to stress the imperious necessity of democracy and the relevance of our theme.

As an ecumenical theological association we make a contribution to the democratization process through sharing ideas so that "humane living" - the aim of the values of the christian gospel - may be firmly established in our lands. The dignity of the human person, the individual rights of humans and the rights of minority groups, as proclaimed by the United Nations and defended by the social teachings and commitments of our various christian churches are best promoted in a democratic environment. Our churches promote and support democratic institutions, justice and peace, because these project and protect humane living.

In Nigeria, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), individual church leaders and associations threw their weight behind the democratic process as evolved in the June 12 presidential election. It was an election in which ethnicity, regionalism, and religious affiliation were subjugated to the emerging common interest of our one nation. It was an election which demonstrated the basis for peace and unity - desire for good government, for justice, equity and peace. Nigeria is not simply a geographical expression. However, when the military sirens struck the seductive chords of ethnicism and projected sectional interests our church leaders wavered. CAN decided to cooperate with the Interim National Government (ING); and, it appears, the top leadership of CAN (and CBCN) is ready to cooperate with the new military junta which sacked the ING. Such change of positions not only compromise principles but also rob the churches of a leadership role which is based on integrity.

Christians proclaim and live Jesus' chosen ministry of installing freedom on earth: to bring the good news to the poor; to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Lk.4: 18-19). No amount of political inexperience will excuse our churches from testing their actions against Jesus' principle of social transformation. In our world of today it is becoming more and more evident that democratic principles favour the social ecology for the sustenance of freedom and well-being for all poor and oppressed. In Nigeria, and elsewhere in Africa and the world, politics appears to be a game of permanent interests and not permanent principles. However, the churches must maintain permanent principles and policies and must eschew the opportunism and self-interest which they blame in politicians. In other words, our church leadership may not have the moral justification to criticize in military or civil government what they are unable to practice in their churches.

Possibly, the lack of experience in democratic administration within our churches may explain the lack of consistency (and zeal) in the pursuit of and support for issues of democracy. The churches lack open juridical structures and efficient systems of communication - all of which are essential for a stable democracy. It is true that the church is not simply civil society; but its structures of governance have been patterned on historical civil society. In other words, should the democratization process sweeping through Africa not also have its impact on our churches? This may not detract from the revelation transmitted and lived through history. Consequently, though not of this world, the life of freedom in the churches may challenge the many ways in which humane living is denied to numerous sons and daughters of Africa.

This issue of our *Bulletin* explores the problems and prospects of democratization in Africa. Our contributors not only examine the negative and positive aspects of ethnicity in nation building, they also chart paths for the emergence of stable democracies based on sound principles. Broohm analyses the problems besetting African states from the socio-political and historical perspective. He affirms that the problems of Africa are not economic, social or even cultural.

They are rather rooted in the contradictory option to combine two models of building the nation inherited from the West - the ethnic and the contractual. This unreal ambitious choice has led to the perversion of political power and the derogation of individual and collective liberties. The ethnic question arises as a sign of crisis: it is a sign of the inability of the post-colonial state to guarantee a harmonious flourishing of communities and individuals, and its incapacity to redress the imbalances and inequalities introduced by colonization. Abanuka searches for a philosophical grounding for the emergence of stable states in Africa which will take on board African socio-political realities. In his view, the kinship factor is overtaken by the interests and objectives of ethnic or multi-ethnic communities. The identity of each human as belonging to such a community is strengthened by participating in the group's interests and objectives. Ijeoma traces the history of the making of the Nigerian nation-state from colonial times to independence. The amalgamation of ethnic nationalities and the adoption of constitutional democracy in its Western hue were beset with problems. In his view, the patriotism of the pre-independence political class, who rose above cultural and ethnic prejudice, saved the unity of the nation. Ilegbune underlines that there is a distinction between being in power and being a legitimate government. Since sovereignty belongs to the people, the government which follows the rule of law, [as opposed to the rule by law], as enshrined in the constitution consented to by the people, has legitimacy. But a non-constitutional, non-democratic, government may, out of grave necessity (such as the mis-governance of a constitutional government), seize power and be popularly acclaimed to be legitimate. The retention of legitimacy by any government is dependent on the effectiveness and just action of the government and the support and consent of the governed.

We conclude this issue with reviews of two important books concerned with the democratization process in Africa - F. Eboussi Boulaga's seminal work on **National Conferences and Elements of Democracy** produced by participants in the Farm House Dialogue of Obasanjo. The sovereign national conference lays the foundation for a new beginning of humane and democratic living in Africa. It takes on board attitudes or values which are constitutive of the African; those crucial

elements which the participants in Obasanjo's Farm House Dialogue perceive as characteristic of African democracy.

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