



Tangaza College

INAUGURAL ADDRESS 2003 - 2004

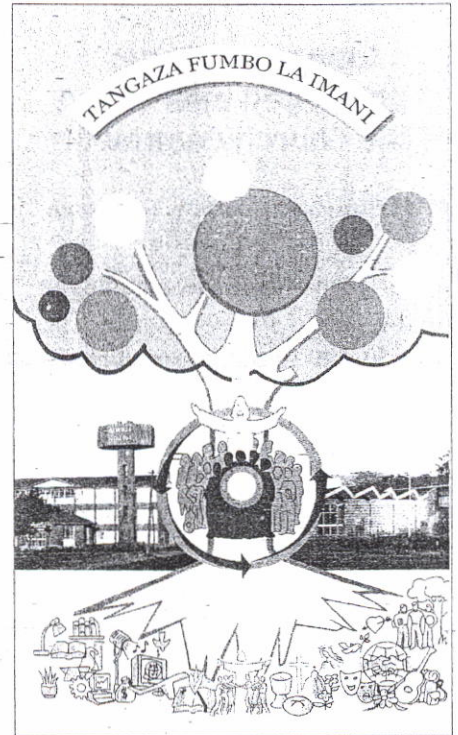
► To be Church and make the experience of Church

By Fr. George Kocholickal, SDB
Principal – Tangaza College
(18th August 2003)

The holy men and women of the Church which is in Africa, both ancient and modern, were greatly concerned to build and experience Church as a profound sign of unity in faith and charity. As an ancient Church its origins go back to the times of the Apostles, associated traditionally with the ministry of the Apostle Mark. This ancient Church of Africa gave birth to countless Martyrs, Confessors, Virgins and many simple but holy Christians. It had a vigorous and leading theological centre at Alexandria. The Alexandrian Christian centre, in its service of defending the faith, laid the foundations of theology, as faith in dialogue with reason, culture, society, experience, etc. It is considered the oldest centre of sacred science in the history of Christianity. It counted amongst its students and teachers such famous theologians as Clement, Athanasius, Cyril, Dionysius, Pierius, Didymus. Then along the North African Coastline we recall Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine. They were in the Church and made the experience of Church; they loved the Church in imitation of Christ, who “loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her” (Eph 5:26).

While championing the cause of unity in faith with the weapons of the intellect, these great Fathers prepared the way for the scientific study of God’s revelation. The deeper the new religion penetrated the ancient world, the more they felt the need for an exposition of its tenets in an orderly, comprehensive and exact way; for this were created the theological schools, the cradles of science, as instruments of **unity in faith and charity**. Tangaza too as a theological and ministerial institution in Africa is a bearer of that tradition at the service of faith and of God’s family.

To be that Church and to make the same experience of Church that is a sign and instrument of unity in faith and charity, in spite of the constant threats to both, is at the heart of our being at Tangaza. This lived experience of the Church and commitment to it is a must as we prepare ourselves scientifically and professionally to answer to the Challenges that the Pope raises in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*. These challenges are many and very demanding: How can African Christians become ever more faithful witnesses to the Lord Jesus (EA 46)? How can the Church in Africa reject a way of living which does not correspond to the best of African traditions



and our Christian faith (cf. EA 48)? How can we be catalysts of unity and reconciliation wherever there is hostility and division (cf. EA 49)? How can we promote the well-being and stability of marital relationships and family (cf. EA 50)? As ministerially charged people, how do we face the challenges of social and political difficulties? (cf. EA 51), etc.

A close examination of these challenges will certainly reveal that, no appropriate answer can be given, unless the answer itself has been experienced, and lived in one’s own life. We are convinced that placing ourselves at the service of the Church in Africa is not simply a matter of receiving doctrinal,

moral or humanistic instruction. It is above all a whole attitude of existence, consisting in a living union with a living person, Jesus Christ, and his living Body, the Church. Indeed, when our being is radically affected by the mystery of Christ, and we live in the Church and experience the Church as truly Christ's Body here on earth, it is possible to be God's ministers in an effective way.

Tangaza College: A privileged expression of the Church Community

Tangaza College is preparing ministers who respond to the challenges of the world today. Hence, like the Church, it is concerned about relationships, about dialogue with people, about being a sacrament of unity (cf. LG 1). As a College, we have our own priorities and plans, and we have the specific ministry of providing or receiving sound theological and ministerial formation. Last year, we entered into a period of consolidation, a time of reinforcing, a time of strengthening the College, of taking stock of things, of strengthening the bonds that exist between various sectors and institutes of the College, while moving forward with a recharged vision. On that occasion I proposed to you three areas of our commitment:

(1) Building on the unity and identity of the College, (2) safeguarding and developing our academic standards and programmes, (3) Implementing sound financial policies and procedures, as well as opting for a simple style of life. I must say that much has already been achieved, thanks to the initiative and co-operation of all of us together. However much remains

to be done. This year, I would like to emphasise the first of our three commitments: to build at Tangaza College one single God-centred and people-centred community while encouraging responsible independence and effective collegiality. The question at heart therefore is the unity in the diversity of the College: the diversity of Institutes (8, including the Islamic Studies), diversity of nations (over 50), diversity of religious charisms (102 religious communities), ethnic groups (very hard to number them, but it may be well over 400), vocations (ordained, religious, lay), tasks (students, lec-

**To build at Tangaza College
one single God-centred and
people-centred community
while encouraging responsible independence
and effective collegiality**

turers, administration and supportive staff), denominations, sexes, interests, etc. These are all elements which differentiate us from one another. While these differences are not to be eliminated, however it is a college which is one, and seeks to perfect its unity while safeguarding the differentiations.

The foundations of our unity as a college

Allow me at this juncture to remind ourselves of the sources and reasons of our unity as a College and as an expression of the Church.

1. First of all, we are one because our lives have been transformed by the Trinitarian presence of the divine: God unites us in Christ through the Spirit, making us part of the Body of His beloved Son (cf. 1 Cor 11:17- 12:26). We must believe in this already

existing unity, though very much imperfect in this world, but a unity which is fundamental for the life of the College.

2. For many of us, there is still another level of unity flowing from our identity as consecrated people, as icons of the transfigured Christ in the Church and for the Church (VC 14,15), living publicly a life of obedience, poverty and chastity. We must never let that be compromised. Tangaza is permeated by its religious ethos.

3. The history of our college - different religious communities coming together to form **one** theological and ministerial centre - is another important element of our identity and rea-

son for our unity. Though there are different institutes in the College, these aren't separate entities. In addition the whole of the formation offered here is oriented towards theological and ministerial formation of the students. The task of preparing for evangelisation in its manifold dimensions is the common denominator of all the Institutes, and provides one of the essential links that unites the Institutes together in one whole.

4. The context of Africa and the mission unites us further at this College. Whether natives of this large continent or not, we are here because we have come to identify ourselves with the African peoples and the present milieu, "becoming all things to all men" (1 Cor 9:22). Consequently we carry within our hearts the "joy and hope, the grief and anguish" (GS 1) of the people of Africa letting everything that is genuinely human to find an echo in our hearts (cf. GS 1).

5. Our commitment to a serious scientific study unites us further still, whether we be lecturers or students. We are people who have discovered the importance of qualified formation for mission, since we do not want to be slaves to our own whims and fancies; neither do we want to be slaves to the constantly rising and dying ideologies of this world. Instead we are people of faith, who are trying to discover the reasonableness of our faith and serve it; our faith is our "treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor 4:7).

Challenges to our unity

While these are our unifying elements which need to be constantly strengthened, both individually and collectively, we also need to take note of the challenges to unity that we constantly face in this our peculiar set up. Let me name a few for our constant watchfulness:

1. Losing sight of our divine foundation (secularisation): It is so easy today in a society controlled by mass media and the consumerist culture, to lose a sense of our divine foundation, to forget the truth of our existence, that all is grace and that everything bears fruit when graced by God, and that we labour in vain if Yahweh is not building the house (cf. Psalm 127:1).

2. Compromising our particular vocations: We live in this world, within the affairs of the world, and at the same time we live a life dictated by the standards of Christ and not the standards of the world. This requires that we struggle on a daily basis to be faithful to our baptismal, religious and ministerial commit-

ments to the Lord. We differentiate between an occasional failure, which calls for understanding and forgiveness, and the compromised life of a Christian and/or religious which cannot be condoned; we are convinced that sin is divisive in any community.

3. The difficulties in sharing a common mission, can lead to selfish or sectarian tendencies: St Paul in his beautiful letter to the Philippians complained about the selfish tendencies of some of his fellow workers for he said: "They all want to work

As an ecclesial community and as a College, we are to be profoundly shaped by our own environment. Hence we keep responding to at least five relevances arising from our environment: cultural relevance, pastoral relevance, spiritual relevance, missionary relevance, and religious relevance.

for themselves, not for Jesus Christ" (Phil 2:21). The challenge of selfish tendencies, the root of penury in our heart, is also real here: it could lead some to making the College an instrument (for acquiring wealth, for making personal success stories, for cheaper education, for personal/ congregational pursuits at the expense of the rest, etc.), and not an institution we love, serve and grow in; instead we need to recognise that the health of the institution has to be taken care of by all concerned, for the college as a whole to carry out its mission well.

4. Loss of contact with the local reality: Our unity and experience of Church will also be threatened if we lose contact with the concrete reality of the local Church and majority of the people who live around us. Church is never a closed reality; in fact it is a reality busy building relationships through the path of dialogue.

This demands that Tangaza be part of the local situation, and be deeply committed to the liberation of the total person here and now, in the concrete realities of this local situation.

5. Loss of focus on our primary duty of study and research: Our oneness can be dramatically threatened and possibly destroyed if we don't keep our commitment to serious study, research and preparation for ministry. It is a commitment required of both the staff and students at the service of the

Church, her faith and her mission. If we reject knowledge, the prophet Hosea warns, God might reject us from his special call to be His ministers (cf. Hosea 4:6), causing serious rifts within the College.

The uniqueness of Tangaza in our context

As we face the issues that threaten our unity, we keep going back to our origins, and seeking a better grasp of the vision and mission of Tangaza College, elaborating the qualifiers that would make this College unique and different from others, much like the Alexandrian School of the early centuries. The **environment** in which the Alexandrian School developed in the early centuries, had given it its distinctive characteristic. The needs and challenges of the Society around - the rejection of Christian faith by secular philosophies, and com-

promising the content of faith by misguided interpretation of Scriptures - shaped its uniqueness, namely metaphysical investigation of the content of the faith, a leaning towards the philosophy of Plato, and allegorical interpretation of scriptures. So too, as an ecclesial community and as a College, we are to be profoundly

teachers and students of Tangaza College who responded generously and scientifically to these five relevances that had been identified as making our environment. Of course, that is possible only when Tangaza community strives to be a microcosm of the Church and make the experience of Church.

Dear students, faculty members and non-teaching staff, let us this year make the "Tangaza community" a personal life plan as well as a plan for the Institutes. Let us **believe in it**

Francis, a penitential form of life within the Church. Let us put aside our own personal tiredness and disappointments with the College, as did the Apostles who had laboured all night without catching anything but tried again on the request of the Lord (cf. Lk 5:5,6). Our future vitality depends on our ability to work together, see and experience the College as one College. The essential basis for this is a renewed commitment to the Lord Jesus and a broader ecclesial vision which frees us from any parochial or divisive tendencies. At the word of the Lord we too cast our nets into the New Scholastic Year, confident that the Lord will see to it that our efforts will bear fruit.

Let us continue to trust in our Heavenly Mother, to support us in our endeavours, to help us to overcome our fears and prejudices, to set us on the path of sapiential and scientific learning, making this community a privileged expression of the Church.

Let us this year make
the "Tangaza community"
a personal life plan
as well as a plan for the Institutes.
Let us believe in it and build it!

shaped by our own environment. Hence we keep responding to at least five relevances arising from our environment: cultural relevance, pastoral relevance, spiritual relevance, missionary relevance, and religious relevance. This is our identity as well as our task. It is my hope that in years to come, people will be able to name illustrious

(that its roots are in the provident love of God and the maternal intercession of our Blessed Mother) and **build it!** It is the task of everyone, students and staff, men and women, young and old. When we see weaknesses and failures, instead of criticizing with the mouth, let the Lord criticise it by the life we live - like that of St.

Tangaza College...

- ... *welcomes* all first year students, new faculty members and other staff to the College and wishes them a very happy and fruitful experience
- ... *welcomes* in a special way Fr. Maurcie Schepers as the Chairman of the BOG and Brother Dominic Ehrmantraut as its Vice-Chair
- ... *welcomes* the Institute of Youth Ministry and Islamic Studies to the College
- ... *introduces* Sr. Grace Xavier DHM as the Deputy Principal Finance, Mrs. Edel Churu Ebale as the Deputy Principal Student Life, Brother Paulos Mesmer FSC as the Director of CTIE, Ms Florence Kabala as the Personnel and Administration Officer, Mr. Ngure Githinji as the Registrar, and Mr. Gikenye Chege as the Accountant of the College
- ... *thanks* the administration which worked very hard during the holiday period to complete the construction works of the Library, reorganise the canteen and beautify the compound
- ... *announces* the successful completion of the Tangaza Extension Project and the submission of the final report to the donor agencies
- ... *expects* new projects to be initiated soon, such as the IT automation of the College and a student hostel for women, both religious and lay
- ... *looks* forward to the Decree from the Congregation for Catholic Education affiliating the Theology Programme of the College to the Ecclesiastical faculty at CUEA
- ... *informs* that the College Canteen is under a new management
- ... *wishes* everyone a very successful academic year 2003-2004.