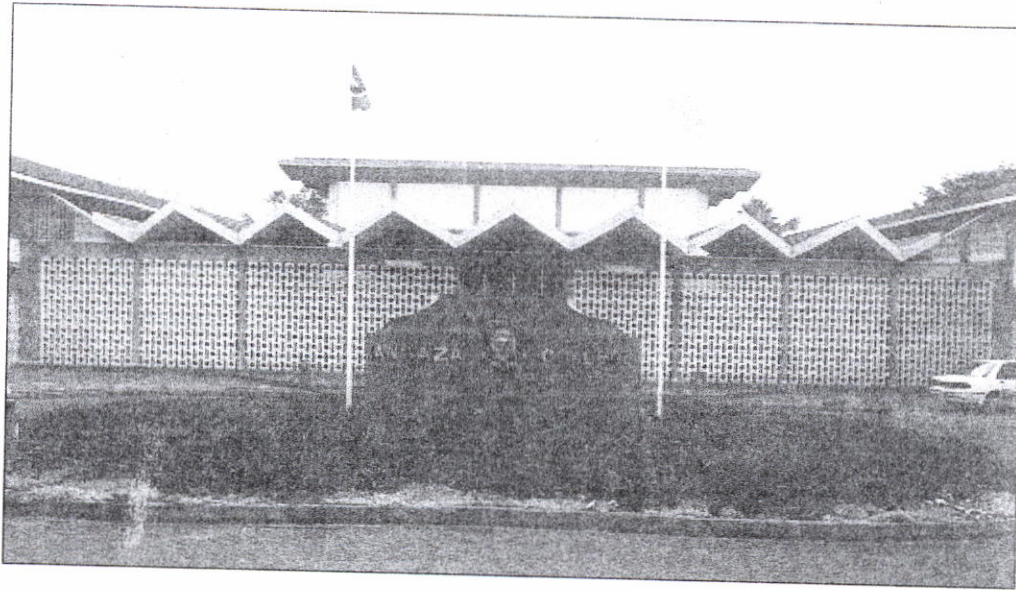


Memory, Prophecy and Commitment



Inaugural address of the year 2002-03

On this day in the most solemn manner around the Eucharistic Lord, united with our Lord and Master, we open the doors of this College that is "on the threshold of sweeping change" (Fr. Shorter, *Principal's Annual Report 2002*, p. 1). The "Tangaza Extensions" will soon be complete. The Institutes (4 of them), except Theology, will shift to the new building at the end of this Semester. Two more new ones might soon be joining the College taking up their offices and classrooms in the new extensions. "It will then be necessary to go through a period of consolidation" (*Principal's Annual Report 2002*, p. 1). It is a period of reinforcing, a time of strengthening the colleg., of taking stock of things, of clarifying better the details of our functioning, of strengthening the bonds that exist between the various sectors, programmes, and institutes of the College, without however forgetting to look forward. It shall be a period in which we shall remember the past with gratitude, look forward to the future with great confidence, and live the present with enthusiasm and greater commitment. It is a time of memory, prophecy and commitment.

MEMORY: THE RELIGIOUS ETHOS OF THE COLLEGE

The Israelites, and later Christians, were called upon so often by God and his prophets to "remember" (Deut 5:15) who they were and what God had done in their lives. It was necessary, for the prophets and teachers knew very well that a community without memory or with only an intermittent memory is very problematic and fragile. So too Tangaza has to remember. We who form the body of the College today have to remind ourselves of our origins, our identity. What shall we remember? What is our identity?

Tangaza College, which opened its doors to the first group of students on 25 August 1986, is a centre of Catholic theological and ministerial education in the context of the Church in Africa. It is an institution arising from the cooperation of a number of Provinces or Regions of Religious and/or Missionary Congregations to provide for the theological and ministerial education of their respective students and for the professional and religious training of other Christians. Being a College of the Religious and the majority of the students being religious it certainly strives to live a religious ethos distinguishing it from the other centres of higher learning.

This leads us to the next question: What is the specific religious ethos that we are striving to live? What I intend by our "religious ethos" is our characteristic spirit as people whose lives are profoundly founded on the mystery of Christ and the Trinity, who have a very special relationship with Jesus and are icons of the Transfigured Christ in the Church and for the Church (*Vita Consecrata* 14,15). Being people who are guided by the spirit of holiness, we are a sign of communion, and a manifestation of God's love in the world, especially through the way we live (cf. John 13:35) and the services we render (cf. John 13: 15). It is a Christian community where the members through their life of obedience, poverty and chastity bear prophetic witness to the primacy of God in their lives.

This is the religious ethos of the College and we have to remind ourselves of that today. Tangaza is not another College like the rest, but a College where men and women who have been consecrated to God in a special way, come together, reflect, study and prepare themselves together with lay Christians and peoples of other faith. It is a community characterised by dependence on God, on a life-style of evangelical simplicity and austerity, hard work, obedience, and commitment to God's people. Our theological and ministerial preparation here flows from this original commitment to God and God's people.

The peculiar religious ethos of the College in no way excludes the lay Christians and people of other faiths from the College. In fact all baptised live the one Christian vocation of discipleship. By embracing lay Christians Tangaza College hopes to witness to the unity of Christian life whether it is lay, consecrated or ordained, without at the same time denying or neutralising these specific vocations. Living and learning side-by-side with the religious, the lay Christian can come to know and love better the life of a religious who is called to live in a prophetic and visible way the "profound 'configuration' to the mystery of Christ" (VC 16). On the other hand for the religious, it is a time to recognise the dignity of the Christian secular vocation and to serve it whole heartedly.

PROPHECY: A WONDERFUL GIFT OF GOD FOR THE CHURCH AND FOR AFRICA

Our identity, as people whose lives are deeply transformed by God's grace, and as people who are committed to a serious quality preparation for ministry among God's family is profoundly prophetic. It is an invaluable gift to the Church as a whole and especially to God's family in Africa.

We know very well that the mission of God's family certainly embraces many tasks, chief among them today being overcoming ethnic tensions and divisions. It has a major role to play in the face of divisions caused by the coexistence of ethnic groups with different traditions, languages, and religions, and the mutual hostility generated by the situation. We, hailing from over 90 congregations with deep diversities of age, gender, culture, nation, etc, are at the very heart of the Church and a decisive element for her mission of being a "sacrament of unity" (LG 1) in Africa. We as members of that Church and members of this College are at the vanguard to overcome such divisions of exclusivism, particularism, sexism, and excessive ethnocentrism. Through our life as people profoundly faithful to the Gospel, we witness to the rich variety and diversity of the sons and daughters of God and call everyone to unity.

Moreover through the acceptance of the evangelical counsels, which is "an integral part of the Church's life" (VC 3), we call the world back to those fundamental Gospel values of evangelical simplicity, obedience to God's word and commitment to the kingdom. Through our poverty we witness to the values of a simple life-style, of travelling light like the many nomadic tribes of Africa, of sharing with the poor, of solidarity and social cohesion, of the real wealth of interpersonal relationships, of traditional culture and wisdom, etc. We do this especially when our contemporary societies are being eroded by materialism, selfishness, gross social inequalities especially in the distribution of wealth, family feuds for wealth and the like.

Similarly, our life of consecrated chastity is a much-needed prophetic answer to the traditional society with its procreative emphasis of marriage, and to the contemporary society under the ongoing pervasive power of pan-sexism and exploitation of sex, the moral disorientation of youth and the manipulations of the media with its anti-religious bias. Through a life-giving celibate life we witness to the world God's original intentions in creating us sexual, namely for love and communion (cf. Gen 2:23-25) and to the truth that "nothing is impossible to God" (Lk 1:37) and to a person whose life has been overtaken by Him.

Our life of obedience on the other hand is a life of constant listening, learning, dialoguing and living a life rooted in Christ. This is a rejection of all arbitrariness as well as authoritarianisms in our life and our society. It is a choice to study, to learn God's ways.

As prophetic people we prepare ourselves for ministry. The efforts that we make here, our studies, our research, our sharing, are all deeply prophetic. We train ourselves here so that we can be qualified ministers. We know too well the destructive power of ignorance, and its dark effects on our people. "My people perish for want for knowledge," (Hosea 4:6) cries Yahweh. We want to bring them to light, the light of the Gospel, the light of modern scientific advances, the light of authentic relations.

We know more than ever that the transmission of the evangelical message is particularly arduous in today's world, especially because some of our contemporaries are submerged in cultural ambiances that are often ignorant of any spiritual or inner dimension, in religious confusion provoked by the proliferation of many denominations, in the on-going changes and breakdown in the traditional religious and cultural set-ups of our societies, and in situations where essentially materialistic aspects prevail. We are prophets being touched, healed and prepared by God before being sent to them. Hence we cannot reject the path of serious study, reflection and qualified preparation and the warning is dismal: "Since you yourself rejected knowledge, so I shall reject you from my priesthood" (Hosea 4:6).

COMMITMENT

Hence we commit ourselves to our life as Christians and/or religious and to our study/work here at Tangaza. I urge that we in the coming years commit ourselves to work to achieving three major goals. The first of these focuses on the unity and identity of Tangaza, the second on the academic matters, and the third on the financial sector.

We commit ourselves to build at Tangaza College one single God-centred and people-oriented community of committed people, while encouraging responsible autonomy and effective collegiality.

Tangaza College has to be ONE College, whose unity is founded on the common-rootedness of all its members in the one God of Jesus Christ, the one mission of Jesus and his Church, and sharing in the mission and goal of the College as described in the Statutes. Being faithful to the original vision of the College we try to safeguard and encourage its religious ethos, while creating a community made of religious and lay, male and female, students, teachers and supportive staff, working together for formation in collaborative ministry. We commit ourselves to a relationship of openness, sincerity, mutual respect, generosity and love. We carry out our specific tasks while collaborating with the rest. We reject all selfish tendencies of isolationism, both as individuals and as institutes/programmes.

We live our oneness in diversity. Our diversity here comes primarily from our origins, our genders, religious charisms, and the areas of our study and specialisation. We don't have to deny these nor lose these. In fact they have to be embraced, supported and encouraged. However these diversities are lived in a reconciled unity. Tangaza is one, as the diverse personal, academic, charismatic and spiritual riches of the members are duly respected, cherished and shared.

We commit ourselves to safeguard and develop the academic standards and academic integrity of the College.

We are here to study, a study that will affect our lives first of all, and God-willing the lives of many others. Some of the matters that we learn are meant primarily to affect us in our existence, while some others are meant to be a tool for ministry. Both are important and both should be the goal of our studies. As we proceed in life we must discover and live the close bond between thought and action, belief and mission. Our studies illumine our thoughts/beliefs and determine what we do, namely our mission in life. For the students of theology serious study and research will help them see and experience the unity of faith we profess and live. The unity and harmony of this synthesis will constitute a new argument for the truth of the faith and give meaning to our existence. For all of us knowledge will lead us to greater freedom and commitment/love. That is why today we want to commit ourselves to learning, to education, to a life of serious academic engagement.

Safeguarding academic standards and integrity will include taking steps to prevent possible abuses, putting in place sound academic policies where there might be loopholes, creating a procedure for the affiliation of new institutes/programmes, developing further the library and the development of Masters Programmes where it is necessary and convenient. Both Theology and Social Ministry would like to develop Master's Programmes. These initiatives should succeed well. For that we need the commitment of everyone here.

Tangaza College, especially through its Academic Board, has put in place policies, guidelines and regulations for the intake, curriculum content and development, academic standard and integrity. These need to be revisited and if necessary revised in order to safeguard the academic quality of the programmes offered as well as the goal of each particular Institute/Programme. Sound procedures need to be worked out for the affiliation of new programmes, for the accurate and safekeeping of the academic grades, and authorised giving out of Academic Diplomas, Certificates and Mark List. Students need to be encouraged to be original and scientific, and to be helped in their study and research.

We commit ourselves to make the College financially accessible to all, especially to local African congregations and laity. Towards this we commit ourselves to the values of evangelical simplicity.

In the thought of Tertullian, the creator of western ecclesiastical terminology, simplicity and power are God's qualities, while what takes place in human and idolatrous undertakings is great show and expense. That was Tertullian's way of putting the evangelical message of poverty in spirit (Mt 5:3; 11:5; Lk 4:18; 6:20; 7:22; Lk 21:2,3; 2 Cor 6:10), which we have embraced willingly. Simplicity of life and an inner detachment from worldly possession is the choice that all of us have made. As committed Christians working and studying at Tangaza we are attentive to the Pauline teaching: "For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs" (1 Tim 6: 10) and the reminder from the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never fail you nor forsake you'" (Heb.13: 5).

We renew our commitment to these teachings today. Our commitment to the College would also mean we are opting for a simple style of life and functioning here at Tangaza, to avoid all unnecessary, unproductive and wasteful expenditures, and taking extreme care of the College property. We are just stewards and we have a duty to take care of it so that many others who will come later can use it as well.

Living in the context of Kenya and Africa where the income is low for very many, we need to keep the College accessible to all, especially to local African Congregations and laity. During the past few years the financial office has succeeded well in bringing about much transparency and putting in place appropriate procedures for making the budget so that there is a clear supervision of the financial resources. We still need to study the various expenditures to see how and where the financial resources are spent and whether a greater proportion of the financial resources could be used for academic matters and initiatives including the purchase of good books. We commit ourselves to such a worthy cause today.

TANGAZA, A GIFT OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Tangaza College is a gift of God through the special intervention of Mary to the Church and the people of Africa. She is the mother of this College, the name *Tangaza* itself having a reference to the event of the Annunciation of the angel to the Blessed Virgin Mary. She sustains us on our journey of academic and spiritual preparation for a life of qualified service to the Church and all God's people. To her we entrust our new year, and our plans and programmes for the future:



To you, O Virgin at the Annunciation,
We entrust the College and each one of us today,
That all our endeavours to prepare ourselves for ministry
May bear fruit.

Make the College, O Mother,
An instrument of sapiential and scientific learning
Capable of founding and consolidating
The whole edifice of the academic and pastoral formation
Of future presbyters and ministers.

O Virgin of the Annunciation,
May the time we spend in Tangaza
Be a special time of silence and waiting,
Of love and communion,
Of search for God and love of brothers and sisters,
Of scientific learning and research,
Making this community
A privileged expression of the Church.

O Lady of Africa, Mother of us all,
Be specially mindful of the peoples of Africa
Obtain the gift of peace to all
Torn apart by hatred, resentment and racism
Obtain freedom and forgiveness
To those under the weight of sin.

May your Son's law of love win over and unite all hearts
So that together we may sing the glory
Of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Virgin-Mother at the Annunciation, pray for us

Fr. George Kocholickal, SDB
Principal - Tangaza College