



FIGHT AGAINST HATE SPEECH, OUR COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

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PORT HARCOURT, NIGERIA -

Eradicating hate speech in the Nigerian nation is the collective responsibility of all Nigerians and stakeholder groups in the country, irrespective of ethnic, religious affiliations and status. This assertion was made by Rev. Fr. Dr. Hyacinth Orlu-orlu of the University of Port Harcourt, in his presentation titled: Hate Speech and National Security in Nigeria.

The University don was addressing delegates at the Second National Delegates Assembly of Signis Nigeria held recently at the JCT Guest House, National Pilgrimage and Eucharistic Adoration Centre, Elele, near Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The theme for the Assembly was: Communication for the Promotion of Justice, Peace and Reconciliation in Nigeria.

The lecturer spoke extensively on communication as an important survival skill; what constitute hate speech; the legality of hate speech; biblical antecedents of hate speech; national security and hate speech and national security. Noting that hate speech threatens the political, social and religious existence of the society, Fr. Orlu-orlu traced the genesis of hate speech, its challenges and sources and outlined reasons that have made the curtailing of hate speech in the country difficult.

Concluding his presentation, the guest speaker declared: “By and large, this discourse has shown that whereas no right thinking person will support the practice of hate speech, given its consequences for individuals particularly and the nation generally, there is reluctance on the part of the legal system to impose any law that, in the long run, will stifle free speech”.

He enjoined that Nigerians should be mindful of their utterances wherever they find themselves; either in the Church, in the political field during electoral campaigns, in the Legislative Houses or in Government Houses. He concluded: “The Priest who has superior divine power, should guide the king. Christians should obey the biblical injunction that we should pray for those in authority over us.”

In his own presentation, the founder of the National Pilgrimage and Eucharistic Adoration Centre, Very Rev. Fr. Professor Emmanuel Edeh stressed the importance of peace, hence “Jesus Christ made it his parting gift to his apostles”. Speaking on the topic: Communication for Peace, Justice and Reconciliation in Nigeria; Professor Edeh described practical charity as the panacea for peace, adding that the Pilgrimage Centre has used this concept to help resolve about 14,000 cases that could have degenerated to crises.

Referring to the logic of the philosophy of Igbo metaphysics being used by the Pilgrimage Centre in this perspective, to buttress his point; Professor Edeh noted that “It is certain that our world cannot make progress without peace since it is a compulsory component of progress in our society”. He added that despite the great growing importance of peace in our human society, it seems clear that peace is eluding the modern world; stressing: “many parts of the world today are experiencing one form of crisis or another as a result of absence of genuine peace”. So, the guest speaker proposed what he called practical and effective charity as a panacea to peace, noting that “behind every peaceful atmosphere is the spirit of charity”.

Professor Edeh declared: “Practical approach and effective charity leads to peace in the modern world. In the Catholic community, peace is not mere absence of violence but a result of right relationship between God and

neighbour. A right relationship is based on love and charity, charity is charity everywhere, but the manner of charity is the charity that you put into practical use". He concluded: "If God carries the world and cares for us, then we owe it as a duty to care for one another. This is an obligation which we gladly carry out in this Pilgrimage Centre."