

CWENA'S

A TALK AT THE PRESENTATION
OF A BOOK ENTITLED:

THE GCE CRISIS: A TEST OF ANGLOPHONE
SOLIDARITY

SAINT JOSEPH'S CATHEDRAL PARISH HALL
BAMENDA

Monday, 01 July 1996.

SHEP MELBELTUS KWI GIRBA
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel highly privileged to have been invited to this occasion of the presentation of the book entitled:
The GCE Crisis, A Test of Anglophone Solidarity.

2. The book which is presented to the public here today renders a very important service to all of us and to future generations of Cameroonians. It was indeed necessary to put on record, in the form of a publication such as this, the story of a long and bitter struggle, a struggle in which Cameroonian Parents, Teachers and Students engaged through peaceful and legitimate means in support of a noble cause, namely, the safeguarding, preservation and development of an *educational system* whose very existence was under serious threat. It is an educational system which ordinary Cameroonians consider as a priceless heritage, an heritage for whose survival they do not consider any price too high to pay. The battle which they fought, through peaceful means, to ensure the survival of that educational system was also meant to uphold the principle according to which "Parents have the prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children"¹.

3. I am convinced that all Cameroonians of good will must feel very grateful to the author of the book which is presented to us today. In assembling and presenting the documents and material contained in this book,

¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26, p.3

Dr. Francis Beng Nyamnjoh merits the deep gratitude and sincere congratulations of his fellow citizens.

4. On an occasion as this, I believe that no one will take it amiss if, over and over again, tribute is warmly paid to the heroes who valiantly fought and won the battle for the creation of the GCE Board, those heroes, precisely, whose victory is sung in Dr. Nyamnjoh's book. In that regard, there immediately come to mind:

- The Teachers Association of Cameroon (TAC)
- The Confederation of Parents / Teachers Associations of Cameroon (CAPTAC)
- University Students and Secondary Students.

With dogged determination, these groups methodically galvanized and channelled public opinion to resist cultural absorption and assimilation. The members of TAC, in particular, deserve our sincere admiration, not only for the consummate tact and skill with which they pursued their noble objective, but, above all, for the self-abnegation and disinterestedness which they brought to bear upon their struggle, accepting to stake their property, their careers and their very lives in order to preserve for our children today, and for prosperity, an educational system which we all dearly cherish. In this way, the members of TAC, together with Parents and Students, demonstrated before the entire nation that there are values worth dying for.

5. It is also necessary, I believe, to salute, most sincerely, the action by which the Cameroon Government created the GCE Board. That action was no doubt

enormously facilitated by the admirable report of the Sondengam Committee on the GCE Board, a Committee which had been set up in September 1992 by the Honourable Prime Minister.

6. Since it went operational, the GCE Board has carried out its mission with the highest standards of professionalism, notwithstanding the monumental obstacles and difficulties with which it has to contend almost every inch of the way. For that reason, it merits the praise showered upon it by all men and women of good will across the nation and beyond.

Recent events seem to indicate that the forces of evil and of darkness have not disarmed, and that they are refurbishing and deploying their lethal arms in a bid to erode and destroy the credibility which the GCE Board has established at the price of very great sacrifice. Those who believe in the power of prayer must pray relentlessly for the GCE Board, that it may continue its noble mission untrammelled by the forces of evil and darkness. May eternal vigilance be the watchword of each and everyone of us, and may the GCE Board be able to count upon the loyal collaboration of Teachers, Parents and Students, so that it may be able to carry out its mission without let or hindrance.

7. The bitter struggle for the creation of the GCE Board whose story Dr. Nyamnjoh ably presents in his book was aimed at ensuring that the educational system of the former British Cameroons should be left intact and allowed to exist

alongside the system that developed in the former French Cameroons.

“The two systems have become encrusted and engraved in Cameroonian society and should be left alone. The responsibility of enlightened leadership is therefore not to create some crude notion of an integrated society where integration is only in the mind of the person conceiving it, but rather to create a unique African society, where for the first time, Napoleonic and Anglosaxon cultures can co-exist in harmony and mutual respect. The objective should be to create an environment that induces constructive interaction between the two cultures in a manner that minimizes destructive inference and releases the creative synergy that exists in the two cultures”².

8. It would take too long to recount some aspects of the unwritten policy of absorption and assimilation according to which one would have to be frenchified in order to be accepted as a Cameroonian. If anyone thought that such assimilation was never part of the unwritten policy of our country, I would like to remind him of the interview which the Right Honourable Hamadou Mustapha, Vice Prime Minister in-charge of Housing and Town Planning gave, as late as last November, to Blaise-Pascal Talla, Managing Director of the Review *Jeune Afrique Economie*.

The Vice Prime Minister was asked the following questions:

² Nfor H. Susungi, what can Cameroon learn from Canada's Constitutional Crisis, Abidjan, 1991, p.20

Avez-vous le sentiment que les anglophones sont, dans certains domaines, lésés par rapport au reste de la nation?

To that question, the Right Honourable Vice Prime Minister replied as follows:

A un moment donné effectivement, on a commencé à oublier que les anglophone étaient là. On a eu l'impression que les anglophones s'étaient déjà francophonisés. Or, ce n'est pas le cas. Ils continuent d'exister avec leur culture. Il faut en tenir compte.

De plus en plus, il faudrait qu'ils soient associés à la gestion totale du pays. Je ne pense pas qu'il faille revenir à la Fédération, mais on doit les associer davantage. La décentralisation est une forme qui permettra aux anglophones de pouvoir s'occuper de leurs propres affaires chez eux³.

9. Far be it from me to suggest that the legitimate struggle for the preservation and development of the anglophone education system should imply, on the part of anglophones, a neglect of the French language. On the contrary, I personally agree, totally, with Blaise-Pascal Talla who, in his editorial in *Jeune Afrique Economie* last December, said, inter alia:

³ *Jeune Afrique Economie*, N.207, 20 Novembre 1995, p.63

L'Histoire a offert à un pays comme le Cameroun le privilège du bilinguisme (Anglais et Français). C'est un avantage considérable, même si les francophones font moins d'efforts que les anglophones. Même dans un pays comme la France, les responsables de l'Éducation s'emploient aujourd'hui à introduire l'anglais dans certaines écoles primaires pour former dès demain une génération de vrais citoyens de l'Europe. Pourquoi donc les Africains devraient-ils, au même moments, s'enfermer dans ce qui pourrait vite devenir un... ghetto linguistique ?⁴

Blaise-Pascal Talla was reacting against the misguided and strident call addressed to certain African countries, first in Mauritius in October 1993, and then at Cotonou in December last year, to fight against the spread of the English Language.

10. Before concluding, I wish to express my deep gratitude to the GCE Board for the action it has taken to restore Religious Knowledge as a subject for the GCE Examination.

⁴Jeune Afrique Economie, N.208, 1er Décembre 1995, p.3

Sixteen years ago, an illustrious son of this country, who was at the same time an outstanding educator, wrote an article entitled **Res Una Publica**, in which he said, *inter alia*:

If anyone in charge of education, forgetful of Sophocles' warning that 'Of happiness the crown And chiefest part is wisdom And to hold the gods in awe', shall declare that no certificate, diploma or degree gained in religious studies of Coran or Bible or Tradition (supreme studies) shall be recognised by the state under the misguided and spurious argument that the state is lay, forgetful of this that a lay state is not an atheist state, let him be anathema.

For, he inculcates into the minds of the young that, if religion counts for nothing in their studies, it counts for nothing in their lives - an extremely dangerous mentality that spells the bane of the Republic, the woe of the Commonwealth, the doom of the Common-weal.⁵

11. The recent massive attempt by the forces of evil and of darkness to undermine and subvert the work of the GCE Board should make us pause and reflect profoundly. The fact that so many young people and even adults in our Society so readily and uncritically collaborated with the

forces of darkness in their diabolical enterprise is an indication of the extent of the erosion of the fear of God and of Gospel values in our country. I am not God, and I have no right to judge the consciences of those who lent a hand to the forces of evil. One thing is certain, however, and it is this. Whatever the subjective state of their souls may be, those in our society, young and old, who participated in activities that are utterly inadmissible in the educational system of this part of our country, must be considered as the objective allies or instruments of the forces of darkness which are seeking the destruction of the GCE Board. And that is why it is so very important that we should support the action of the GCE Board whereby it has restored Religious Knowledge as a subject for the GCE Examination.

12. "History is replete with examples of well-trained people who, bereft of a moral sense, are dangerous. A principal of a large inner-city high school in Boston sends the following letter every year to each of her new teachers:

Dear Teacher,

I am the victim of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness: gas chambers built by learned engineers; children poisoned by educated physicians; infants killed by trained nurses, women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates. So, I am suspicious of education.

⁵ Bernard Fonlon, *Res Una Publica*, in *ABBIA Cameroon Cultural Review*, nn 38-39-40, May 1982, pp. 34-35

My request is this: Help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human "6.

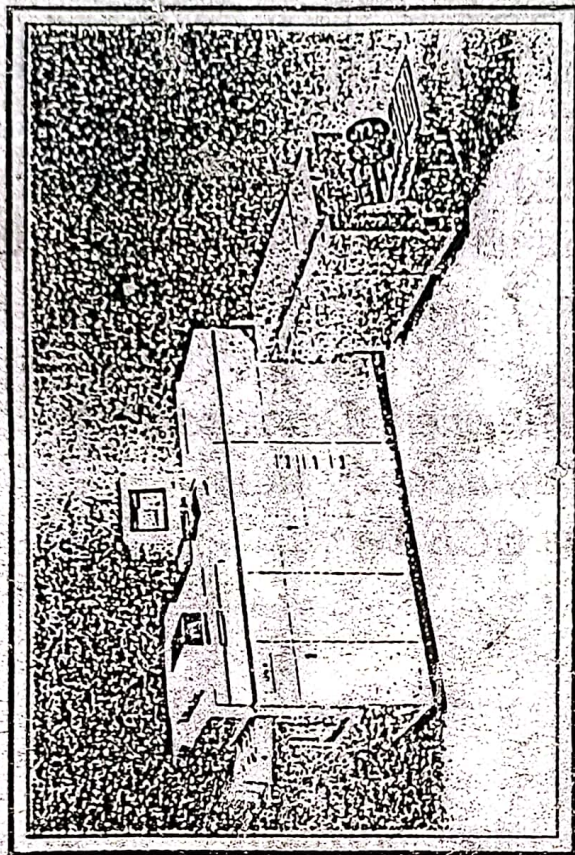
*Ladies and Gentlemen, Thank you,
And may God abundantly bless
and protect the GCE Board.*

+ Paul Verdzekov
Archbishop of Bamenda

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