

A WELCOME ADDRESS PRESENTED BY ANTHONY C. AJAH, ASSOCIATE MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH IN VALUES AND PHILOSOPHY (CRVP) AND THE ORGANIZER OF THE 2017 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IN HONOUR OF LATE PROFESSOR GEORGE MCLEAN, HELD AT THE GEORGE MARION JOHNSON BUILDING, SCHOOL OF GENERAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA, ON THIS MONDAY, MAY 15, 2017

- The CRVP Regional Coordinator for Africa, Professor Joseph C.A. Agbakoba,
- Distinguished Conferees

One of the things that give meaning to human existence is the set of [most times conceptual] realities we call values. Simply understood as “things of worth” to an individual or group of people, values are the foundation of the choices we make as human beings. The choices we make, on the other hand, jointly define, in the short and long-term, our existence as humans. Yet, questions about values – the nature and usefulness of values, the universality of values and frameworks for [e]valuation - have continued to receive attentions from scholars over the centuries. The idea that positive and universally valid values order human actions had come under devastating attacks from various philosophical trends throughout human history. These attacks were championed in the early 19th Century by Friedrich Nietzsche, and consolidated by the very aggressive 21st Century brands of relativism and postmodernist philosophies.

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (CRVP) was founded in the 1960s: first as Workshops in a few departments in the United States, later as colloquia, and later again (from the 1970s and 1980s) as a platform for organizing conferences and seminars on themes around cultures, human person/ identity, and human societies. Founded by the Late Professor George F. McLean (June 29, 1929 – September 6, 2016), the CRVP has continued to bring together those who are interested in using philosophical research to, borrowing the words of Martin Heidegger, ‘re-ground’ values, providing more universalist frameworks that can withstand the disordering onslaught of 21st Century relativist and postmodern philosophical positions. This is why it has as its three Goals, to:

- Understand and appreciate one’s own culture and the values that shape aspiration and motivate actions;
- Understand other cultures and to develop a positive yet critical appreciation thereof; and
- Build cooperation among people by healing deep tensions and promoting peace and friendship on a global scale.

There are also three objectives that derive from these goals. These are to:

- Mobilize research teams to study the nature, interpretation and development of cultures and to apply them to the challenges of contemporary change;
- Publish and distribute the results of these efforts; and

- Organize extended seminars for deeper exploration of these issues and regional conferences for the coordination of this work.

All these (Goals and Objectives) have to do with what the CRVP describes as the urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, the quality of human life, the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and the relation of all these to the development of social and political life. It is Late Professor George McLean's understanding of this urgent need that sustained his commitment to the goals and objectives of the CRVP as well as the spread of these [goals/objectives] throughout the globe. For more than 45 years of his 87 years of existence, Professor George engaged with Philosophers and researchers [from different fields of study], from tens of countries, and from every continent and religion, as he worked on these goals that defined the founding of the CRVP.

Since his death in September 2016, several conferences and workshops have been and will continue to be organized in his honour in various countries of the world. Ours today is one of such gatherings in his honour. He died a gadfly in his own time. Can we be gadflies too in our time and societies? While technological developments challenge what it means to be human, can we pay attention to research on what makes us humans? While we blame others for every ill around us, can we pay closer attention to ourselves and our societies to identify even sub-conscious set of values and preferences that continue to shape our aspirations and motivate our actions? While we are encouraged from many angles by Philosophers, Anthropologists, researchers in Religious Studies, and other researchers in the Humanities, to support what is called "African Culture" [as if there is any such single culture that is African], can we learn from George McLean that our best attitude to any culture must be two-way: not only positive [with the intention to preserve what is called 'our heritage'] but necessarily also critical [to identify and reconstruct/ reject development-impeding ideologies and practices]?

Having asked us these questions, I conclude my brief remarks of welcome by making a request:

- Can we be a team of researchers who pay attention and engage in research on the hidden predominant values and preferences that have continued to determine the actions and inactions of the larger percentage of the members of our contemporary local and global societies? This, in my view, is more important than excavating and philosophizing in defense of development-impeding ideologies and practices all in the name of preserving our cultural values and heritages.

I welcome us to this conference. I wish us all an enriching experience. Welcome to the 2017 International Conference in honour of Late Professor George McLean [May 15-16, 2017].

Anthony C. Ajah
Conference Organizer [May 15, 2017]