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**Nigeria @ a Crossroads: Leveraging on the Catholic Social  
Teaching to Reconstruct a Just and better Society**

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**Abstract**

*After rising from the ashes of persecution and opprobrium - consequent upon the accession to power of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great (272-337 B.C.), the Catholic Church occupied and continues to occupy a pre-eminent position in global socio-political and economic affairs. Over the years, the Church especially, in western countries and in many parts of Africa, has played critical roles at critical junctures that furthered human freedom and development. Unfortunately, as the sword of Damocles hangs over Nigeria's neck and, as Nigeria drifts precariously to the brink of disintegration with its attendant catastrophic consequences, the Church appears helpless and seems to lack the prophetic courage to speak out more vigorously on behalf of the poor and the vulnerable and engage in any meaningful manner with the extractive institutions that prey with reckless abandon on the lethargic and docile citizenry. However, in spite of her own shortcomings, the Church still remains a formidable force to be reckoned with in all aspects of the life of Nigerians. This article explores the possibility of the Church going beyond recrimination and condemnation of social ills to leveraging on her excellent Social Teaching to pull Nigeria back from the brink and assist it in reconstructing a relatively, just and peaceful society. This can be done through a robust mobilization of the masses and constructive engagement in socio-political and economic activities.*

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### **Prevailing Situation and the urgent need to change it**

#### **We built this place**

*“A **lecturer** wanting 5 rounds to pass a female student. A **policeman** demanding 500k for bail. A **judge** demanding 5m for judgment. A **public servant** demanding 50m for a contract. A **voter** demanding 5k for his/her vote. A **clergy** demanding 5-500k for “blessing.”*

*A **leader** closes his eyes to corruption and nepotism. A **parent** offering 50k for ward’s admission into school or paying for exam questions. A **society** rewarding incompetence. A **society** closing its mind to murder. A **society** shutting down common sense.*

*A **society** designed to allow the worst to emerge to the top, in many respects. A **society** that justifies all things in the name of politics, tribe, ethnicity and individual benefit. A **society** that blackmails others for difference in thinking.*

*A **Nation** that we have all collectively built. One working towards oppressing the other. Where impunity is rife. Where our default thinking is on wailing or hailing, but never a consideration of the issue.*

*A society with low or no expectations from their leaders. A **society** in conflict with itself. A **society where thought is absent**. That all issues are swept under the carpet depending on who holds the broom and where all things can be covered depending on where the umbrella tilts.*

*A **society** where seemingly educated men run away from speaking out in the face of evil so that they will be seen as saints. A **society** where evil doers are glorified by men who pretend to be gentlemen. A **society** where men have no regards to the legacy they will leave behind. A **society** where money is preferred to wisdom. We built this place.”<sup>2</sup>*

The above excerpt is a serious indictment on the Nigerian people; it captures succinctly, the degeneration and decay that have become

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<sup>2</sup>Adasaka Olusoji, “We built this Place”(October 10, 2019) Retrieved from: <https://threadreaderapp.com/thread/1182195621274570752.html>. (Accessed February 12, 2020).

the bane of the Nigerian society. The country is at a crossroads and in a suffocating quagmire from which it has to be rescued and urgently too, before it descends further into the abyss. In the 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index rating by Transparency International (TI), Nigeria dropped two points from its previous position of 144<sup>th</sup> out of 180 to become the 148<sup>th</sup> least corrupt countries of the world.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, among the Economic Community of West African Countries, Nigeria was also rated the second most corrupt nation by the same Transparency International.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, corruption is so pervasive and endemic in Nigeria to the point that almost every facet of its life seems irredeemably tainted by unethical and unwholesome practices. Even religious and faith-based institutions are also not immune from this hydra-headed monster. Apparently, the more sinister aspect of it is the fact that the majority of Nigerians have resigned to it and adopted the philosophy of self-defeatism or as it is known in popular parlance – ‘if you cannot beat them, join them’. This is perhaps, the most deadly aspect of the phenomenon of corruption because it further emboldens the perpetrators and, at the same time, recruits new ones who have come to the understanding that there are no punishments as deterrents and that it pays more to be corrupt than to be ethically upright.<sup>5</sup>

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Thus, the myriads of social malaise and devastating effects of corruption are boldly written in every nook and cranny of Nigeria and beyond – where our nationals are subjected to humiliating treatment as a result of this infamous badge of dishonour with which

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<sup>3</sup> Transparency International, “Corruption Perceptions Index.” Retrieved from: <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2019>. (Accessed: January 21, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> The Cable, “Nigeria ranked second ‘most corrupt’ ECOWAS country on TI corruption index.” Retrieved from:

<https://www.thecable.ng/breaking-nigeria-ranks-lower-on-transparency-internationals-corruption-index>. (Accessed: January 15, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Azuka Onwuka, “It pays to be Corrupt in Nigeria,” *Fighting Corruption in Nigeria BribeNigeria.com*. Retrieved from: <http://www.bribenigeria.com/it-pays-to-be-corrupt-in-nigeria/>. (Accessed: January 17, 2020).

our faces are tarred everywhere we go.<sup>6</sup> It reflects on the churning out of mostly unemployable graduates from our universities and institutions of higher learning some of who obtained their marks by giving ‘five rounds’ and/or ‘sorting’ with cash and via other insidious means; it is seen in the shabby and deplorable conditions of roads and numerous ones that are not built at all as a result of outright embezzlement of funds meant for them; it manifests in the staggering infant and maternal mortality rate consequent upon the lack of primary health-care facilities for both rural and urban dwellers;<sup>7</sup> it is evident in the perversion of justice resulting in the imprisonment of the innocent while the guilty rich and ‘connected’ persons go scott-free when the judiciary and law-enforcement agents are compromised; it throws up a bunch of selfish politicians who, fraudulently corrupt the electoral process by buying their way to positions of power only to wallow in stupendous and mind-boggling affluence while the masses who purportedly voted them into power starve and die in squalor and disease;<sup>8</sup> it emboldens the law-enforcement officers who brazenly and flagrantly extort money from traumatized citizens and brutalize those who show any signs of resistance to their unscrupulous demands. In fact, corruption and the failure of leadership at all levels have made Nigeria the poverty capital of the world- ranking it 157<sup>th</sup> on the bottom ten poorest countries of the world behind Uzbekistan, Haiti and Chad.<sup>9</sup> It is corruption that made Nigeria to score the highest number of out-of-

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<sup>6</sup>Oluwaseyi Bagudu, “Update: Corruption, bad leadership destroying Nigeria’s image abroad- Ike Nwachukwu,” Premium Times January 10, 2013). Retrieved from: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/114581-update-corruption-bad-leadership-destroying-nigerias-image-abroad-ike-nwachukwu.html>. (Accessed: January 20, 2020).

<sup>7</sup>Olalekan Othman *et al.*, “A Population-based Study of Effect of Multiple Birth on Infant Mortality in Nigeria” Springer Link (September 10, 2008). Retrieved from: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/1471-2393-8-41>. (Accessed: January 21, 2020).

<sup>8</sup>Innocent Jooji, *Perspectives on Socio-Political Values in Nigeria* (Abuja: Daily Graphic, 2006) 113

<sup>9</sup>Adebayo, B. (June 26, 2018) “Nigeria overtakes India in Extreme Poverty Ranking.” *Cable Network News*, CNN. Retrieved from: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/26/africa/nigeria-overtakes-india-extreme-poverty-intl/index.html>. (Accessed: February 8, 2020).

school children in the world.<sup>10</sup>The ongoing insecurity problems that have ravaged Nigeria for many decades now is the resultant effect of the lack of investment in the educational sector especially in the North. The lack of social infrastructure at all levels makes life miserable and triggers off inimical brain-drain and migration of exuberant and youthful workforce needed to build a thriving nation.<sup>11</sup>The irony of it all is that Nigeria is an oil producing state but oil has certainly become a curse instead of a blessing to many Nigerians.<sup>12</sup>Generally, the rule of oil according to Middleton, is that many of those places that have oil seem to be in a mess because they simply earn money without working for it.<sup>13</sup>

It is in this deplorable and frightening socio-economic and political quagmire that the Mother Church is called upon to draw from her wealth of experiences and to leverage on her well-balanced social teaching to bring the country back from the brink of total disintegration and attendant catastrophic consequences. This essay therefore, presents some pertinent aspects of Catholic Social Teaching and explores ways and means by which the Church can interface with political actors to reconstruct a just and peaceful society in Nigeria where human rights and ethical values and virtuous conducts are cultivated and upheld for the common good of all Nigerians who are created in the image and likeness of God.

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### **Extractive Institutions that created the current Situation**

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<sup>10</sup>Yusuf Kazeem, "Nigeria is set to stay the world's poverty capital for at least a generation." *Quartz Africa*(October 12, 2018). Retrieved from: <https://qz.com/africa/1421543/nigerias-poverty-crisis-is-worsening-oxfam-world-bank-data/>. (Accessed: February 24, 2020).

<sup>11</sup>Omonijo Dare Ojo *et al*, "Understanding the Escalation of Brain-Drain in Nigeria from Poor Leadership Point of View." *Mediterranean Centre of Social and Educational Research*. Vol. 2 no. 3. Retrieved from: <https://www.mcser.org/index.php/mjss-vol-2-no-3-september-2011/154-understanding-the-escalation-of-brain-drain-in-nigeria-from-poor-leadership-point-of-view>. (Accessed: January 21, 2020).

<sup>12</sup>Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009) 169.

<sup>13</sup>Paul Middleton, *The End of Oil, Nigeria and Beyond* (London: Magpie Books, 2007) 28.

It is not by accident that Nigeria is becoming a failing or failed state— comparable in a certain sense, to Somalia, South Sudan and Mali. According to Robert Rotberg, “nation-states fail because they can no longer deliver positive political goods to their people.”<sup>14</sup> These political goods according to him include: education, healthcare, security, social infrastructure, employment opportunities, and the legal framework for law and order. In this context, the government “loses its legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens. The state is therefore characterised by an intense and enduring violence, which is usually directed against the existing government.”<sup>15</sup>

It is pertinent however, to point out that the collapse of Nigeria is not a consequence of its geographical location or cultural diversity. Nor can it be predicated on ignorance and the lack of competent political and economic experts to manage its abundant human and natural resources. According to Acemoglu and Robinson, these three hypotheses, namely; geography, culture and ignorance have been debunked with historical evidence.<sup>16</sup> The unfolding tragedy in Nigeria as well as in the Sub-Saharan Africa and in many other third world countries follows a historical pattern based on extractive political and economic institutions that stifle growth. Acemoglu and Robinson opine that “poor countries are poor because those who have power make choices that create poverty. They get it wrong not by mistake or ignorance but on purpose.”<sup>17</sup> This assertion may appear strange and even illogical but the Nigerian experience gives credence to it. To understand this phenomenon, one has to go beyond economics and the availability of expert opinions on economic development and look at how decisions are made, who makes them and why such decisions are made. These political and economic institutions are called ‘extractive’ because “they are

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<sup>14</sup>Robert Rotberg, “*The New Nature of Nation-state Failure*,” Washington Quarterly, vol.25, no.3, pp. 85–96 (2002).

<sup>15</sup>Edidiong Oko *et al.*, “Is Nigeria a Failed State? A Commentary on the Boko Haram Insurgency.” *Global Journal of Human Social Science F.*: Vol. 18 Issue 5 Version 1.0, 2018. Retrieved from: <file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/4-Is-Nigeria-a-Failed-State.pdf>. (Accessed: February 23, 2020).

<sup>16</sup>Daron Acemoglu & James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origin of Power, Prosperity and Poverty* (London: Profile Books, 2013) 48-69.

<sup>17</sup>*ibid*, 68.

designed to extract incomes and wealth from one subset of society (namely, the poor) to benefit a different subset (the rich).”<sup>18</sup> One of the most disastrous characteristic features of these extractive institutions is the fact that social amenities are quite often non-existent in order to bring the citizens to their knees and command their loyalty and obedience. In the words of George Ehusani, “ours is clearly a case of impoverishment, not poverty.”<sup>19</sup> Nigeria as a country is not poor but its citizens are poor and the leaders work so hard for it to remain so.

### **Theological Basis for Church’s Effective Participation in Building a Just Society**

As a result of the controversy and misunderstanding which often obfuscate the role of the Church and Christians in civil matters, it is important to expatiate on the imperative of, and theological basis for Church’s participation in helping to construct a better Nigerian society. One often hears the admonition that Churchmen should focus on the spiritual wellbeing of their flocks and not meddle in dirty politics.<sup>20</sup> For lack of space, it is not necessary to devote space for argument on the dualism of body and spirit but suffice it to say that the kingdom of God begins here on earth and that part of the Church’s mission is to participate in the construction of such a kingdom.

According to Edmund Hogan, "the Church in Nigeria is now sufficiently mature to reflect deeply on its roots and to cherish and

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<sup>18</sup>*ibid*, 76.

<sup>19</sup>George Ehusani, *A Prophetic Church* (Osun: Provincial Institute Publications, 1996) 7.

<sup>20</sup>T. A. Falaye, “Christianity and Politics: The Experience from Nigeria.”

*Global Journal of Politics and Law Research*. Vol. 4 no. 6 (December, 2016) 1-7. Retrieved from:

<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/02/nigeria-now-qualified-failed-state/>. (Accessed: January 13, 2020).

own them in a manner which was not previously possible."<sup>21</sup> Thus, it is incumbent on the Church to proffer a theological response to the wanton and reckless destruction of human lives in Nigeria. As Lawrence Nwankwo puts it, such "a theological response to violence would involve enunciating, from the rich treasures of Scripture and Church Tradition, visions that flow out into practical commitment with a model in which theology is seen as faith seeking intelligent action rather than simply as faith seeking understanding."<sup>22</sup> Clodovis Boff identifies three aspects of this witnessing: first, the socio-analytic and philosophic mediation; second, the hermeneutical mediation, and third, the practical mediation.<sup>23</sup> The socio-analytic and philosophical mediation deals with a deeper grasp of the circumstances - socio-historical, economic, political and cultural ambience which are to be tackled through reflection on the faith. The hermeneutical mediation is concerned with theological interplay of faith and the visions emerging from the socio-analytical and philosophical mediation. This interaction between the two approaches has the potential of unfolding new vistas coming from a greater reflection on and understanding of the faith with regard to the issues raised in the peculiar context. The practical aspect is a translation of the hermeneutical ideal into a transforming theology in concrete pastoral milieu. Nwankwo further opines that "such vision and pastoral ministry would aim at mobilizing the Christian community to integrate and embody in their lives the visions and perspectives won from Scripture and Tradition and to apply these in their daily life and practice."<sup>24</sup>

The above analysis is perfectly in line with the Church's theology of peace-building and servant-leadership which, according to Cahill, seek to mediate the reality of God's redemption in the

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<sup>21</sup>Edmund Hogan, "Revisiting the Early Roots of the Catholic Church in Nigeria," in: Kathleen Garvey *et al* (eds.), *Nigerian Journal of Religion and Society*, vol. 2, (June, 2012) 21-33, 21.

<sup>22</sup>Lawrence Nwankwo, "Egbe bere Ugo bere!: Towards a Theological Response to Violence," in: Richard Onwuanibe *et al.*, *Oche Amamihe - Wisdom Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 9th Edition, 2012) 65-92, 69.

<sup>23</sup> Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundation*, trans. by Robert Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987) 7.

<sup>24</sup>Nwankwo, *Oche Amamihe*, 70.



world.<sup>25</sup> In the words of Daniel Philpott, "it is only fitting that Catholic philosophers and theologians take a great interest in the restoration of societies that have suffered through international wars, civil wars, genocide, invasion, dictatorship, and anarchy."<sup>26</sup> Hence, according to Louis Ngare, the priest has a four-fold role in his community namely: as a leader who leads by example; as a preacher who preaches the gospel of righteousness; as a builder who promotes team work and as a protagonist of liberation.<sup>27</sup> The priest therefore is a messenger of hope in a community and a spiritual leader.<sup>28</sup> In this circumstance, a distinction must be drawn between playing partisan politics and being interested in political affairs. Church leaders should be interested in what happens in politics because according to Easton, politics is "the process through which authoritative binding decisions are made for allocation of scarce resources in the society."<sup>29</sup>

In fact, according to Klein, political participation is a fundamental right of every citizen which affords one the opportunity to influence public affairs and this can happen at specific or general levels for instance, participation in civic affairs such as neighbourhood watch and social engagements etc.<sup>30</sup>

Instances abound in history when religious figures picked up the gauntlet and liberated their faithful. Such instances are seen in the

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<sup>25</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, "A Theology of Peace-building," in: Robert Schreiter *et al.* (eds.), *Peace-Building: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis* (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 2011) 300-331, 300.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Philpott, "Reconciliation: A Catholic Ethic for Peace-building in the Political Order," *Peace-building: Catholic Theology, Ethics and Praxis*, 92-124, 92.

<sup>27</sup> Louis Ngare, "The Rise of Islamic Radicalism in Nigeria: A Theological Response," in: Richard Onwuanibe *et al.* (eds.) *Oche Amamihe - Wisdom Journal of Theology and Philosophy* vol. 2, no. 4, 2012 (Seat of Wisdom Major Seminary, Owerri, Nigeria) 39-64, 54, 55.

<sup>28</sup> Mark Coleridge, "The Role of a Priest," Catholicpriesthood.com, Retrieved

from: [http://www.catholicpriesthood.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=frontpage&Itemid=1](http://www.catholicpriesthood.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=frontpage&Itemid=1). (Accessed: February 21, 2020).

<sup>29</sup> David Easton, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1965) 7; See also, D. F. Oroniran, *The Baptist Heritage: A Nigerian Perspective* (Ibadan: Titles Publishers, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Hans Klein, "The Right to Political Participation and the Information Society," *A Paper presented at Global Democracy Conference* (Montreal, 2005) 7.

leadership of Moses in the Bible (Exodus 14) when God gave him the mandate to free his people from the oppression of the Pharaoh of Egypt. In the Philippines in 1986, the Church took a decisive action to end the dictatorship of President Ferdinand Marcos when Cardinal Jaime Sin - the Archbishop of Manila called for a street protest.<sup>31</sup> During the genocide in South-east Asia in 1999 when Indonesia invaded East Timor and killed more than 200,000 Timorese, the Church was in the vanguard for Timorese independence and continues to play prominent role in Timorese political affairs.<sup>32</sup>

In Nigeria, the Church played a decisive role in saving millions of lives of South Eastern Nigeria especially the Igbo during the Nigeria-Biafra war 1967-1970. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria CBCN has also spoken out on several occasions in condemnation of bad governance plaguing Nigeria.

### **Leveraging on Catholic Social Teaching to Reconstruct a Better Nigerian Society**

So far, I have tried to describe the socio-economic and political situation in Nigeria and how the age-long vicious circle of extractive institutions have been nurtured and sustained coupled with the unpalatable consequences that threaten to drown the country. I have also analysed the theological basis upon which the Church hinges her social teaching and how it has become imperative for the Church in Nigeria to become more engaged in constructing a viable, peaceful and just Nigerian society. The myriads of problems confronting Nigerians appear insurmountable, however, I am of the view that according to Chichi Aniagolu-Okoye, we are not as powerless as we think we are because evil thrives only when good people keep silent, complain and do nothing to change a bad situation. Following this line of thought, are there some practical and reasonable steps within the confine of the law the Church can take to change some aspects of this vicious circle?

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<sup>31</sup>Janet Cawley, "Cardinal Sin Leader in Marcos' Downfall," *Chicago Tribune* (March 4, 1986). Retrieved from: <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1986-03-04-8601160548-story.html>. (Accessed: February 17, 2020).

<sup>32</sup>Wikipedia, "Catholic Church in East Timor," Retrieved from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic\\_Church\\_in\\_East\\_Timor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church_in_East_Timor). (Accessed: February 18, 2020).

In contradistinction with the extractive economic and political structures, inclusive institutions “are those that allow and encourage participation by the great mass of people in economic activities that make best use of their talents and skills and that enable individuals to make choices they wish.”<sup>33</sup> This is an established paradigm everywhere in the world where political and economic prosperity have flourished. What is necessary in the Nigerian context is a constructive engagement in which the Church interfaces and enters into meaningful dialogue with political actors and, at the same time, mobilizes the flock in pursuit of the common good in their respective areas of influence for the benefit of all.

### **Educating the Faithful on Catholic Social Teaching**

Formation houses are the best place to start a thorough education on Catholic Social Teaching in order to give would-be pastoral agents the basic tools to work with. In 1988, the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education published Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church’s Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests. The aim is to narrow the yawning gap “between faith and justice: the pulpit and real life; prayer and action.”<sup>34</sup> Although the importance of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) in seminaries and formation houses cannot be over-emphasized, it appears to lack the much needed African content which should be a domestication or application of the principles of the basic pillars upon which the Catholic Church's social teaching are anchored. It is suggested that Catholic Social Teaching be upgraded to the status of other major courses such as Dogma, Scripture etc. and be spread out to cover the whole of theology study period so that these essential elements can be dealt with in much greater detail. In forming would-be priests, care should be taken not to give them the impression that they are privileged persons who should not engage in volatile socio-political advocacy. This may take some time to materialize as a result of the fact that “most priests and pastoral agents in Africa are already acculturated and estranged.”<sup>35</sup> To change this situation, according to Freire, “reality becomes a knowable object” in which pastoral agents in-the-making are conscientized to become acutely

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<sup>33</sup>Acemoglu & Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 302.

<sup>34</sup>Obiora Ike, *Catholic Social Teaching: Historical Overview and Application to the Challenges of Africa* (Enugu: BEW Limited, 2016) 1.

<sup>35</sup>Joseph Ezechi, *The Dead Never Gone* (Enugu: Kingsley’s, 2011) 111.

aware of the social, political and economic conditions of God's faithful.<sup>36</sup>

At the parish and deanery levels, one hardly hears anything about Catholic Social Teaching. There is hardly any space in the homily to undertake any meaningful explanation of the social teaching of the Church. The normal Sunday evening instruction is almost non-existent in many parishes and many priests no longer conduct such educative programme. What has become most important in parishes is fundraising for building of churches and institutions and the burden of financing all these projects goes to the same faithful who have not been paid their wages and salaries for many months. To change this situation, priests must become passionate about political issues and make extra efforts to educate themselves first and then pass it on to the people and follow it up with effective actions and in this way, orthodoxy and orthopraxis come together. This will also change the general perception of many Christians about politics which is seen as dirty and incompatible with being a 'good' Christian. The result is that leadership is abandoned to 'charlatans and dubious persons and those who love power rather than those who love God.'<sup>37</sup> At the National level the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigerian CBCN "will be required, in fidelity to the social apostolate for the Church in the modern world, to identify with all the genuine efforts being made from different quarters to get Nigeria and Nigerians politically on the right direction."<sup>38</sup> At this moment when Nigerians are on their knees, the CBCN has to go beyond joint pastoral letters and communiqués in which it speaks out against political oppression, to work with the people in practical and effective ways to change the oppressive structures and widen the political terrain to become pluralistic as a countervailing force.<sup>39</sup> In addition, according to Adediji, the

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<sup>36</sup>Paul Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (trans.) (New York: Penguin Books, 1982) 15.

<sup>37</sup>T. A. Falaye, "Christianity and Politics: The Experience from Nigeria." *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research* vol. 4 no. 6 (December, 2016) 1-7.

<sup>38</sup>Simon Anyanwu, "The Catholic Bishops' Conference and Nigeria's Political Struggles: Ways Forward," in: Uzochukwu Njoku & Simon Anyanwu (eds.), *In the Service of Charity and Truth* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2012) 217-226.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.* 217.

Bishops should take a firm stand against those who had a hand in the perpetuation of Nigeria's political problems.<sup>40</sup>

### **Legislative Input via Soft Diplomacy**

The bedrock of every democratic institution is the principle of separation of powers in which the three arms of government are entrusted to different groups to avoid abuse of power which is likely to occur when power is concentrated in one person. The legislature as an arm of government is charged with the responsibility of making laws. At the national level, the CBCN should accredit competent personnel and attach them to the National Assembly to monitor the process of law-making which generally, passes through many stages before a bill gets the assent of the President and subsequently enacted into law. It is at this stage that unjust bills inimical to the welfare of the citizens and the common good can be spotted and amended before it becomes law. This aspect of vigilance and soft diplomacy is very well-known in Europe especially in Germany where many non-governmental organizations such as Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the German Bishops' Conference have special offices and staff dedicated to monitoring and influencing legislations and raising alarm to galvanize the general public against unjust laws should soft diplomacy fail. The German Churches (Catholics and Protestants) also influence policies through seats allocated to them by the government on supervisory boards across the country on the grounds that they have significant demographic.<sup>41</sup> This is already happening in a significant way in the central and east African countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Uganda. The Kukah Centre in Nigeria has started this form of advocacy aimed at staying close to those who make laws with the aim of making an input and positive influence.<sup>42</sup> This can also occur at state and local

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<sup>40</sup>A. Adedeji, "Saving Nigeria's Third Republic: What Role can Liberation Theology Play?" in: *The Nigerian Journal of Theology*, vol. 7, No. 1 June 1993, p. 13.

<sup>41</sup>Kathleen Schuster, "6 Facts about Catholic and Protestants Influence in Germany." Retrieved from: <https://www.dw.com/en/6-facts-about-catholic-and-protestant-influence-in-germany/a-43081215>. (Accessed: January 18, 2020).

<sup>42</sup>The Kukah Centre, "Who We Are." Retrieved from: <https://thekukahcentre.org/who-we-are/>. (Accessed: February 21, 2020). The Centre has offices in Abuja and Kaduna and treats political leadership as a collaborative exercise that requires multiple governance structures at various

government levels especially in states where the Church has a large following. The bishops can lead a delegation of deanery priests or Board of Consultors to the State Houses of Assembly and local government headquarters to discuss issues affecting their flock. The impact of this type of dialogue is capable of influencing the provision of those basic social amenities that are glaringly lacking in rural areas. Political leaders who fail to dialogue with them risk losing elections as a result of the influence the Church can wield on her members.

### **Commitment to the Course of Justice and Peace**

In a country where injustice seems to be the order of the day and the prospect of relative peace fades into oblivion, the Church becomes the vanguard and the voice of the down-trodden. In what concrete ways can the Church match orthodoxy with orthopraxis that goes beyond skeletal and haphazard approach to free those unjustly detained and imprisoned? No doubt, the office of the Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) can be found in almost all Catholic dioceses in Nigeria but there seems to be very little to show in terms of verifiable indicators as effective outcomes. More often than not, the JDPC has very little funding as the Church seems to be more interested in building churches and institutions than in building the kingdom of God which is to “bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set the down-trodden free and proclaim that the kingdom of God has come” (Lk 4: 18-19). Of course, these efforts transcend human liberation here on earth and culminate in the beatific vision which will come after our sojourn on earth. The Third Synod of Bishops in 2018 articulates this in the following words: “action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every form of oppressive situation.”<sup>43</sup> In Nigeria,

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levels – individuals, households, small businesses, the organized private sector, NGOs and government.

<sup>43</sup>Vatican, “Press Conference to present the Pope Francis’ Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio*, on the structure of the Synod of Bishops (18 September 2018). Retrieved from: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/index.htm). (Accessed: January 12, 2020).

every parish and deanery should establish advocacy groups whose duties will include legal representations on the basis of *pro bono* for those caught up in the vicious circle of police intimidation and exploitation; to bring redress to those tortured and deprived of their fundamental human rights. For the moment, what is being done by some dioceses is like a drop of water in an ocean of injustice and oppression. The kind of advocacy being proposed here requires proper funding and hiring of competent personnel working on daily basis in equipped offices. The bishops can also frequently visit detention centres and prisons to take a look at how human beings – most of them innocent persons are treated like animals. The Church can no longer sit back and complain; she has to go beyond recrimination and condemnation of all these social malaise and take appropriate actions to change the oppressive structure.

### **Campaign against Corruption and Bad Governance**

As already pointed out above, the level of corruption in Nigeria has reached an alarming stage and as President Buhari pointed out, Nigeria will either kill corruption or it will kill Nigeria. A meaningful engagement by the Church entails a vigorous campaign against corruption such as the one launched by the Kenyan Conference of Catholic Bishops.<sup>44</sup> An aspect of the Kenyan example is a statement by the bishops that henceforth, fat donations to the Church by politicians would be rejected and that political statements by politicians in the Church would not be allowed. The Nigerian Church should borrow a leaf from Kenya and establish anti-corruption desks in all Catholic Churches in order to follow all reported cases of corruption and urge members to make a declaration to fight corruption in their places of work. On the part of church leaders, it is recommended that for the sake of transparency, all donations made to churches and religious leaders should be accompanied with letters from the donor detailing for what the money is meant. What makes corruption a canker worm in Nigeria is the lack of the rule of law and effective supervision. The Church should lead a campaign that gives clear direction on how to tackle the problem of the lack of over-sight function at all levels of our socio-political life. For instance, funds allocated to local

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<sup>44</sup>Francis Mureithi, “Catholic Church starts drive to break Kenya’s graft chain,” *The East African* (October 6, 2019). Retrieved from: <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/ea/Catholic-Church-to-open-anti-graft-desks/4552908-5300808-113h92r/index.html>. (Accessed: February 21, 2020).

councils are hijacked by the governors and rural dwellers are left without the basic social amenities such as water, healthcare, access roads and conducive atmosphere for learning in schools. The Church can enter into dialogue with political office holders and this can even be more effective if the politicians are Catholics who count on the good-will of the Church to win elections. The Church can take a position to the effect that governors who embezzle local government funds or who fail to carry out meaningful development projects in their domain would not enjoy the support of the Church during elections.

### **Beyond St. Vincent de Paul's Collection for the Poor**

The discourse on preferential option for the poor and the vulnerable comes into sharp focus as a result of the magisterial teaching of the Church on the dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of God. Both *Rerum Novarum* and *Centissimus Annus* refer to the care for the poor as an integral part of evangelization. According to Achunonu “we are fully aware of the fact that a hungry man is an angry man; therefore, it would be no use presenting such a person who is hungry with the Bible and the cross of Christ without first of all showing the person the means that will lead the person out from the miserable condition he finds himself.”<sup>45</sup> In this way, the *tandem* relationship between the theology of the Church and the sociology of the Church becomes manifest. There is no canonical provision that forbids the Church from investing in massive agricultural production which is capable of providing the teeming population with gainful employment and to a large extent, solve the problem of poverty and joblessness.<sup>46</sup> God has given us the mandate to form an alternate community where the gospel values are recognized and lived out in the day-to-day life of the people.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Anthony O. Achunonu, *Poverty and the Church in Igboland* (New York: Xlibris Corporation, 2012) 6.

<sup>46</sup>Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1973) 295.

<sup>47</sup>C. P. Varkey, *Authority: Its Use and Abuse* (Mumbai: St. Paul's Publications, 2008) 32.



### **Prospects, Opportunities and Challenges**

The magnitude of social maladies and frightening insecurity facing the Nigerian people pose an existential threat which the Church can no longer explain away and console herself with recrimination and platitudinous pronouncements that have no practical effects. It can also be safely stated that the citizens are eagerly waiting for the Church to pick up the gauntlet and take the lead for them to follow suit. It is to be noted that the Church according to Pope John Paul II is not proposing “a third way between liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism, nor even a possible alternative to other solutions less radically opposed to one another.”<sup>48</sup> Church’s intervention is rather borne out of “the accurate formulation of the results of a careful reflection on the complex realities of human existence, in society and in the international order, in the light of faith and of the Church’s tradition.”<sup>49</sup> What is being proposed in this write-up is a practical step which is within the confines of the Nigerian Constitution and in consonance with the social teaching of the Church.

However, the immediate challenge in the accomplishment of the social actions being proposed here is the adage ‘physician heal thyself’. It is no longer secret that the Church herself is being plagued by the same social illness that have damaged our social fabric. The seeming apathy and haphazard response from the Church in the face of threatening existential situation in Nigeria is reminiscent of the French Revolution era in 1789 when the very faithful who greeted the bishops and priests obsequiously, murdered them and burnt down bishops’ courts and rectories.<sup>50</sup> However, in the spirit of *ecclesia semper reformanda*– the Church is always in the process of reforming herself- the time is ripe for the Church to take more decisive actions. Some have argued that the debilitating situation in Nigeria indirectly benefits the Church as a result of the fact that the more the people are dehumanized and impoverished, the more they run to the Church as an abode of last resort. The booming miracle centers and prayer houses promise economic breakthrough and employment where there are no industries and

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<sup>48</sup>John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1988, No. 41).

<sup>49</sup>*ibid.*,

<sup>50</sup>Clémence Houdaille, “The Martyrs of the French Revolution,” *La Croix International*. Retrieved from: <https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-martyrs-of-the-french-revolution/4075#>. (Accessed: February 26, 2020).

conducive environment for business to thrive. Does religion not serve as the opium of the people in this circumstance according to Karl Marx? In fact, in a survey carried out in Ilorin, Kwara State, more than 64.6% of respondents were of the opinion that religion is not only the opium of the people but an oppressive social structure.<sup>51</sup> The booming healing centers hardly preach about specific social actions to lift the masses up from poverty and disease. Instead, the people are fed with promises of miracles and unrealistic hope which in turn take their attention away from confronting the evil that prevents them from having functional hospitals and schools. The issue of incessant collection of money is another criticism leveled against the Church. All sorts of ingenious means are devised to squeeze out as much money as possible from the people sometimes, even to the point of blackmail when the impression is created that the more money one gives to God, the more prosperous one becomes. According to the survey mentioned above, the beneficiaries of this brand of Christianity are of course, the Church leaders whom the respondents perceive as furthering their own economic well-being using religion as opium to hide their mundane action.<sup>52</sup>

However, as disturbing and poignant as these criticisms may be, there is another view of religion as an agent of development as espoused by Marx Weber. In Weber's view, religion can be an independent variable and a source of social change.<sup>53</sup> Weber's positive view of religion as agent of social change no doubt, mirrors Calvinism which conceives economic success as a sign of being chosen - as empirical sign of redemption. In view of this, many churches in Nigeria are to be commended for building a lot of physical structures such as schools, hospitals but they have to go beyond these structures by liberating the masses from the shackles

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<sup>51</sup>Akinfenwa Oluwaseun *et al.*, "The role of religion in modern society: Masses opium or tool for development: A Case Study of Saw-Mill Area, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria," *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*. Vol. 6 (1) (January, 2014).

<sup>52</sup>J. Brockner, *Religious Criminalization in Sub Sahara Africa* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Company, 2010) 3.

<sup>53</sup>Marx Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1930) 8.

of unjust structures that demean and prevent them from living a decent life in the midst of plenty.

### **Conclusion**

It is said that the only thing that makes evil to thrive is the silence of good people. The majority of Nigerian Christians who shy away from politics have allowed evil to thrive for too long and now we are reaping the sour and poisonous fruits of such silence and inaction. As Nigeria degenerates slowly into a failed state, more and more Christians should form or join political parties, stand as candidates in elections, join non-governmental advocacy groups or civil society groups; participate in lawful peaceful demonstration, vote during elections and referenda and discuss politics at diocesan and parish levels. Christians who have already joined political parties should work hard to eschew all the evils that have become the bane of Nigerian brand of democracy such as do-or-die politics, money politics, godfatherism, politics of bitterness and politics without ideology.<sup>54</sup> The Catholic Church is in a very strong position to liaise and dialogue with civil authorities so as to infuse her social teaching into all aspects of the socio-political and economic life of Nigerians. According to Udoekpo, “Christianity if taken seriously and conscientiously can liberate us from our moral, cultural and social slavery of corruption.”<sup>55</sup> This is what has happened in many of the places where the vicious circle of extractive political and economic structures has been dismantled and democracy and the rule of law allowed to prevail. Massive and effective participation of the Church will broaden the space and usher in what Acemoglu and Robinson describe as the virtuous circle which encourages prosperity that creates positive feedback loops that prevent the efforts by elites to undermine them and appropriate the common patrimony of the masses to themselves leaving the citizens to languish in abject poverty. The participation of the Church will act as a constraint on the exercise of power by politicians and enhance pluralistic distribution of political power in society.<sup>56</sup> It will break

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<sup>54</sup>T. A. Falaye, “Christianity and Politics: The Experience from Nigeria,” *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research*. 6.

<sup>55</sup>Michael Udoekpo, *Corruption in Nigeria Culture: The Liberating Mission of the Church* (Enugu: Snap Press, 1994). 34

<sup>56</sup>Daron Acemoglu & James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 308.

the strangle-hold of a few individuals who impose their will on others without constraint which has brought us to our knees. To achieve these general and specific objectives, ecumenical synergy, networking and coordination between all Christian denominations are of utmost importance in order to present a common front. By so doing, the Church fulfills her God-given mandate: to proclaim the good news to poor Nigerians; to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.

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