

JUSTICE THE FOUNDATION FOR PEACE

OBIORA IKE

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to show that the *Civil Society* has a big role in influencing a constructive and positive social change on the cultural, economic and political levels of nations. Such change is necessary towards the establishment of Peace which is found on the transformation of society for the common good. It follows that this is the challenge facing many developing countries in their genuine search for credible and sustainable systems that can maintain their efforts for building credible institutions and partnerships. If this is done, the polity can be stabilized to guarantee peace and promote solidarity in our fragile communities.

2. PEACE AND JUSTICE GO TOGETHER

Action for Justice and Peace demands of accountability and transparency, good governance and the principles of democracy upon which the stability of a nation depends. This is the practical ambient for realizing the ambition of the role of Civil Society in the transformation of any country from *poverty to wealth, ignorance to knowledge, apathy to action, backwardness to progress, disease to health and exclusion to an all-inclusive society*.

.Peace is not simply the absence of war. It is a state of the mind, which is tranquil and searches for balance in creation. Peace is the fruit of work – works that build bridges across nations and peoples and bring healing to a fragile environment. Peace is found where there is forgiveness, respect for human dignity and for creation and where the common good, beyond selfishness is guaranteed. Peace is the fruit of Justice, for without Justice, Peace is but a mere word.

Justice in itself is the result of Live and Let Live. It is giving to each person their due and finding balance in all things. No wonder, the document of the synod of Bishops on the theme “*Justice in the World*” in 1971 states very clearly that: “*action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the teaching of the Gospel, or in other words, of the Church’s Mission for the salvation of the human race and its liberation from oppressive situation*”.

This has remained a concern for the Catholic Church in particular and one of its great Popes, John XXIII had declared in 1961 that achieving Peace was possible but only if justice was pursued at the same time.

“*It is a difficult task indeed, yet a most noble one. To the performance of it we call, not only our own sons and daughters scattered throughout the world, but also men and women of goodwill everywhere*”. (*Mater et Magistra*). The Pope calls for the unity of Thought and Action. “*It is not enough merely to formulate a social doctrine. It must be translated into reality. And this is particularly true of the Church’s Social Doctrine, the light of which is truth, justice its objective and love its driving force*”. (*Mater et Magistra*)

3. CONCRETE ACTIVITIES OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN NIGERIA TOWARDS PEACE

Christian Missionary enterprise started in Nigeria in the mid 19th century, around 1850 with various Christian denominations involved, particularly, the Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Evangelicals and other Protestants engaged in the work of evangelization. Later, the African Christian Churches emerged with their emphasis on inculturation and the mixture of the western received euro-centric Christian faith and their traditional practices. The phenomenon of the Pentecostal Church's in Nigeria is very current and therefore falls outside the scope of this work. Just for the sake of reference, Islam had been in Nigeria particularly in the northern parts for centuries earlier.

In Nigeria, the Catholic Church together with other confessions and religious groups, contributed differently and on various levels towards building up a genuine foundation for the emergence of Nigeria. The country with a population of over 220 million people today (2021 statistics⁹ continues its struggle to emerge within the international community as a nation that guarantees human freedoms, the satisfaction of human wants and the preservation of the integrity of its peoples. Christian Missionaries especially have championed and contributed to Nigeria's development in the past. The present historical epochs remain challenging but looking back, the search for Peace meant some of the following activities:

- **FIGHT AGAINST SLAVE TRADE AND ABUSE OF HUMAN DIGNITY:** The fight against slave trade and other manifold abuses against human worth, which according to history records was an abhorrent and nefarious denigration of human dignity. Slave trade was the business of selling human beings from various African nations through the North Atlantic Ocean axis to Europe and the Americas; but also on the trans-Saharan axis to Arabic nations; as well as on trans-Indian Ocean axis to Asia. The slave trade was fought against and stopped by humanists, philosophers, free thinkers, groups of enlightened people acting with a Christian and human conscience. Much later on, the work of Christian missionaries within Nigeria itself made the complete stop of this trade possible. By fighting against the slave trade and stopping it effectively, the Christian Churches both in the West and in Nigeria who collaborated fulfilled their mandate to enhance the sacred dignity and worth of individuals and indeed the black race. Missionaries such as the Anglicans and the Catholics set up centers where ex-slaves were received and rehabilitated, given education and guaranteed protection. They also purchased and paid the price due on ex-slaves whose slave masters demanded for the original price paid on them, to mention but a few of the activities related to this traumatic and shameful practice of slave dealings and the trade of human beings as goods.
- **DECOLONISATION:** The fight for decolonization was also championed by various interest groups, humanists, politicians, some Christian persons and the indigenes themselves who came to realize the monumental injustice which colonialism brought with it. Today, the Christian Churches are leading in the decolonization campaign as we witnessed in the case of South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Biafra (which did not survive then) and many other nations. the promotion of education for all.
- **HEALTH:** The promotion of health, social institutions and welfare homes in the pre-nation-state of Nigeria was mainly a primary method of evangelization by the emergent new Christian missionaries. Orphanages were built to cater for the socially disadvantaged in many rural areas by Catholic Missionaries; hospitals were constructed in the urban and peri-urban centers since under colonial rule,

the British in Nigeria did not care for the rural areas and the lives of people there but focused on infrastructure within some urban towns of pre-colonial Nigeria. These hospitals and the training of adequate personnel both within and without Nigeria and the supply of equipments and drugs helped in no small measure to guaranteeing the foundations of a healthy nation. Today in Nigeria, the Catholic Church remains the largest and strongest health services supplier amongst all the Christian and religious denominations in the country.

- **EDUCATION:** The promotion of educational institutions such schools, evening bible classes, centers for learning at the primary, secondary, tertiary and skills acquisition levels. Through the schools, people were empowered and encouraged with capacity to fight for their own liberation, engage the oppressor, gain independence and self- reliance which education brings with it; cultivation of culture, morality and conscience as ingredients of good character and the overall impact of education in nation building. It is on record that the best schools in Nigeria till date are those with Christian origins and background. With meager resources that is much less than what the State has, Mission and Christian Churches have built up massive training programmes and educated millions of Nigerians at all levels from childhood to adulthood. This is an area where collaboration and partnership is called for, instead of the hostile State attitude to Mission schools and even the complete take over of such schools at a certain period of the nation's development at the end of the Biafra war. Education is key to a nation's development. In Nigeria the products of Christian missionary schools participated actively in nation building as politicians, teachers, administrators, entrepreneurs, civil servants in both the public and private sectors and community leaders. Upon these products of Christian Mission Schools rests to a great extent, the human and social capital which the people of the nation can showcase as their strength and asset. Christian Churches made this possible and this has continued in the absence of European missionaries as the local priests and educated elite have continued to see education as one key area where the Nigerian State has failed and where they, the Christian Missions themselves cannot fail.
- **SOCIAL MOBILIZATION POTENTIALS:** The power of mobilization of people and the reality of grassroots support and control of the churches on their believers is a factor which is critical in Nigeria. African peoples believe their religious leaders and respect the impact of religion on their own personal life and destiny. Not to be religious is to be un-African and indeed un-Nigerian. Christian Churches have a potential as social organizations to influence their followers, not just in a prayer or faith encounter but even on social and political matters. Through this mobilization, people were encouraged to go out to vote and to effect changes in their society on the social, economic and political levels of society. This element of grassroots mobilization is highly relevant and critical in today's Nigeria. Even though the Churches did not found political parties or make their members join the political parties as these were more ethnic at the onset as religious, they could with the present state of things at least influence the process of a credible election by election monitoring, call for a boycott of elections, influence candidates for political post and indeed, they do influence who gets what post in some relevant government and political postings.
- **LEADERSHIP ROLES:** The Nigerian Christian Churches seem to be assuming greater responsibility in leadership roles. The Catholic Bishops Conference of

Nigeria write public statements often much of which are orientations of the State and the citizenry towards higher values and the position to take on matters where one demands to take a stand. This leadership role makes the Bishops and priests to be consulted by various stakeholders in matters concerning the common good and public good.

- **MISSIONARY AWARENESS:** The country with the largest number of seminarians and persons entering the seminary to become priests in the Catholic world of today is in Nigeria. Statistics from the Vatican show that this is followed by India and Poland; Nigeria is now ready to send missionaries to other countries of the world including Europe, America and Asia, which countries once sent their own missionaries to Africa. In assuming this internal God-given gift and role as a missionary-producing country, Nigeria is now gaining respect from the Catholic Church as a leader in the provision of trained agents of evangelization who work, not only in their own countries, but even abroad. No one shall doubt the great effect of a country known as a provider of missionaries. Placed besides countries that produce technology, ICT merchandise and other goods, this is a notable achievement and a worthy contribution of the Nigerian Church to universal Christendom at this age and time.
- **CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM OF THE STATE WITH ADVOCACY:** The country where the Christian Churches are both loyal to the State, yet are the greatest critique of the State. Because of the weight of the opinion of the leaders of Christian religious groups, the Christian Association of Nigeria which is a union of all the five major groups of Christian religious denominations has emerged, besides the singular voices of the Bishops or their positions in plural as is often noted under the Catholic Bishops conference of Nigeria (CBCN) and other voices which attract both international and local audience and attention. What religious leaders matter to the State, the adherents of these religions and the citizenry.
- **PROMOTION OF DIALOGUE:** The promotion of dialogue of life and of religions especially with Islam and traditional societies, with the modern world and technology and with the various levels of society is one that falls squarely to the portfolio of the Christian Churches. Dialogue is all about finding common ground in the search for truth without necessarily compromising one's own position. Dialogue minimizes the urge for the use of violence and other means in the settlement of issues. With a large percentage of Muslims and Christians, numbering on either side over fifty million people, Nigeria has the largest population of these religious groups more than any other country on the continent. Its challenges therefore in maintaining religious peace and harmony are a must, difficult as it may be.

4. PEACE IS POSSIBLE NATIONALLY AND GLOBALLY

There are definitely challenges that face African countries at this period of search for unity and progress as great nations. With the background of several years of attempts and failures caused both by historical, contingent, human and natural factors, the Christian Churches cannot stand aloof and watch as our countries grow apart and its great mission of reconciliation and announcing the good news of salvation thwarted. It has become clear that with many years of military dictatorship and failures, rebuilding the fabric and architecture has to be re-done. This is the challenge of the present times.

Making this possible demands of enormous sacrifices of all and sundry including individuals, NGO's and civil society organizations, local and national actors, private sector led organizations, communities, the international community and of course religious and traditional leaders.

- promotion of the rule of law
- support for economic stability with programmes for sustainability
- enhancing good governance
- assisting the state in the monitoring of elections to avoid rigging
- advocacy work which makes the Church the voice of the voiceless,
- supplying assistance in education, health and other social projects,
- collaborating with government in the fight against poverty at the grassroots levels
- maintaining high ethical profile and calling for justice, peace and reconciliation,
- building communities for peace and educating its own members in tolerance
- leadership and focused action,
- Helping to build inclusive and integrated societies.

5. . FINDING PEACE THROUGH WORKS OF JUSTICE

We come to a conclusion of this reflection and offer some suggestions on the fundamental values and choices which the Christian Churches and indeed all religious groups may need to emphasize as crucial for the survival of society. These values are of priority in the promotion of core principles that sustain the nation. They stem from the Christian conception of life and society as envisaged in Catholic Social Thought and even find parallel in the wisdom of traditional Nigerian wisdom thought and practices in ancient culture, therefore they are not necessarily borrowed principles. I state them simply here in the form of a summary:

A. Religious and social dimensions of life are linked:

The "Social" human construction of the world is not "Secular" in the sense of being outside of God's plan, but is intimately involved with the dynamic of the reign of God. Therefore Faith and Justice are closely linked together. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965 n. 39).

B. Dignity of the human person:

Made in the image of God, women and men have pre-eminent places in the social order, with inalienable political, social, Legal and economic rights. The fundamental question to ask about social development is: what is happening to people? (*Populorum Progressio*, 1968, N.8 -26).

C. Option for the poor:

A preferential love should be shown to the poor, whose needs and rights are given special attention in God's eyes. "Poor" is understood to refer to the socially and economically disadvantaged who as a consequence of their status, suffer oppression and powerlessness" (*Paul VI, Octogesima Adveniens* 1971, n.23).

D. Love and justice are linked:

Love of neighbor is an absolute demand for Justice, because charity manifests itself in actions and structures, which respect human dignity, protect human rights,

and facilitate human development. To promote justice is to transform structures, which block love. (Justice in the world, 1971 n. 16 and 34)

E. Promotion of the common good:

The common good is the sum total of all those conditions of social living – economic, political, cultural, which makes it possible for women and men to readily and fully achieve the perfection of their humanity. Individual rights are always experienced within the context of promotion of the common good. (John XXIII, Mater et Magistra, n. 65)

F. Political participation

Democratic participation in decision making is the best way to respect the dignity and liberty of people. The government is the instrument by which people co-operate together in order to achieve the common good (Christmas Message)

G. Economic justice

The economy is for the people and the resources of the earth are to be equitable shared by all. Human work is the key to contemporary social questions. Labour takes precedence over both capital and technology in the production process. Just wages and the rights of workers to form trade unions are to be respected. Women and disabled people, migrants and unemployed people share fully in the profits of the production process in solidarity. (John Paul II, Laborem Exercens, 981).

H. Stewardship

All property has a “social mortgage”. All people are to respect and share the resources of the earth. By our work we are co-creators in the continuing development of the earth. (John Paul II, Laborem Exercens).

I. Global solidarity

We belong to one human family and as such have mutual obligations to promote the development of all people across the world. In particular, the rich nations have responsibilities toward the poor nations and the structures of the international order must reflect justice. (Paul VI, Populorum Progressio, 1967)

J. Promotion of peace

Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon right order among humans and among nations. The arms race must cease and progressive disarmament take place if the future is to be secure. In order to promote peace and the conditions of peace, an effective international authority is necessary. (Paul VI, Populorum Progressio, 1967).

Obiora F. Ike, Professor of Ethics Godfrey Okoye University and Executive Director of Globethics.net Geneva, Switzerland. He is a Fellow of the World Academy of Arts and Science and A member of the European Academy of Science and Arts.