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**TOWARDS A SELF SUSTAINING AND SELF-RELIANT CHURCH:
THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES FROM THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF
THE CHURCH AND LOCAL EXPERIENCES IN DEVELOPMENT**

1. GRATITUDE

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my mathematics teacher, choir master and mentor far back in 1969 and 1970 while I was a fresher and junior seminarian under All Hallows Seminary Onitsha (then on exile at Ukpok) the Most Reverend Solomon Amatu, Bishop of Okigwe. I have known the bishop for over 40 years and admire his piety, wisdom and audacity in quiet sincere service and transformation of Church and Society. Father Isidore has told me that the Bishop assented to my nomination as guest speaker and resource person at this auspicious occasion which is a gathering of the Church hierarchy, religious and faithful of the diocese. Besides approving the event, I am told he desired to manage his programme to allow some personal presence, an act that speaks for itself. I pay tribute to all diocesans who are collaborators with the Bishop in the tremendous progress this diocese is making on the path of integral evangelization and the practice of charity since his transfer to serve the people of God in this ecclesiastical circumscription.

I recall the memory of the founding Bishop of this diocese, Most Rev Anthony Ikonu (Requiescat in pace) who after the civil war of Biafra and Nigeria, worked as teacher at the Bigard Memorial Seminary (my parents lived in Uwani Enugu) whilst I was a junior seminarian. I served at his masses for children, celebrated every Sunday at 7am. His last visit to our parish at Sacred Heart Uwani Enugu a few years ago was like home coming. His visit to pass the night with me at my residence in Enugu and our late night discussions centered on his desire to complete a befitting project for his people and lead them to a self-reliant and self sustaining indigenous African Church.

My gratitude goes to the competent diocesan officials and organizers, especially Father Isidore for taking the lead in inviting my presence and keeping the pace of the warmth and belief that we had something to share with the brothers and sisters of Okigwe diocese, coming from our own background of Enugu diocese which experiences is worth sharing. A people can by sheer solidarity, determination, will, vision, opportunity and challenge rise above their given situations and take their destiny into their own hands. Enugu diocese has done just that and I am glad to share our local experiences in humble acknowledgment that much is still ahead.

Let me confess that Father Isidore with his persistent daring and constantly keeping in touch with several telephone calls, Emails and telematic correspondences, virtually monitoring my movements whether in Nigeria or abroad made me cancel other scheduled engagements to share your warmth and participate at this event. Such daring and persistence by missionaries for their flock, parish, schools, health centers, projects vision and mission for the common good is exemplary and brings desired results in our times and clime. Thank you for the invitation. To my many friends, classmates, colleagues and acquaintances here present, I pay my respects and now invite you all to share with me some thoughts on the topic assigned.

2. OKIGWE DIOCESE IN FOCUS

The focus of this paper, dialogue and sharing is the Catholic Church and people of the territory of Okigwe diocese. Your gift is this land blessed by God with large numbers of priestly and religious vocations who are ready to bring the Good news of salvation to the ends of the earth. Okigwe diocese within Nigeria ranks among the areas with the most dedicated, educated and missionary oriented dioceses. Claim it and enhance it for upon the heels of the bringers of the Good News follow blessings for their peoples. The Irish and Polish missionary experiences showcase how the role of the missionaries in championing the emergence of these nations into the international theatre, with a John F Kennedy emerging the president of the USA. Missionaries are ambassadors for their people. Added to the gift of these vocations to the religious and priestly life are the many other endowments of human and natural resources of your diocese, some of them still untapped.

Counting on the blessings, one is amazed at the numbers of the human capital, thinkers and scholars who are indigenes to this diocese whether Roman Catholic or not. Professor Adiele Afigbo of the University of Nigeria, now deceased, a renowned humanist and historiography teacher and such caliber of persons show the gift which is your territory. The establishment of tertiary institutions, schools and enterprise centers speak volumes of the desire of the people to move from neglect, stunted cultural practices, religious syncretism and fetish, poverty and ignorance into a competitive world class territory with the many possibilities and apparent limitations. To achieve greatness however, Unity is essential and this appears in my humble estimation as one of the critical challenges for a Church on Mission in Okigwe diocese to redeem its people.

It seems appropriate to presume that one of the expectations of the audience is to share a reflection on how we can specifically offer a lasting solution to the legitimate quest for self-reliance of the local Church, moving away from the age long dependence on external agencies and institutions to realize the vision and theology of the Second Vatican Council. This theology promoted the role of the particular Church and her competence in human, natural and social resources with the focus on the theology of incarnation and inculturation, summarized in those beautiful words of St John's Gospel: "The Word took flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14)

Our study follows the Synod of the Bishops on Africa at the Plenary Assembly (Africa Synod) in 1994 and the call of the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II in the Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* No 104. The Pope challenges the Church in Africa to articulate her mandate in all dimensions, namely of proclamation, inculturation, dialogue, Justice and Peace, Social communications all of which are possible through a dynamic and sustainable local personnel and to contribute these to the universal Church. The Africa Synod locates the issues of self reliance and sustainability as an agenda of the future of the local people and challenges all who have positions of responsibility to initiate credible methods and models of lifting the African Church and people from a *"begging and dependant Church to a self reliant Church."* At a meeting in Kumasi, Ghana of the Bishops of West Africa, concern and focus was given to matters of sustainability and self-reliance, showing that the bishops are resolved to move from a

receiving (begging) Church to become a self sustaining and rather giving Church. Pope Benedict XVI in the Second Synod of the Bishops on Africa in 2009 uses the biblical language “Africa rise up and walk” to show the challenge of the cripple who seemed dependent but indeed had received the gift of healing. The Apostolic Exhortation “Africae Munus” of 2011 is a veritable document which talks of Africa’s commitment to Christ from apostolic times which foundations are its assets in terms of becoming the region of the world Church with future, Hope, family values and as the Pope says – “*the spiritual lung of the world Church*”. This is apt because the respiratory organ upon which breathing and thus all life depend upon is the lung.

The role of the Church founded on the incarnate word, who elevated humanity to redemption and salvation and recreated the challenge by the Creator to “*subdue and fill the earth*” (Genesis Chapter 1), is to lead by credible example and show that self reliance and sustainability is not only possible and desirable, but corresponds to the teaching of the Fathers of the Church (St Augustine; St Thomas Aquinas; St. Peter Abelard; St Anthony of the Desert; St Clement of Alexandria etc). These have adapted the Gospel to its teaching on the the endowment of each person with gifts that call for responsibility and judicious use as each shall render accounts of stewardship for the gifts received.

One may thus apply this passage to Africa, the Church, to Nigeria and contextually to Okigwe diocese, our Political Elite, the educational or social and cultural organs and the captains of industry who are our economic drivers to “*rise up and walk*” and not continue to wallow in self pity, lethargy, apathy, unrealistic and unrealistic bogus claims, dishonesty, adulation and a perpetual dependency syndrome. This in my humble estimation remain part of the challenges facing the Igbo Church, nay in local context, the people of Okigwe diocese. Hope is the gift. Optimism founded on reality, is the foundation for success. Okigwe diocesans are brilliant with realistic ideas, planning and methodology skills which are foundations for the proper participation of all persons as productive ingredients in the attempts towards self-reliance. The contributions of the Laity in resources management needs to be constantly encouraged and not be neglected. The laity have a wealth of resources, decision making

systems and management competency skills that serves the need of the Church and their locality. Their participation is critical and Laity remain the major untapped resource in our Churches

3. OUR MANDATE

Look around you and you shall discover the manifest situation of many people in our land, frustrated, dejected, brutalized, abandoned, disillusioned and rendered poor in every sense of the word. They are hungry, exploited and naked, homeless and many of them die young. Statistics on the African continent state that 40000 children die daily due to lack of the basic means of livelihood. The contextual statistics would be most challenging, thus the phenomenon of crime, boko haramism, kidnapping and brigandage into negative actions which has become the bane of our society.

Our mandate has its roots in the Gospel of Jesus Christ to *“Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news”* (Matthew 28:19). *“I came that they may have life in abundance”* (John 10:10). *“The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me for the Lord has sent me to bring Good news to the poor”* (Luke 4:18). The Lord Jesus Christ in his life challenged the people of Israel to self-help. A good example is the miracle at the lake of Galilee with the multiplication of loaves. He made the disciples “not to send the people away into the desert in search of food” but to give them food themselves by helping locate a young lad who had five loaves and two fish. This symbol was enough for the Lord to perform the miracle of the multiplication and feeding of five thousand people, not counting the numbers of women and children.

It is our responsibility as Christian leaders of society to encourage the empowerment of people, which leads them into self-reliance and allows them to shape their destiny. Such strength helps people to understand the underlying causes of poverty and to organize themselves for purposeful activity. Positive empowerment is based on solidarity and mutual respect and strives for an equality of relationship, which it may never fully achieve. This is the real challenge facing the world and the Church, for how can we see people die daily of hunger for food, unemployment, curable diseases, illiteracy and ignorance, ill-health, inadequate housing and horrendous poverty without realizing their God given destinies and

talents? The challenge and mandate in the language of Vatican II is to *"see the signs of the times and translate them in the light of the Gospel"* (GS 1, 2).

Taking into consideration, the fact that any discussion about self reliance revolve around the proper use of power which is the ability to achieve purpose and bring about change, we do underscore our utter rejection of a system which creates and encourages poverty in order to practice charity. The New Testament repeatedly attests to the paradoxical inter-relationship of power and powerlessness. *"He has sent me to bring the Good News to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to set the downtrodden free, and to proclaim to all the Lord's year of favor"* (Luke 4: 18-19).

The long tradition of Catholic Social Teaching has always advocated the empowerment of poor and marginalized people, a theology completely consistent with the Gospel by empowering the less privileged to become equal and responsible citizens. No genuine authority can be based upon the powerlessness of those who are subject to it. In fact, political and economic situations challenge poor people to effect changes in their own lives by engaging the oppressive structures and social situations that has kept them dependent. *"God helps those who help themselves"*. What we experience in the Arab world and in other places of tumult and uprising currently is the relocation of power to the people against years of oppression, injustice and tutelage. There comes a time when people can and must say No to subjugation as an attempt to recreate their destinies wasted by an elite that denied them their rights and suppressed it. The exodus phenomenon is the historical presence and action of God alongside the marginalized, a paradigmatic approach which captures the present situation and mood of the Nigerian people. In the words of a Vatican diplomat to the UN: *"If the process globalization which is taking place in our world is to be truly human, it requires the construction of a truly global community where concern for all especially the weakest is uppermost"*. (Cf. Archbishop Renato Martino, Vatican Diplomat and Nuncio, speech to the UN, 1997).

CHURCH AND SELF-RELIANCE- CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING EN-ROUTE

The universal quest by man created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27) for a better world founded on the biblical injunction to "subdue the earth and fill it" (Gen 1:28) living in full equality, dignity and integrity, prompted this reflection on the linkage of Church and self reliance. Due to the lack of knowledge by people, including Christians of the profound teachings contained in the Social Teaching of the Church since Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical letter "Rerum Novarum" on the conditions of the working classes (and the call for their liberation, just treatment and just wage), the magisterial office of the Church has continued to inundate the world and the faithful with statements, guiding principles and teaching that guarantee a proper understanding of socio-economic and political-cultural realities. These realities are founded on sound reason, common sense and the injunctions of faith. We as African theologians, Christian faithful and ministers of the Word are also called to reflect on these teachings in the light of our own peculiar faith experiences and circumstances of life with the purpose of drawing from their insights, deepening them in our thoughts and further elaborating upon them with our background and context in view.

This sharing today draws upon some of these age old wisdom and guiding principles, thus their presentation in a brief summary here. Pope John XXIII described the Church as "*Mater et Magistra*" (mother and teacher) in his Encyclical letter which bears this title, stating very strongly that this "*Catholic Social Doctrine is an integral part of the Christian conception of life*" (MM 222). He suggests that these principles are of universal application, for they take human nature and the varying conditions in which man's life is lived into account. The principles also take into account the principal characteristics of contemporary society, and are thus acceptable to all (Cf. MM no 220). Pope John XXIII therefore recommends that there is urgency for the study of the Social Doctrine of the Church. "Such teaching must be extended by regular, systematic courses in Catholic schools of every kind, especially in seminaries. It is to be inserted in to the religious instruction of parishes and of association of the lay apostolate. It must be spread by every modern means at our disposal: daily newspapers, periodicals, popular and scientific publications, radio and

television" (MM 224). This call, which since then has been interpreted to mean prophetic challenge in view of the events of human history since 50 years of its publication faces us more in the particular churches of Africa and our developing nation. With the document *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI in 1968 gave the world a clear teaching on the link of development and progress, Church and self reliance, Culture and society. In fact, he called development the "new name for peace" and urged that every effort be made to bring humanity to the awareness and authenticity of their true self, identity, skills, ability and resources which in essence is authentic and sustainable development. True development is not infrastructural, it is the building of the human person and his integrity and personality according to the mind of God.

The linkage of Church and self reliance is a theological concept, expressed since apostolic times and engraved even in the nature of the family and the system of economic enterprise, particularly agricultural production in antiquity before the emergence of industrial capitalism. In the word of Pope John XXIII, "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 is driving force" (MM226).

Grieved at the wanton misery and suffering into which increasing majorities of our people are condemned to live especially their economic dependence, there is need for the leaders of the people to realize that "*failing to plan is planning to fail*". Therefore, in an effort to free ourselves from the present situation of dependency we acknowledge the need to recognize our potentials and limitations, in order to achieve the desired self-reliance. Over ambition and undue expectations are part of the problems which make people "build castles in the sky". Several resources have been wasted in unattainable projects. The Church is called to lead by modest example to sustain this drive and its ministers must commit themselves to carry out this mission in educational campaigns for justice and peace for all our people.

The quest for self-reliance is not an attempt at rebellion, or an exercise in isolation. Self-reliance also implies solidarity. The Church can

attain self-reliance in those areas where she can do things for herself, seek reasonable assistance from external bodies on those things she cannot support herself and pursue the wisdom which states that Subsidiarity does not exclude solidarity in the search for the Common Good. Our belief is based on the fact that we have several values in our religious, theological, cultural and social ambient which teach us the proper use and management of resources. These correspond to the wisdom of our ancestors who became rich by saving and harnessing the little they had. In our context and with the added advantage of knowledge and experiences of what works elsewhere, the management of local resources and the belief in our ability to sustain and survive assumes the dimensions of a Gospel initiative. It is imperative to accept this challenge and serve the people to redirect their values so that we learn to *"cut our coat according to our size and cloth"*.

Given the socio-political conditions in our country today, the Church's growth and development of the faithful has been adversely affected without much needed resources. The seminaries and religious houses still lack adequate accommodation. Many parishes especially in the rural areas do not have the access and adequate resources required for mission work. Infrastructure much needed for development are lacking as our roads network, housing, energy and power supplies for industrial development is below average and constant outage of electricity a common occurrence. As a result, we still have to depend upon external assistance on a wide range of areas. We realize that funds emanating from external sources may have some "strings" attached and may not continue for long, in fact are rather diminishing. Donor agencies have developed a gradual "aid fatigue" and there is a direct call to recipients to be on their own. We urge ourselves and other Non-governmental organizations including our local Church to prepare for this probable development.

As a credible step towards financial self-reliance, we join the recent calls by the local Church and our civil rulers and commit ourselves to encourage income-generating projects to enable people and institutions achieve their own development and overall common good. This can be done through the establishment of Microfinance banks that are properly functioning and are guided by discipline and corporate governance; agricultural projects: skills training and

vocational centers for the youth and adult education with literacy programmes for those in need. Other useful projects are the creation of Small Projects Fund and credit revolving projects for communities and groups such as youth, women and men to promote their efforts on a revolving basis. Such projects build up group solidarity action and workers rights. From our experience in Enugu, we have observed that the provision of soft loans through our own Umuchinemere Pro-credit Micro finance bank (UPMFB) supports private initiative, social market and individual or group entrepreneurs and has helped us linkage and empower over 500000 people with loanable funds over a volume serviced by an asset base of near three billion naira. Umuchinemere bank is one of the largest and leading MFB's in Nigeria.

Here, I shall share with you some of the successful projects going on in the diocese of Enugu as a point of departure of what we all can do in our different localities. Some of these include CST programme; health and educational institutions; the establishment of a diocesan university, the GOU with faculties and the attendant advantages of a university; the VITTC; the Ofu Obi Africa centre, the growing numbers of parishes, pastoral programmes and initiatives towards evangelization; agricultural projects; rural development; education work at all levels; women and men programmes on the competence and levels of the laity; income generating projects; linkage of Church and government; team work of the local personnel through trust and control mechanisms; social housing programmes; further studies and a new sense of mission under new evangelization.

RESOLUTIONS

Aware of the enormous responsibilities facing humanity, the African continent, the Nigerian nation and Okigwe diocese at this time, I recommend that we resolve as follows:

1. To face up to the real problems and challenges of the local Church, working in unity, determination and focus and through the Holy Spirit of God to promote more conscientiously the mission of Jesus Christ which is summed up in the new evangelization understood as: proclamation, dialogue, inculturation, justice and peace and the challenges of the means of social communication (Ecclesia in Africa).

2. Reaffirm our desire to identify and harness the material, spiritual and human resources of our local Church for the attainment of a state of sustainable self-reliance.
3. Acknowledge the relevance of trained personnel in our work to sustain the training and empowerment of our personnel and calling for ongoing formation in skills and knowledge within the shores of the locality and abroad.
4. Promote the sustenance of the use and management of funds at our disposal as a vital issue in the attempts to attain self-reliance. It is therefore imperative to hold tenaciously the principle of proper accountability, honesty and transparency in the use of funds
5. Promote the preferential option for the poor which calls each individual to give a weighted concern to the needs of the poor, in all economic, political and social decisions; because, it is the most impoverished people whose rights and dignity are most often violated. We affirm that we are on the side of the poor.
6. Challenge the rascality by which Local, State, and Federal Government officials of government have borrowed money to buy supplies, equipment or a house. They borrow money from private markets and international financial institutions. Individual loans are often repaid directly, but if a country borrows money, the citizens are not necessarily notified or informed of the purpose of the loan or its terms and conditions. In fact instances exist, where such loans have been used to enrich a small group of people and have been transferred to private bank accounts of government officials outside the country. We question the logic and the justice which demands repayment of debt taken thirty years ago, before many African children were born and paid to creditor nations to be enjoyed by their children who were not born when the loans were taken. Huge debt repayments places repayment before life, and a total debt cancellation is a bold gesture of the Millennium Development Goals to usher in demand for ethical considerations that promote and enhances life for all.

7. In line with Catholic Social Teaching, to emphasize our belief in the sacredness of each individual and in the dignity of each person. We consider this position a criterion against which all economic, political and social systems are to be judged and all aspects of the debt situation must be measured. The erosion of common good, caused by the current debt situation demands active solutions from governments, institutions, and the Churches which assure human dignity and protect human rights.
8. To foster education growth at all levels and in all forms and dimensions, especially in the promotion of career and skills programmes, youth and women development and in the promotion of a theology of empowerment, which is truly Catholic and authentically African.
9. To challenge our people to register, vote and be voted for and develop positive interest in politics for the general welfare, whilst supporting lay and active participation in politics. We are aware that only in the restructuring of the social order based on the principles of justice, truth and fairness can there emerge the new society of our dreams. This optimism has its source in the belief that a *"common dream" is "the nearest reality" and affirm with the Bishops of Africa in the Synod our hope and belief in HIM through whom all things are possible (Luke 1:37).*
10. To acknowledge the spiritual, social and human dimensions of the Nigerian context in which we act as agents of the Good News. There is a lot of potentiality in human, natural and material resources in our nation and dioceses. Almighty God has blessed us abundantly. The local church to a large extent is already self-reliant in manpower and personnel. The Church leadership has vision and there is need for courage. While much has been achieved already with the support of the world Church and people of goodwill, much is yet to be done.

CONCLUSION

I have enjoyed my sharing with you all, brothers and sisters. May we now recommend all these deliberations with intensive prayer and trust in him who makes all things possible (Luke 1:26) and call

on all our people, to work assiduously for the achievement of the goal of a self reliant Church in our Diocese which is mature enough to help herself do what it can and even assist others. We agree that our success in attaining self-reliance will need discipline, truth, justice, hope, patience, love and perseverance. We therefore call on our heavenly Father” in this year of Faith for His abundant blessings.