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FROM THE EDITOR

To the glory of God and the joy of humanity, you are reading a copy of volume 5 of *Insight: Journal of Religious Studies*. This is a clear indication that *Insight* has come to stay. Certainly, this is not the making of a single individual. Many people have put immense efforts into making the birth, nurture, and growth of this Journal a reality. Although not an honour roll, permit me, as the current Editor of *Insight*, to recognize the contributions of the previous Editors and their respective Editorial teams: Sampson M. Nwaomah, PhD (the Founding Editor, 2004-2006) and my predecessor Adelowo Felix Adetunji, PhD (Editor, 2007-2008). I would not forget all the authors and printers who believed in this new baby and invested their academic energies to help make it grow. Congratulations! Your investments have yielded great dividend.

My team and I are building on the solid foundation you laid to move *Insight* to greater heights. Having learned from the teething problems of the past, the present Editorial team has forged a stronger front for *Insight*, resulting in significant improvement on the layout and quality of print of the journal.

The two functional e-mail accounts for *Insight*, in full use since 2008, have facilitated speedy and more efficient communication with our dear authors and contributors. This has cut off the slow process that characterized the practice of dealing back and forth with hard copies. This present volume is a product of an almost paperless procedure of communicating with authors of articles from the submission of their first draft to the final proof version.

Furthermore, in response to the demands of the cyber age in which we operate, academically, *Insight* has taken another giant step in that all articles in this present volume and henceforth are hosted on the official website of Babcock University, Nigeria for easy access and wider readership. Thus, through *Insight*, we express our commitment to excellence and efficiency in delivering quality, scholarly articles to your doorsteps, utilising the physical and cyber *agora*.

Thank you for believing in *Insight* and partnering with us. Enjoy your reading and please, send in an article for publication in *Insight: Journal of Religious Studies* as soon as you can.

Michael Onyedikachi Akpa, PhD
Editor

CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES FOR THE ROMAN CATHOLICS IN AFRICA

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I. Introduction

The basic element of hope and trust in God is that there is a force and design associated with the history of the world and that the power whose concealed presence is experienced in this manner is worthy of worship. He is the creator ever creating. We live in a society whose physical fabric is endowed with visible rational beauty.¹ Thus, African peoples are in no doubt that the universe is by God's ordinance. Every institution, government and event in the society is therefore, seen by Africans as religiously oriented. "Religion permeates the whole of man. It enters into the life of every individual, hence of the society."²

Therefore, the reality of a society ordained by God inculcates the spirit by which the citizens of the nations are to be animated in relation to God and to each other. It brings about norms or procedures that are integral to culture, transmitted in customs and traditions. But it has become clear that strange tension engulfs the contemporary society in general and African in particular.

Just as in other continents, Africa is passing through difficult political, economic and social times. As noted by Benedict XVI, during his recent apostolic visit to Africa, certain values of the traditional society have been overturned. Relationships between different generations have evolved in a way that no longer favour the transmission of accumulated knowledge and inherited wisdom. The quality of family ties is deeply affected by this.

Uprooted and fragile members of the younger generation, who often are without gainful jobs, seek to cure their pain by living in ephemeral and man-made paradises.³ Indeed, social justice is grossly abused and human dignity is rapidly eluding the Church of the 21st century amidst corrupt leadership in many countries. "African people are now too constrained to flee from themselves and abandon everything that once made up their interior richness".⁴

According to Pius XII, the Church has no well articulated political, economic or social mandate. The mission which Jesus Christ gives to her is strictly religious.⁵ However, the Vatican II Fathers submitted that, "out of this religious mission, comes a function, a light and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law."⁶ In other words, the Church Social Doctrine can be that consolidating intervention. It can be the Church's response to the political, economic and social issues of the contemporary day. For the Church is, "by her relationship with Christ, both a sign and an instrument of intimate union with God, and of the unity of mankind".⁷

The thrust of this study is, therefore, to examine the concept of Roman Catholic Social Doctrine and see how the knowledge of it by the majority of Christians in Africa can enhance the enthronement of the values of God's kingdom on earth. The approach of this article is historical and analytical. It is the intention of the author to x-ray the Biblical basis of this body of teaching on social, economic, political and cultural matters. From these, we shall draw the implication and responsibilities with which the Church is saddled in the 21st century, with Nigerian situations as a case of emphasis. The study concludes with a clarion call on the African Church to wake up to her responsibilities.

II. Roman Catholic Social Doctrine

The present facts of leadership in Africa, ecology, corruption, economic meltdown, HIV/AIDS, etc are challenges for all Christians and human beings at large. The issue of position of the Church on these various topics is gaining new attention in many circles and the volatile nature of some of these topics generates lively debates. But it also reveals a gross lack of knowledge of the body of teaching the Roman Catholic Church calls social teaching, social thought or social doctrine. Confronted with contemporary events, people look around for explanations and guidelines which give a Christian perspective on these human problems. What can we say, as Christians, about Niger-Delta, arms race and youth restiveness, corruption

and money laundering, racism and human trafficking, the dignity of all persons and the sacredness of human life, work and workers rights, etc.?

These questions lead the rational human mind to the discovery of the Church's social teachings. According to Peter J. Henriot, Edward P. Deberri, et al, the Catholic Social Doctrine expresses commitment to a faith that does justice.⁸ It is a well articulated guideline that accepts the fact that "a living faith leads directly to a loving action in the transformation of the world".⁹ However, easy answers to difficult global problems cannot be found in the Catholic social teachings. That is to say, that the temptation to look for cheap solutions to human problems must be resisted while applying the principles of Catholic social teachings. The Catholic Social Doctrine or teaching is a social wisdom based on:

Biblical insights, the tradition of the early writers of the Church, Scholastic and other Christian philosophies, theological reflection and the contemporary experience of the people of God struggling to live out faith in justice.¹⁰

Within a society, Christians in general face the challenge of adjusting to new ideas and popular participation in the affairs of politics, economics and other social engagements. And Catholics in particular would always choose to assert the necessity for order and hierarchy backed by a divinely constituted authority able to announce and enforce the demands of nature and God. Thus, this interplay between nation-state and the Church provides the basic platform for the emergence of Catholic Social Doctrine. As O'Brien and Shannon observed,

What held society together and gave it ethical discipline, and coherence was a theory of social obligation that sprang from the very nature of society and was related to a hierarchical universe presided over by God. Social obligations thus took priority over individual desires and wants.¹¹

The above observation is justified by the fact that an organic social theory, supported by emerging ideas of natural law, provided strong foundation for the specification, by the Church, of rules governing social and economic activities oriented toward the efficient share of scarce resources. Catholic Social Doctrine, as in all other Christian teachings, "begins with the person and message of Jesus."¹² Jesus, not being a political or economic messiah, he proclaimed the kingdom of God and saved people from corruption and sin.

Following the example of Jesus Christ, the Popes teach; not only divine mysteries, but also comment on social questions. Most of these teachings come in the form of encyclicals. "Encyclicals are the most important and the most authoritative documents a Pope writes".¹³ The first encyclical was written in 1745 by Pope Benedict XIV, on usury. The teachings on social, political and economic issues are informed by flexible approaches to scripture and by a more positive assessment of the contemporary world. Therefore, the Catholic Social Doctrine is that body of,

modern documents communicating a vision of the Church as servant of humanity, a renewed concern for the human person and human rights, an increasing emphasis on popular participation, and a more open and humble acknowledgment of the historically conditioned character of human life and consciousness.¹⁴

The social doctrine of the Catholic Church also projects the ideas and reflections of the emerging Christian communities and governments of the African countries. The doctrine is universal in impact, spirit and scope. And it challenges the African Church on many issues.

III. Biblical Basis of the Social Doctrine

God's children have always turned to the Bible as the magna charter for their various teachings. In so doing, the rich resources of the sacred scripture become blueprints of missionary activities and for the establishment of a just society. In other words, a careful reading of both the Old and New Testaments make it clear that Biblical witness to the mission of redemption is a chorus from many persons. This section of the study is an attempt to capture the harmony of that testimony in the light of Catholic Social Doctrine.

The classical prophets record various passages in which they buttress strategies of social transformation, in very clear and passionate terms. One hears God complaining against public leaders who oppress the poor and larger society: "The Lord enters into judgment with the elders and princes of his people; 'It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses'" (Isa 3:14).

Passages like this received attention at the inception of the social and political consciousness in scriptural studies, lending Biblical foundations to the Catholic Social Doctrine. In this context, there are many works dealing with the relevance of the prophets to social questions.¹⁵

The prophets never tired in recalling to Israel's errant conscience the social implications of the Pentateuch. The code, notably, prohibited the alienation of human rights and corrupt leadership. It also emphasized on the relation of the secular and sacred in the development of the country. Above all, it pointed out how the meaning of God's activity in history intertwine with justice and salvation.

All the above aimed at poverty reduction, relieving the social stress, as well as enthroning more of democratic values which Israel had known in the nomadic era. The consequent wars, taxes, forced labour coupled with the minimal condition of agriculture in Canaan soon drove the masses into clutches of banking and mortgage. It was against this immoral political rascality that the prophets protested eloquently. Thus says the Lord,

because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes—they that trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted. Amos 2:6ff.

The prophet Isaiah strongly condemns those who increase their wealth (Isa 5:8) and those who deny the poor basic amenities (10:1-ff). The woes denounced by the prophets are all over the streets of Nigeria. There is massive looting of Nigeria's resources by a small but active band of desperadoes in the past decades. There is stealing in both upstream and downstream Nigerian oil sectors. From the presidency to the legislature to the political parties to the public and private sectors, the story is the same: corrupt practices everywhere. All the people involved are adherents of Islam, Christianity or African Traditional Religions (ATR) with little or no knowledge of the principles of Catholic Social Doctrine.

Suffice to note, the prophets decried all manners of injustice, corrupt leadership and evil in their society, thereby laying the foundation of social doctrine. However, the biblical prophets cannot be equated with humanists and modern day prophets who have specific plans for social progress. Squarely, the Catholic Social Doctrine places the political and social progress under the moral order ordained by God.

IV. Implications and Responsibility

Concern for social justice and economic well-being of the greater number of people do not disappear in Christian religion. On the contrary, the social teachings of the prophets receive approval in the New Testament.

Jesus recognizes the secular element in government, a clear departure from the Israelite concept of theocracy that impresses a sacred character on governance. Jesus makes a distinction between Caesar and God, but not a separation; both come from God. However, it remains a challenge and responsibility for the Church leadership to persevere with the mission of directing and pointing out areas where political and social orders contradict the law of God. This may lead to opposition and even active persecution. But it should not deter the Church from carrying out the mandate of Christ via the social doctrine.

While the prophets gave little attention to the interior dispositions and more to the external acts, "Christ, on the other hand elevated this ethic to a higher plane by stressing purity of heart."¹⁶ This moral outlook cannot be neglected by religious leaders in Africa and Nigeria in particular.

About 40 per cent of political leaders in Nigeria profess Christianity, yet "the country's resources are being serially mismanaged to the detriment of the larger population. We are in a sorry state, with over 50 per cent uneducated; more than 50 per cent having no access to water, electricity and other means of good livelihood."¹⁷ Yet the opening lines of "The Church in the Modern World" of Vatican II stated that without good leadership, we do not have true Gospel living. According to the document,

The joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of the women and men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way oppressed, these are the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of the followers of Christ.¹⁸

It is the responsibility of the Church in Africa, through various conferences, to shout the louder the Church's social teaching in the face of today's bad governance and corrupt practices. The social consciousness and concern in the Church, as regards the state of nations, has to grow and expand, Catholic social doctrine is an effort to spell out what it means to take up the "joys and hopes, sorrows and anxieties" of the citizens of various countries of Africa and the world.

In Nigeria, the insincere approach to governance has led to non-provision of the basic needs of the people, and social services are provided in highly unbalanced ways. The federal legislature reworks the budget and share billions of Naira into so called "constituency" allocations. Professor Sola Adeyeye, a former Representative, has said that if Nigerians truly know what legislators take away from the Assembly, they would stone the legislators.¹⁹

Through the Social encyclicals (Social Doctrine) and addresses of the Popes, it is implied that the Church in Africa must carry on the fight against the ills of the contemporary society. In more apt expression, the African Church must see it as urgent mission to preach the principles of social justice in line with the saving message of Jesus Christ.

V. Conclusions

The ultimate reason why the Church exists is the salvation of all people, regardless of colour or language. Since this redemption is a gamble of the earthly life, since it hangs not only on internal dispositions but also on conformity with nations' constitutions prescribed for human relation, the Church must then address what is morally wrong in social institution, even when her own sons and daughters are involved. Here again, 'Gaudium et Spes' re-echoes:

But it is always and everywhere legitimate for her, to teach her social doctrine, and to discharge her duty among men without hindrance. She also has the right to pass moral judgment, even on matters touching the political order, whenever basic personal rights of the salvation of souls make such judgment necessary.²⁰

The state of the universe in general and African countries in particular is making the knowledge and teaching of Catholic Social Doctrine an inescapable pastoral duty. It is the challenge of our time.

Endnotes

¹John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science*, (London: Yale University Press, 1998), 1-2.

²J. Omosade Awolalu and P. Adelumo Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion*, (Ibadan: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Limited, 2005), 231.

³Benedict XVI, *L'osservatore Romano*, Wednesday, 25 March, 2009, 9.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Pius XII, Address to the International Union of Institutes of Archaeology, History and History of Art, March, 1956.

⁶Austin Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1975), 942.

⁷Ibid., 350.

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⁹Ibid., 6

¹⁰Ibid., 4.

¹¹David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (eds.), *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 3.

¹²Ibid., 2.

¹³Joseph G. Donders (ed.), *The Encyclicals in Everyday Language*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), ix.

¹⁴David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (eds.), 1.

¹⁵Some of the works on the relevance of the prophets also highlight the Biblical Foundations of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. Works like the following: Anthony R. Ceresko, *Introduction to the Old Testament: A Liberation Perspective*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1997).

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¹⁶John Lucal, "The Prophets as Social Reformers" in John Lucal (ed.), *The Bible Today*, (Minnesota: Collegeville Press, 1992), 10.

¹⁷The Guardian, Monday, April 6, 2009.

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¹⁹The Guardian, Sunday, April 5, 2009.

²⁰Austin Flannery (ed.), 910.