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Guest Editor: J.J. Carney, PhD

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Editor's Introduction

The most populous country in Africa, Nigeria stands at the geographic and symbolic heart of the continent. From the internecine Biafra War (1967-70) and subsequent military dictatorship to the "semi-democracy" that emerged following Olusegun Obasanjo's 1999 accession to power,¹ the nation's political history has often mirrored the continent's broader fortunes. In turn, Nigeria's economy is the second-largest in Africa and increasingly challenges South Africa as the continent's economic engine. Culturally, the literary works of Nigerian authors such as Chinua Achebe and, more recently, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, have shaped generations of Western views of Africa.² Religiously, Nigeria straddles the Muslim-dominated Sahelian belt and the Christian-dominated West African coast. Grappling with the intersection of evangelization, religious pluralism, and violence, Nigeria is what John L. Allen has termed a "test case" for Christian-Muslim coexistence in the Global South.³

It is thus fitting that the *International Journal of African Catholicism* dedicates this special issue to Nigerian Catholicism. Although Catholics only comprise 15-20% of the overall population of 170 million, this still gives the nation the second-largest Catholic population in Africa. In turn, Nigeria has produced record numbers of religious sisters, seminarians and priests, many of whom can be found toiling in far-flung American parishes, schools and universities. In recent years Nigerian prelates like Francis Cardinal

¹ Crawford Young utilizes this phrase to describe the trend in African politics in the late 1990s and early 2000s. See Crawford Young, *The Postcolonial State in Africa: Fifty Years of Independence, 1960-2010* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 29.

² See in particular Chinua Achebe's 1958 classic, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Anchor, 1994); Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Purple Hibiscus* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin, 2003) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (New York: Anchor, 2006). Not surprisingly, religious themes emerge prominently in all of these works.

³ John L. Allen, *The Future Church: How Ten Trends are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church* (New York: Image Books, 2009), 116.

Arinze and John Cardinal Onaiyekan have been mentioned as potential *papabili*, exercising considerable influence in Rome and Abuja alike. And as in much of Africa, the Nigerian Church's legion of schools, clinics, and election monitors exercise a disproportionate influence in political and social life alike.

For all of its remarkable growth and influence, however, the Nigerian Catholic Church is not without its "feet of clay." To their credit, this special issue's authors offer critical insiders' perspectives on the Nigerian Church, offering much-needed correctives to outsiders' tendencies to lionize, simplify and misunderstand. Building from Emmanuel Katongole's recent critical reading of African political theology,⁴ Simon-Mary Ahiokhai begins our issue by analyzing the history of Catholic missions in Nigeria. In light of this difficult history, Ahiokhai calls for the contemporary Nigerian church to embrace a prophetic voice muted by decades of seeking institutional aggrandizement. In particular, he targets the plagues of tribalism, nepotism, corruption, and materialism that he sees afflicting clergy and laity alike.

The next four articles all debate one of the most important works on Nigerian Catholicism to emerge in recent years: the Dominican scholar Iheanyi Enwerem's *Crossing the Rubicon: A Sociopolitical Analysis of Political Catholicism in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: BookBuilders Editions Africa, 2010). Growing out of Enwerem's years of toiling for the bishops' Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, this book offers a damning indictment of the internal power struggles and corruption that have too often marked church leadership in Nigeria. At the same time, Enwerem's book is a true jeremiad. Like Jeremiah, he both "roots up" and "plants" (Jer 1:10), challenging church leaders to help construct a more faithful

⁴ Emmanuel M. Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Press, 2011).

Catholic politics that offers a genuinely egalitarian and participatory sociopolitical praxis. Enwerem is looking for nothing less than renewed Christian servant-leaders – those who are able, in his words, to "raise, here on earth, a faithful constituency for God...that is lived out and witnessed in one's concrete interaction with the people and the world."⁵

Based at Marquette University and Liberty University, respectively, Joseph Ogbonnaya and Anthony Ikwueme laud Enwerem's willingness to speak truth to power. At the same time, they question whether Enwerem is both too critical of the church hierarchy and too enamored with the hierarchy's engagement in the political sphere. Enwerem takes up the challenges offered by Ogbonnaya and Ikwueme in two spirited response articles. Throughout this vigorous if respectful debate, the key issue concerns the proper nature of the church's role in political society. In this regard, this scholarly dispute has ramifications far beyond Nigeria. It should resonate wherever the Catholic Church navigates the fine lines between Catholic social teaching and partisan politics and between proclaiming the gospel *ad extra* and embodying the gospel *ad intra*.

The essays in this volume emerged from two sessions dedicated to African Catholicism at the annual meeting of the College Theology Society held at Creighton University between May 31 and June 2, 2013. We are grateful to the conference organizers for offering an unusually large platform for African theological discourse. We hope this bodes well for future scholarly engagement with African Catholicism in the U.S. and beyond. Thanks also to Cyril Orji at the University of Dayton and IJAC Editor Randall Woodward for their support throughout the project. We are grateful to IJAC for publishing this important exchange.

⁵ Iheanyi Enwerem, *Crossing the Rubicon: A Socio-Political Analysis of Political Catholicism in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: BookBuilders Editions Africa, 2010), 19.

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The Need for Prophetic Voices in the African Catholic Churches: The Nigerian Context

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Introduction

I hope that as my audience follows the argument articulated in this paper, they will appreciate why such a vibrant church needs a radical form of witnessing *ad intra*. Statistics do not always portray the real dynamics operating in a church or organization. It will be truly disadvantageous to the Christian religion if we simply conclude that based on the number of recipients of the sacraments of initiation in the Catholic Church in Nigeria and other African countries and colonies, the Catholic faith is on firm grounds and will accommodate all contemporary forces for innovation. At the very least, the tragic and recent genocides in Rwanda and Burundi have shown that the faith of the people needs to be engaged critically and constructively.⁶

This paper is based on the challenge that Emmanuel Katongole enunciates in his 2011 book, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*. Here, Katongole invites African theologians to become the prophetic voices for a church that has been unable in the past to truly transform the continent's conscience because it enjoys the vestiges of the colonial power that continues to define and shape the destinies of the people.

Before I engage the current realities of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, it is appropriate to explore the Christian narratives that were exported to the empires, kingdoms, principalities, and city-states that the British annexed and conquered to form Nigeria. This revisiting of our past is very important because Africans in general believe

⁶ For a brief analysis of the role Christians played in the genocides in Rwanda and Burundi see Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of African: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 47 - 49.

that a link to their past is vital if one is to understand the present and plan for the future. Not to engage the past is to be lost, and one faces the possibility of repeating the mistakes of the past.⁷ This is also true for the Catholic Church in Nigeria. A critical engagement with its past from the colonial era to present time is vital if the church is to be relevant in reinventing Nigeria's future.

This paper aims to show the need for a radical prophetic witnessing that is faithful to the collective understanding of the message of Christ and the riches of the cultural heritage of the people of Africa. To limit the scope of this paper, precise attention will be given to the Nigerian situation, with the understanding that the other national churches in Africa can still benefit from the observations made on the Nigerian context.

Methodologically, I will present a brief history of the Catholic Church in Nigeria with the intention of showing the progress that has been made by the indigenous clergy and the faithful. Then I will consider those ills that currently plague the church and grapple with the question of whether the church is able to heal itself or is handicapped by negative cultural, religious, and social forces. Finally, I will attempt to articulate the nature of the prophetic witnessing that is needed in the Catholic Church in Nigeria and how this can be made possible.

*Highlights of the Presence of the Catholic Church in Nigeria:
Precolonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial Eras.*

The relationship between the Christian evangelization of Sub-Saharan Africa and European control of the continent is one that no serious scholar can afford to ignore when describing the process of evangelization and the embrace of the Christian faith by Africans.

⁷ For the treatment of ancestor veneration in some African communities see Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community*, 2nd Ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000), 102 – 111.

The first 15th - 16th century wave of European missionary interest in the continent coincided with European material interest in exploring new trade routes leading to the spices of India as well as the 1494 partition of the discovered world by Pope Alexander VI between the Kingdoms of Spain and Portugal. Though the papal bull *Inter Caetera* was primarily addressed to Spain and concerned mainly the newly-discovered lands in the Americas which they erroneously believed to be part of the vast lands of India, it was meant to counterbalance the territorial claims of Portugal, especially in Africa.⁸ In the bull, the pope repeatedly stressed the expectation that the Spanish monarchy send competent persons to evangelize the inhabitants of these territories.

Africa mainly fell under the influence of Portugal until the 19th century entrance onto the exploration stage by the English, French, Germans, Italians, Belgians, and Dutch. During this first stage of encounter between the Portuguese and the kingdoms and city-states in Africa, the Portuguese had two main priorities, and one later took precedence over the other.⁹ They were interested in commerce with the African kings and leaders; they were also interested in evangelization.

For the most part, the evangelizing strategy used by the Portuguese failed to convince the Africans intellectually of the relevance of Christianity over the many African Religions. Gradually, the Portuguese shifted their focus from evangelization and commerce to an exclusive focus on commerce with the African people. Despite the disappointing results of the Portuguese in failing to make many converts of the African people, instances

⁸ See a detailed translation of the bull into English in Frances Gardiner Davenport (ed.), *European Treaties Bearing on the History of the United States and Its Dependencies to 1648* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1917), 75 – 78. For the Latin version, see 72 – 75.

⁹ For information on how both the economic and spiritual interests played out in Nigeria see Michael Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*, 4th Ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 111ff.

of Christian influences remained in some African Kingdoms. In the Kingdoms of Warri and Benin in present-day Nigeria, Christianity had an enduring influence in shaping some aspects of the customs of the people. An heir to the throne of Warri Kingdom, Sebastian, became a convert to the Catholic faith in the sixteenth century.¹⁰ He sent his son Domingos, the future king, to Portugal to study for the priesthood and also to be the ambassador of the kingdom to the palace of the King of Portugal. Interestingly, Domingos never became a priest due to his ascendance to the throne of Warri. However, to secure an alliance with the Kingdom of Portugal, he took a Portuguese bride. She gave birth to the future king, Antonio Domingos. Antonio Domingos, who ruled as Olu Obanighenren, also insisted on marrying a Portuguese bride as a condition of him remaining a Christian. He also embraced monogamy, which was not the cultural practice in his kingdom at that time.¹¹ During his reign, Antonio Domingos wrote to Pope Clement X to plead with the King of Portugal to send priests to the kingdom.¹² This request was granted. However, the environmental conditions in the kingdom made it difficult for expatriate missionaries to live in it. A huge portion of the kingdom is swampy, and malaria was prevalent. After some years, the Portuguese Capuchins left the kingdom. All the rulers of the kingdom from Sebastian until 1733 remained Catholics even in the absence of clergy.

On another note, in the late fifteenth century the Portuguese missionaries and traders also engaged the Kingdom of Benin in Midwestern Nigeria. The Oba of Benin sent his son, the future Oba Esigie, to Portugal as an ambassador. Esigie embraced the Catholic

¹⁰ See Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Lawrenceville, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 1995), 61.

¹¹ See Chris O'mone, *The Saga of the Early Warri Princes: A History of the Beginnings of a West African Dynasty, 1480-1654* (Bloomington: iUniverse Inc., 2012), 72.

¹² *Ibid*, 72 – 73.

faith and was baptized. Many of the nobles were also baptized. However, the success of missionary presence in Benin was limited. The religious obligations demanded of the monarchs by the indigenous religion made it impossible for them to embrace the Catholic faith wholeheartedly. Also, as noted by Elizabeth Isichei, the absence of priests to continue the instruction of the people added to the lack of success in spreading the faith in the kingdom.¹³

The relationship between the Portuguese and the Africans they encountered in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was not shaped by racial hermeneutics as became the norm during the slave trade and colonial periods. For the most part, the Portuguese were amazed at the cultural sophistication they encountered in many of these kingdoms. Evangelization was done in the spirit of dialogue and respect of freedom of religion. Many of those who embraced the Christian faith did so freely and were allowed a place in society by the reigning monarchs in the evangelized territories.

The discovery of the Americas and the need to take advantage of the economic benefits of the natural resources found in Africa led to a shift in the policy of the Portuguese toward the African people they had engaged for decades. A systematic shift from respect to degradation became the policy shaping the trade relations with the African people. To justify the act of enslaving another human, the Portuguese, as well as other European nations who participated in the slave trade, had to redefine the hermeneutics on the dignity of the African people. Africans and their entire cultural heritage were portrayed as barbaric; local peoples were said to inhabit a dark continent where death and satanic worship prevailed. Evangelization became a process that excluded dialogue. Africans were

¹³ Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa*, 63

to embrace Christianity and/or face servitude in the plantations. The greed that was cultivated by the Europeans did not make any distinction between baptized Africans and Africans who refused to embrace Christianity.

The nineteenth century saw a radical shift in the method used for evangelizing the continent. This time around, it was done with the barrel of the gun. The primary goal of the European powers was to control the sources of raw materials for their industries at home and in the plantations in the Americas. The slave trade was now becoming a burden commercially and socially. European nations, under serious pressure from abolitionists, outlawed slavery in all their territories at different periods. Britain, an imperialist nation at this time, used the pretense of outlawing the slave trade in Africa to overthrow many kings and leaders who refused to become protectorates of the British monarch. The Benin Kingdom in Nigeria was an example. The king, Oba Ovonranmwen, was overthrown in 1889 after engaging in a lost war with the British over the issue of his kingdom's independence from external powers. He was accused of continuing the slave trade even after it had been abolished and was exiled to Calabar in present-day southern Nigeria. He died in exile in 1914. Jaja of Opobo, the ruler of the Kingdom of Opobo in southern Nigeria, was also deposed under the pretense of him engaging in slave trade.

In 1860, the Holy See established the Apostolic Vicariate of the Two Guineas and Senegambia with a seat in Gabon. This vicariate covered all of Nigeria and many other countries. In 1884 the apostolic prefecture of Upper Niger was created which covered Northern Nigeria. And in 1889 the apostolic prefecture of Lower Niger was created, and it covered all of eastern and southern Nigeria. With the creation of these prefectures, midwestern and western Nigeria fell under the jurisdiction of the Vicariate of the Two

Guineas and Senegambia. Both the vicariate of the Two Guineas and Senegambia and the prefecture of Upper Niger were given to the Society of African Missions (SMA) to evangelize. The prefecture of Lower Niger was given to the Holy Ghost Fathers. These two religious communities were French congregations. Initially, these communities only sent French missionaries to Nigeria, but with the surge in missionary interest in the Irish Catholic Church, Irish missionaries gradually replaced their French counterparts.

As a colonial and imperialistic strategy, the evangelization of Nigerians and other Africans during the colonial period intended to make the people docile, facilitating their acceptance of the new reality of being subjugated and ruled by foreign powers. Most of the Christian missionaries had no real power to effect a change in the colonial policies of their secular counterparts. However, they enjoyed the vestiges of power from such policies. They treated the people as infants with inferior intellectual abilities. A few missionaries tried to be faithful to their calling by embracing the Nigerian cultures. These missionaries were also limited because they failed to speak truth to the structures of power which, paradoxically, protected their own place and work in the country.¹⁴

The bias of the missionaries and the colonial agents emerges in the accounts describing the religious heritage of the people. The indigenous religions were simply referred to as fetishism.¹⁵ No serious attempt was made to engage them. This is not surprising because it would be a contradiction to affirm the religious truths found in these indigenous religions and still insist on the people's conversion to the Catholic faith. Also, the European sense of superiority over other people and cultures was at its peak during

¹⁴See Elizabeth Isichei, *The Religious Traditions of Africa: A History* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2004), 153

¹⁵ See "Upper and Lower Nigeria," in <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11073c.htm> (accessed March 30, 2013).

this period. Nothing good could be found in the cultures of the conquered people. They simply had to embrace the European way of life.

The dogged determination of many of the missionaries has yielded some tangible fruits in the continent. In Nigeria for example, Christians make up almost half of the population. The Catholic Church has a significant presence in the country. As of 2005, there were around 18.9 million baptized Catholics in the country, which is 15% of the population.¹⁶ The number is growing everyday. Currently, there are nine archdioceses, forty-three dioceses, and two apostolic vicariates in Nigeria.¹⁷ Also, the country has produced four cardinals. One is dead; two have retired; and one is the Archbishop of Abuja Archdiocese, which is also the capital of the country. On Sundays, the Catholic churches are filled with members. Priests have a very hectic schedule in the country. Most of them do not have days off or annual leave because of the pastoral work they are engaged in. There are thousands of junior and senior seminarians in the seminaries in the country. Most of the dioceses have junior seminaries. There are numerous religious communities for men and women, and they have hundreds if not thousands of their members in initial and ongoing formation. There are thousands of parishes and mass centers in the country.

Though the Catholic missionaries came late to Nigeria during the second phase of evangelization of the country during the nineteenth century, their strategy of evangelization eventually led to their dominant presence in parts of the country. As noted by Felix K. Ekechi, the policies of providing Western medicine for the sick especially during

¹⁶ See BBC NEWS, "Factfile: Roman Catholics Around the World," April 1, 2005, in <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4243727.stm#nigeria> (accessed March 30, 2013). The population of Catholics has remained virtually the same from the 2009 data. See [www.wikipedia.org, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholicism_in_Nigeria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholicism_in_Nigeria) (accessed January 10, 2014).

¹⁷ For the names of the archdioceses, dioceses, and vicariates in Nigeria see Conference of Catholic Bishops of Nigeria, "Dioceses According to their Ecclesiastical Provinces," in <http://www.cbcn-ng.org/dioceses.php> (accessed March 30, 2013).

the 1890 dysentery epidemic along with providing the Western school system helped to consolidate the Catholic presence in the country. The Catholic missionaries mystified the practice of Western medicine and made the people believe that their Christian God as practiced by the Catholic Church was responsible for the cure of the sick they treated. Nigerians who encountered these missionaries were convinced of their mystical powers and embraced the Catholic faith at the expense of both the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and other Protestant churches that were already present in Nigeria.¹⁸

Since the independence of the nation from Britain in 1960, the Catholic hierarchy has played a very prominent role in attempting to serve as the “conscience” of the nation. In the 1990s, the Nigerian bishops’ conference invited Catholics to pray for the nation and work towards the eradication of corruption. This led to the composition of “the Prayer against Corruption” which was recited at every mass celebrated in the country for many years. Whether this prayer has helped to reduce corruption in the country is known only to God. However, what the average Nigerian sees today is a sophisticated practice of corruption in all spheres of the national life.

Though Katongole argues for a constructive role for the Catholic Church in shaping the destiny of the African continent, there is a caveat concerning the role of the Catholic Church in Nigeria. The next section of this paper will explore the paradoxes and contradictions faced by the church even as it tries to live above the vices plaguing the nation.

¹⁸ For a detailed treatment of this topic see Felix K. Ekechi, “The Holy Ghost Fathers in Eastern Nigeria, 1885-1920: Observations on Missionary Strategy,” *African Studies Review*, vol. 15 no. 2 (Sept. 1972), 217 – 239.

Some Vices Plaguing the Catholic Church in Nigeria Today

I began this paper by stating that it is acutely relevant for the people of Nigeria to engage their past and commit themselves to not repeating the mistakes that shaped the past. In this section, one can begin to see how the vices of the past have gradually resurfaced both in the life of the nation and within the Catholic community in the country. Tribalism, lack of accountability both in the nation and the church, clericalism, and classism continue to plague the nation both in the secular and religious spheres. To have a better understanding of how these vices continue to limit the people of the nation, it is proper I engage each one of them briefly.

Nigeria is blessed with diversity. There are many religions in the country that contribute to the rich worldview of the people. Along with the many Christian denominations, there is a very visible presence of Islam and some of its offshoots in the country. There are also Indigenous Christian Churches that have been able to create a unique Christian message and identity that blends elements of the Christian religion with those from the Indigenous Traditional Religions. Nigerians who were disappointed by the racist and discriminatory policies of the mainstream Christian denominations founded some of these Indigenous Christian Churches during the colonial era. Others continue to come into existence due to efforts by their founders to address the peculiar situations faced by Nigerians.

One thing is certain: religion is a very viable business in Nigeria today. Pastors of these Christian Churches including some Catholic priests continue to preach the prosperity gospel, promising the people that the time for their liberation from illness, poverty, and misfortune is at hand. In turn, the people donate the little money they have to the churches.

The pastors most often control the churches' finances, and many of them continue to enrich themselves. Some of them now boast of having private jets when an average member of their church cannot afford to own a bicycle. In this sense I would agree with Katongole that it would be erroneous to suggest that these Christian churches will be the liberating agents in the country.¹⁹ Churches can only be transformative in the Nigerian society when they embrace their calling of speaking truth to all that is wrong in the country. They must embrace the poor truly and define themselves based on their plight.

Just as the political elites of the country continue to steal public funds while ignoring the poverty faced by the majority of the population, these pastors that preach prosperity gospel have failed to embrace a life of simplicity. The option for the poor simply does not make sense to them. In fact, the people are told that poverty is a punishment from God. Such messages can derail the Christian denominations from truly living out the simplicity of the gospel. The people are given a sense of false hope, believing that if they just pray harder and contribute to the church they will become wealthy. I fear that the day may come when the people will rise up and do away with Christianity because it has failed to speak truth to their situations.

Nigeria's history cannot fully be grasped unless one takes into consideration the role tribal identities continue to play in shaping the past, present, and future of the country. Unfortunately, this beautiful reality has now become a source of embarrassment for the people. Since the colonial period, tribalism has been used to serve the agenda of the few to the detriment of the good of the entire nation. The British used it as a form of divide-and-rule policy to conquer the people of the nation. For example, Hausas in the north were

¹⁹ Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, 49 - 50.

encouraged to view southerners as enemies because the south spearheaded the drive for independence from Britain.

Tribalism has become a national and collective disease plaguing the entire nation and the different institutions within it. Although it transcended tribalistic policies at various points in the past, the Catholic Church has become a viable agent for fostering tribalism in the religious sphere. Some dioceses now have an unwritten rule which bars members from certain ethnic groups from joining them to train for the priesthood. For example, in the late 1980s the Archbishop of Benin City had a policy of refusing seminary entrance to first male children from the Igbo tribe. Even if they were born and raised in Benin City, members of the Igbo tribe who applied to enter the seminary were refused entrance and told to apply to the dioceses in their own tribal areas. The unifying sense of national identity seems to be alien to those making these decisions.

Tribalism has become even more prominent when new bishops are appointed by Rome for the dioceses in Nigeria. In some of the dioceses like Benin City and Warri, there are many tribal groups within the diocesan territories. Some of the tribes feel their bishops have marginalized them, especially when the bishops come from another ethnic group. These complaints cannot be easily dismissed. In its nearly two centuries of existence, the Archdiocese of Benin City has never ordained someone from the Owan tribes. There have been candidates from these tribes in formation, but they were always asked to withdraw before ordination. In recent years, the Binis, who make up the majority of the territories covered by the archdiocese, felt their interests were not represented by the policies of the former archbishop, Patrick E. Ekpu. In 2011 a new archbishop was appointed for the Archdiocese of Benin City who happens to come from the Igbo tribe. Many of the Binis

(both priests and laity) protested against the appointment and took the archdiocese to court to stop the installation of the new archbishop. Their complaint? They deserve to have a bishop from their own tribe to run the archdiocese. Also in 2012, a new bishop was appointed to Ahiara diocese in eastern Nigeria. Though he is an Igbo, he comes from a different sub-ethnic group of the Igbo tribe. Most of the priests, especially the consultors of the diocese, have refused to allow him to take possession of his diocese and cathedral seat. Their reason reflects a tribalistic logic: Rome should choose one of their own to be their bishop. The local clergy have gone so far as accusing Cardinal Francis Arinze of purposefully influencing recent appointments of bishops in Nigeria. Many of these new appointments, whether coincidentally or purposefully, come from Arinze's sub-ethnic group. Cardinal Arinze is from Anambra State, and Ahiara diocese is in Imo State. These two states are part of the states that make up the entire Igbo population in Nigeria. However, the respective citizens of these states have little, if any, dialectical differences even though they are all part of the Igbo tribe of Nigeria.

On the parochial level, tribalism has taken hold of ecclesial life. A few years ago, the former pastor of the parish I grew up in refused to recognize the election of some of the officers elected by the youth group simply because they were from a different ethnic group. He openly told the youth group to elect officers who come from the main tribe in the archdiocese (the Binis).

The tribal biases operative in the diocesan setting also play out among religious communities. Some religious groups intentionally refuse to accept members of a certain tribe simply because of the cultural biases against members of those tribes. In 2011, I was invited to engage members of one of the provinces of a certain religious group in Nigeria

who refused to accept their new superior because he was from the Igbo tribe. The members also insisted that only members of the tribes within the territory of their province should be accepted into formation. My persistent intervention and reminder to them of the universal nature of the Catholic Church went unheeded. The heightened sense of tribalism and the reality of its practice both in church governance and ecclesial life has created a sense of distrust and suspicion among many in the Nigerian Catholic Church.

In the secular setting, tribalism is even more pronounced. To get a job in the government, even though one is very qualified for the position, one has to focus on the tribal connection one has with those hiring an applicant. This practice has undermined the national ethos of the country. Each state in the country has a policy of offering government jobs only to members of the tribes within the state. It is my humble view that this policy will never allow Nigeria to attain its full potential in the global stage.

Another illness plaguing both the religious and secular spheres in the country has to do with lack of accountability. Everyone knows today that Nigeria as a nation has a lot of work to do for its leaders to be truly accountable to the people. I would like to focus on the religious sphere.

The theological view that states that the church is a separate community beyond the sinful world has been taken too far by the church's hierarchy; the recent revelation of sexual scandal plaguing the Catholic Church globally buttresses this view. The hierarchy sees itself as not accountable to secular society and thus deals with sexual scandals in its own way, which has proven to be grossly deficient. One cannot 'clean house' when one is part of the dirt in the house. In the Nigerian context, the situation is not different. The Catholic hierarchy in the country sees the church as above secular society. Members of the

hierarchy conceal the truth not just from secular authorities but also from the laity. Recently, the former archbishop of the Archdiocese of Benin City, Richard Burke, S.P.S, was involved in a sexual scandal with a minor. Throughout the process of his removal and replacement, the members of the laity of the archdiocese were not told the truth about the situation. They were simply told that the archbishop was on sick leave. Some members of the laity found out through the internet and not through their pastors.

Another vice in the life of the Catholic Church in Nigeria is materialism. In the past, priests and religious were treated with respect even by the hoodlums in society. Many examples abound where in the past armed robbers stopped robbing people because of the presence of a priest. Today, the story is different; priests and religious are now targets of armed robbers because they are seen to be wealthy people. While the citizens of the country continue to experience poverty and deprivation, many priests and religious, especially the young ones, are living flamboyant lives.

In *The Sacrifice of Africa*, Katongole, calls for a change of direction for the Catholic Church in Africa. I want to opine in the next section of this paper some points that may lead to transformation in Nigeria.

Changing the Narrative of the Catholic Church in Nigeria

Though the church is deeply affected by the ills of tribalism, it ought to engage in serious reflection and challenge itself first before engaging the nation. Bishops, priests, religious, and laity must abandon the tribal narrative. They can begin this process by deliberately engaging in a year-long conference throughout the dioceses in the nation and allow experts in cultural studies/dynamics to engage them on how to be church without the limitations of tribalism. One may wonder why I opine for a year-long conference. The

impact of tribalism in the ecclesial life in the country cannot simply be eradicated by few lectures or homilies. The psyche of the members of the Catholic Church in the country must be transformed gradually and deliberately.

Above, I mentioned that accountability seems to be lacking in the Catholic Church in Nigeria, especially among its leaders. It is my view that the formative process currently practiced in the seminaries and houses of formation seems to be responsible for this. Seminarians are trained in seminaries where most of their formators are priests, and they are made to see themselves as special and above the laity whose members are considered uneducated in matters related to theology. Due to this superiority complex inculcated in seminary studies, ordained priests see themselves as not accountable to the laity. A concrete way this mentality can change is by opening up the seminaries to the members of the laity who are interested in studying theology. Having lay theologians as one's academic companions can gradually change the psyche of the future priests in the country. I should mention that currently the Spiritans and Dominicans have created programs for the laity in their institutions in the country. This policy should extend to diocesan seminaries, which continue to embrace an unhealthy clericalism.

Borrowing Katongole's words, the church in Nigeria "has to sacrifice the elegance and magisterial authority that comes with distance [from the realities faced by the people it evangelizes]. It has to come down within the confused mess of everydayness and risk becoming less and less churchly, so as to nurture and gestate...a different world right here, which is what the new future in [Nigeria] must be about."²⁰ Furthermore, "the church's mission is to proclaim the good news of God's new future, to sow and nurture the seeds of

²⁰ Katongole, *The Sacrifice of African: A Political Theology for Africa*, 144. Words in parenthesis are mine.

the new creation, and to point to its signs. In doing so, the church somehow loses itself - that is, points less and less at itself, so that the full reality of God's new creation, which exists beyond the church, might blossom."²¹ As the present Holy Father, Pope Francis, has reiterated, the Catholic Church ought to be seen in words and actions as a church for the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed.²² Ostentatious show of wealth by the ordained clergy is a scandal to the Christian community in Nigeria.

The church must be seen as simple and on the side of the poor. The current craving for material wealth among many of the ordained is detrimental to the legitimacy of the church in the life of the nation. Corruption has become a defining marker of the country. Unfortunately, it is also becoming part of the church's identity as well. If the priests and bishops do not see the need to embrace a life of simplicity, then I would opine that it is the obligation of the members of the laity to make sure their priests live simply. Concrete steps can be taken to ensure this works. Dioceses can begin by outlawing the practice of each priest having his own personal car since this has led to unhealthy competition among the priests to see who will have the most expensive car. Dioceses can adopt the practice of providing a car for the parish that the priests can use for their ministry.

The problem of materialism is currently causing grave irritation among the lay members of the church. The general complaint one hears in Nigerian parishes is that pastors and bishops focus on endless fundraising rather than preach the gospel. I have witnessed many instances where the doors of a church are locked on Sundays to prevent

²¹ Ibid, 145.

²² Pope Francis, *Apostolic Journey to Rio de Janeiro on the Occasion of the XXVIII World Youth Day: Mass with Bishops, Priests, Religious and Seminarians. Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis* (Cathedral of San Sebastian, Rio de Janeiro, Saturday, July 27, 2013) in http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130727_gmg-omelia-rioclero_en.html (accessed January 11, 2014).

those who can't pay the parish levies from participating in the Sunday Eucharistic celebrations. To enter the church and participate at Mass in these instances, the lay members are told to present their receipts for payments of their parish levies. This is an abuse of the rights of the lay members of the church.

Conclusion

While one cannot deny the fact that Christianity in all its denominations has been an effective tool in shaping the history of Nigeria, it has not always been faithful to the ideals of Jesus Christ. As Nigeria continues to engage its history and build a society where religious tolerance is the norm, the Catholic Church in the country must see this as a moment of grace and an opportunity to change. It ought to engage in a serious self-reflection and have the courage to speak truth first to itself and then to the nation. The Nigerian Catholic hierarchy cannot be an agent of transformation in the nation when it is in need of its own transformation. The church must be seen as simple and embracing the option for the poor. Its hierarchy must be seen as living simply in their actions both publicly and privately. Openness ought to be the policy for all with authority in the church. No one is more important, whether lay or ordained. Above all, courage in the Lord who calls all to embrace a life of truth and authenticity ought to be the marker by which the Nigerian Catholic Church is evaluated if it is to be truly relevant in our time and in the future of Nigeria's collective history. It is most appropriate to restate the wise words of our current Holy Father, Pope Francis, as words relevant to the Catholic Church in Nigeria:

I believe that it is important to rekindle constantly an awareness of our divine vocation, which we often take for granted in the midst of our many daily responsibilities: as Jesus says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (Jn 15:16). This means returning to the source of our calling. For this reason, a Bishop, a priest, a consecrated person, a seminarian cannot be "forgetful": it would mean losing the vital link to that first moment of our journey. Ask for

the grace, ask the Virgin for the grace, she who had a good memory; ask for the grace to preserve the memory of this first call. We were called by God and we were called to be with Jesus (cf. Mk 3:14), united with him. In reality, this living, this abiding in Christ marks all that we are and all that we do. It is precisely this “life in Christ” that ensures our apostolate is effective, that our service is fruitful: “I appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit be authentic ” (cf. Jn 15:16). It is not creativity, however pastoral it may be, or meetings or planning that ensure our fruitfulness, even if these are greatly helpful. But what assures our fruitfulness is our being faithful to Jesus, who says insistently: “Abide in me and I in you” (Jn 15:4). And we know well what that means: to contemplate him, to worship him, to embrace him, in our daily encounter with him in the Eucharist, in our life of prayer, in our moments of adoration; it means to recognize him present and to embrace him in those most in need. “Being with” Christ does not mean isolating ourselves from others. Rather, it is a “being with” in order to go forth and encounter others. Here I wish to recall some words of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She said: “We must be very proud of our vocation because it gives us the opportunity to serve Christ in the poor. It is in the favelas, ... in the villas miseria, that one must go to seek and to serve Christ. We must go to them as the priest presents himself at the altar, with joy” (Mother’s Instructions, I, p. 80). Jesus is the Good Shepherd; he is our true treasure. Please, let us not erase Jesus from our lives! Let us ground our hearts ever more in him (cf. Lk 12:34).²³

I conclude this article hoping that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Nigeria will take seriously the advice of the Holy Father. The Catholic Church must rediscover the prophetic voice it once had during the early stages of Nigeria’s independence from Britain. Tribalism, nepotism, corruption, and materialism will only lead to a negative end.

²³ Ibid.

"My Bible, your Qur'an: Keeping Religion out of Nigerian Politics"

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A review essay of Iheanyi M. Enwerem's *Crossing the Rubicon: A Socio-Political Analysis of Political Catholicism in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: BookBuilders Editions Africa, 2010).

In order to fully appreciate the depth of scholarship by Dr. Enwerem in *Crossing the Rubicon*²⁴, this review attempts to deconstruct the Nigerian Catholic Church as one player among others in the political landscape of Nigeria. Viewed from this trajectory, the book is an audacious effort by a clergyman on a topic that few have dared to explore.²⁵ As with other African countries where the enthronement of democratic governments has yet to deliver the intended benefits,²⁶ the Catholic Church and other religious groups are inextricably thrust in the middle of the country's democratic process. This paper analyzes whether such political involvement by the Nigerian Catholic Church is justified, and how to tackle the attendant concerns between the church and the political process. Related to the involvement of the Nigerian Catholic Church with the democratic process, this paper will also examine other problems within the Church, including the lack of accountability, truth,

²⁴ Iheanyi M. Enwerem, *Crossing the Rubicon: A Socio-Political Analysis of Political Catholicism in Nigeria* (Ibadan; Nigeria: Book Builders, 2010).

²⁵ On the role of the Catholic Church as well as other religious groups in the political process in Africa, see Jeff Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa* (Nairobi: Zed Books, 1996); Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998). Dr. Enwerem offers a unique perspective since he is both a Nigerian priest and an insider to the account of events he explores in the book. His prophetic voice echoes Edmund Burke's dictum: "all that is necessary for evil to triumph is for the good men to do nothing" (Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (London: J.D. Dodsley, 1770)). The banning of Dr. Enwerem's book in all Catholic dioceses in Nigeria reflects a lack of transparency and sound judgment by the church hierarchy, both of which must grow if the church is to fulfill her commission.

²⁶ Among other benefits, a participatory democratic government promotes the rule of law and equitable distribution of a nation's resources, while fostering a deep sense of patriotism among the citizenry.

and moral probity displayed by the hierarchy of the Church. These problems call for urgent attention if the Church will continue to be the beacon of light and hope for its adherents. The thesis of this review essay is that the Nigerian political climate is not conducive for the church to forge a healthy partnership with the political class given the socio-cultural and ethnic composition of the country.

At the center of Dr. Enwerem's book are religion and politics. Is it possible to view man's quest for meaning and fulfillment in life through the lens of his political environment? Or can his political environment help him discover his purpose in life? George Washington in his "Farewell Address" in 1796 noted:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports ... Let it simply be asked where is the security for prosperity, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instrument of investigation in Courts of Justice.²⁷

In the context of the above assertion, the Nigerian Catholic Church has played dual roles in guiding her followers to search for life's meaning and attempting to re-shape the political landscape through some of its programs. Among the several definitions of religion, Martin E. Marty offers the following. "The *gyre* of Religion represents attempts by humans to hold things together conceptually and to aid them in the practice and walk of life...they want to find a center that holds. In the pursuit...people aspire to deal with the ultimate, the whole, the unum, the All."²⁸

²⁷ W.B. Allen, ed. *George Washington: A Collection* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1988), 521-22. Although the above quote speaks of the uniqueness of the birth of the United States, the fact remains that religion is a strong foundation of morality in society.

²⁸ Martin Marty quoted in Stephen M. Feldman, Ed., *Law & Religion: A Critical Anthology* (New York: NYU Publishers, 2000), 26. As used by A.G Stock, one of Yeats's commentators,

Yinger also defines religion as “the way humankind deals with its “ultimate concern.”²⁹ From the foregoing definitions, it is logical that one who leads another in the pursuit and fulfillment of those life’s goals will most likely be involved in how one acquires and preserves political power in society. This is the position the Catholic Church in Nigeria has taken. Assuming that such a role is possible based on how politics is understood in Nigeria – namely a zero-sum struggle to wrestle and hold on to power at all cost - the religious leaders are yet to strike the right accord.

The pertinent question at this juncture becomes “what is it about politics in Nigeria that sullies the image and moral values of some leaders of the church and religious groups”? In practical terms, politics relates to the acquisition and application of power. In Nigeria, access to public office remains the quickest means of amassing stupendous wealth in a system that lacks accountability. Typical of other African countries, bribery, blackmail, and outright intimidation of opponents characterize political elections at all levels. Since Nigerian politicians are known to do whatever it takes to grab and hold on to power, one struggles to understand why some religious leaders continue to warm up to politicians rather than serve as watchdogs for the people they represent. The expression that “he who must dine with the devil must have a long spoon” suitably describes the attitude of Nigerian politicians in their power grab, and Dr. Enwerem sounds a note of caution to Catholic leaders on how to tread cautiously with politicians.³⁰ This book review argues that any relationship between the religious and political classes is flawed from its very

"gyre" or "spheres" is used as a symbol for all experience, such as the spheres of religion and law. A.G. Stock, *W. B. Yeats: His Poetry and Thought* (1964), 186-87.

²⁹ J. Milton Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971), 7.

³⁰ Iheanyi Enwerem, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 68. In summary, politicians cannot be trusted to keep their promises. They say or do whatever is necessary to achieve their political ends and have no remorse changing courses as circumstances change.

foundation because both are contradictory in terms and different in their values.³¹ And whenever conflict ensues, state leaders often prevail over religious leaders.³² In turn, religious leaders are tempted to compromise their values by asking or receiving bribes or other material favors from the political class. Sadly, this picture of cronyism and the subjugation of Nigerian religious leaders feed the unbridled quest for power by Nigerian leviathans.³³ Dr. Enwerem offers a detailed account of such relationships between politicians and some religious leaders which demonstrate the lack of sound judgment or outright betrayal of the high moral standards expected of such leaders. Consequently, it will be difficult for religious leaders who warm up to the politicians to not compromise their moral values. Those who hold their values either eschew politics or become critics of government. What is indeed disturbing is the fact that the Church has tacitly ignored the cases of their hierarchy who make the Church look bad in the public eye. It is high time the

³¹ Among other differences, “religion deals with the supernatural and centers around institutions such as synagogues, churches, and mosques; politics concerns the manner in which society organizes and governs itself and maintains order. Whereas religion is often a private, personal experience involving spiritual matters, politics is a public expression of society’s wishes. Whereas religion sees temporal existence as preparation for higher spiritual purposes, politics regard earthly existence as an end in itself”. See John W. Storey and Glenn H. Utter, *Religion and Politics* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2002), 2.

³² Haynes captures the capitulation of spiritual authority to that of the state through an anecdote concerning church and state relations in Congo. Archbishop Joseph Malula of Kinshasa addressed a message to President Mobutu Sese Seko in the following words. “We will loyally apply the laws you establish. You can count on us in your work of restoring peace to which all so ardently aspire” (Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa*, 110). The fact that Malula was also Mobutu's fiercest critic in the early 1970s explain the ambivalence that characterizes the relationship between some religious leaders and the political class in Nigeria as well as other African countries. Some start out as government critics but then get bought out. Others get too close with the politicians until they begin to lose the support of their base; then they turn into government critics. In either situation, the politicians come out on top as such religious leaders end up compromising the cause they want to advance by receiving gifts or bribes from the same politicians.

³³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. Ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). In *Leviathan*, Hobbes argues for a social contract and a rule by absolute sovereign who must control civil, military, judicial, and ecclesiastical powers.

Church started taking decisive actions against such bad eggs within their fold before she loses her appeal in the eyes of her followers.

To better understand the challenges facing the Nigerian Catholic Church in its involvement in the democratization process in Nigeria, a review of the country's ethno-cultural and political framework is apposite. Accordingly, chapter 2 of "Crossing the Rubicon" should have been preceded by a review of the pre-colonial political atmosphere in Nigeria and how the colonial master, Great Britain, altered the existing order upon their arrival.

Prior to the 1885-1915 European scramble and partition of Africa, many foreign expeditions to that part of the world had laid the groundwork for the religious, political and administrative structures the colonists met upon arrival. The Christian missionaries that accompanied the expeditions came to evangelize the people. Other groups were driven by sheer curiosity to explore the unknown world. Yet others were interested in promoting long-distance trade in African raw materials to feed the growing Western demand for natural resources buoyed by the Industrial Revolution in 19th-century Europe. Accordingly, different missionary groups introduced different Christian denominations in different parts of what later came to be known as Nigeria. As Dr. Enwerem points out in his book, the Roman Catholic Church was not the first to come into contact with the Nigerian people. Similarly, the first effort by Irish Catholic missionaries was not successful. When other missionary groups later succeeded in planting the Catholic Church in Nigeria, it took root in the eastern part of Nigeria. In the account of Dr. Enwerem, before the arrival of the Catholic Church in Nigeria, the Protestant church had already established a sphere of influence along the western coast of Nigeria, particularly around Lagos and adjoining hinterlands. In

the northern region, Islam was the dominant religion. It is a fact therefore that the history of religion in Nigeria predates the country's independence and in fact predates the late 19th-century scramble for Africa. Upon his arrival in 1906, Lord Lugard, then British colonial administrator for Nigeria, was able to forge a mutually beneficial arrangement not only with the predominantly Christians in the South, but also with Moslem leaders in the North. And although Islam was seen as a challenge to both the missionaries and the colonial masters at that time, subsequent colonial administrators managed to work out an arrangement with them.³⁴

The preceding socio-political review indicates that in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious (Christian, Islamic, and African Traditional Religion) society such as Nigeria, the admixture of faith and politics is inescapable. At the same time, such an exercise is tantamount to a dangerous adventure. Even different denominations of the same religion cannot avoid constant maneuvering for power and dominance in political issues. Similarly, any effort to strike a balance between what is reasonable and what conduct is morally proper will be difficult as each side perceives access to political power both as a matter of strategy and survival. Dr. Enwerem therefore rightly concludes that the dominant position of the Nigerian Catholic Church is not without the envy of other religious groups such as the Protestant churches. In some ways the primacy of Catholicism in southern Nigeria echoes the dominance of Islam in the northern part of the country (and throughout Nigeria due to the northern-dominated military's hold on power). Also, as a multi-ethnic political society, the political class always seeks the support of the dominant religious leaders (and through them their followers) to legitimize their claim to power. The religious leaders in

³⁴ Jeff Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa*, 2-3.

turn court the politicians to ensure continued favorable government policies to advance their interests. To assert that compromise will often be the key to any relationship between the religious leaders and the political class is to state the obvious, but such compromises can become problematic when they threaten the core values of the religion.

In light of the composition of the various religious groups - the Catholic Church dominating in the eastern region, Protestant churches in the west, and Islam in the north - it was natural that each religious group will have more followers in their regions. Similarly, the demographic dominance of Catholics in the eastern region implies that there would be more eastern Nigerian clergy and hierarchy. Initially, such demography had no serious implications politically or otherwise both within and outside the church. However, that changed after the successive military coups that toppled the democratic government of Nigeria and led to the Biafran civil war (1967-1970). Those military governments were dominated by predominantly Northern Muslims who began to dismantle some of the accomplishments of the Catholic Church. The civil war further “polarized” (although “politicized” might be more apt) the hierarchy of the Nigerian Catholic Church. As pointed out by Dr. Enwerem, the experience of the civil war left some bitter memories within the Nigerian Catholic Church. Both the congregations and the clergy from the eastern region felt that they were not properly treated by the national hierarchy of the Church. To its credit, the Church was able to manage the ill will that most of the clergy from the Eastern part of the country felt against the national leadership of the church. The relationship however remained somewhat strained. Coupled with the anti-Catholic disdain of the Islamic/Northern controlled government at the center and Protestant Churches in the west, it did not come as a surprise that subsequent government policies sought to

dismantle most of the church's undertakings.³⁵ It was just a matter of time for the people of the eastern region who dominated the Catholic Church to see those reactions as personal attacks based on their ethnicity as Igbos. All these factors combined to open the door to ethnicity in the Church. There was no better way of explaining all the intrigues in fielding staff positions in various agencies of the Church, such as the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) and Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), other than through the logic of ethnicity and politicization of the Church.³⁶

The foregoing review of the circumstances surrounding the history of the Catholic Church in Nigeria sets the stage for its rise to political prominence in contemporary Nigeria. The preceding paragraph also sets the background for the interaction between the Church and political class in Nigeria, and particularly how such relationship is expectedly plagued by all sorts of problems. Besides lack of accountability and transparency, Dr. Enwerem also identified moral decadence in the Church as some clergy “wine and dine” with the politicians, thus compromising their moral grounds to stand for the truth and to speak out against the government when necessary.³⁷

Dr. Enwerem properly identified the problem, but I doubt if his articulation of the solutions can work. Either the Church lacks the integrity to deal with erring clergy, or the problem is not just typical of the Catholic Church of Nigeria, but one that trickles down from the central administration of the Catholic Church in Rome. In turn, it may be that the solutions lies within the Nigerian society at large. Whatever the case, I would part ways

³⁵ Dr. Enwerem aptly articulates how the post-civil war Nigerian military governments took over schools from churches – an area where the Nigerian Catholic Church made a landmark accomplishment.

³⁶ Enwerem, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 290-304.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 260

with Dr. Enwerem's argument that the Church deserves to be an active participant in the democratization process of Nigeria.³⁸

Change is hard to come by in any political system because those in authority prefer to maintain the status quo. Most revolutions in 19th-century Europe were championed by the people against their autocratic monarchs. In modern times, interest groups tend to possess better platforms to mobilize the people into action and bring about social changes. In deference to Dr. Enwerem, the Catholic Church is one such powerful interest group. It is also correct that the Second Vatican Council calls on the church to be a beacon of light to the followers, which can be interpreted to imply the church's involvement in the social lives of the people, including political affairs of the state.³⁹ At the same time, there is something wrong with how the church in developing countries carries out such Vatican injunctions. For instance, churches in the West recognize and apply the principles of separation of state and religion better than in Nigeria or Africa as a whole. Arguably, the more a society enthrones democratic principles, the less likely it is that the church will meddle with the political process, choosing instead to use lobby groups that share their values to propagate their message. One could note here the recent partnership between the U.S. Catholic Church and allied pro-life groups against the United States federal government mandate requiring all employers (including religious organizations) to provide morning-after pills

³⁸ Ibid., 316-34.

³⁹ D.O. Conkle, "Toward a General Theory of the Establishment Clause," *Northwestern University Law Review*, 82 (1988): 1113. According to Conkle, "a person's religious belief cannot meaningfully be separated from the person himself: they are also who he is, why he exists, and how he should relate to the world around him." On Vatican II's call for Catholics to engage modern society, see Pope Paul VI, "Pastoral Constitution On the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium Et Spes," The Vatican Archive, December 7, 1965, accessed December 19, 2013, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

and contraceptives to their employees.⁴⁰ The Catholic Church and other religious organizations spoke with one voice in successfully opposing the government. It is unheard of in the West to read of governments bribing religious leaders in order to support government programs. The system in Nigeria is a little different and understandably so due to the weak democratic structures that allow politicians to act like absolute sovereigns. In the circumstance, it is normal for the Church to feel tempted to jump in and champion the cause of the people notwithstanding the consequences.

As part of the solution to the problems, Dr. Enwerem suggests empowering the Justice, Democracy and Peace Commission (JDPC) in its political sensitization programs based upon its track record of excellence in monitoring past elections in the country. I would argue, however, that the problem goes beyond JDPC. It is possible that the Nigerian Catholic Church has a misconception of the task it is called to by the Second Vatican Council. It could also be that the approach by the Church hierarchy is totally flawed. Rather than get entangled with the political class and all their worms, the church hierarchy can fund outside independent pressure groups to champion her cause, or even educate and energize their followers at all levels to be involved in the political process as change agents in a corrupt system. To borrow a biblical example, the appointment of the seven deacons in the Acts of the Apostles is illustrative of the role the hierarchy of the Catholic Church should embody (Acts 6:1-7).⁴¹ The twelve apostles charged the disciples with the

⁴⁰ See, *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA)*, Public Law 111-148-MAR. 23, 2010.

⁴¹ In Acts of the Apostles Ch. 6, the number of the disciples was increasing with the addition of the Hellenistic Jews. Their widows complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food. Accordingly, the twelve apostles gathered the whole group and asked them to appoint seven men to oversee their welfare, while the apostles would continue to give their attention to “prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:3, NIV).

responsibility for appointing the seven deacons so that they (the apostles) could concentrate on the ministry of the word. Decidedly, the apostles did not avoid what had become a political issue of their day, yet they did not become the seven deacons themselves. By quickly assembling the disciples together and letting them deal with the problem, the apostles refocused the debate on their mission and avoided unnecessary political entanglement. I believe that a similar attitude by the Nigerian Catholic Church will fix most of the problems in the church, while breeding a new crop of political class from among people who identify with the teachings of the church on issues that affect the people most.

Another way to address some of the concerns is for the Nigerian Catholic hierarchy to scrap all the politically-motivated administrative agencies and let them operate independently as corporations. That will subject their operations to the same standard of review that applies to corporate organizations and gradually reduce the number of clergy running political organizations. It is a trite aphorism that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. It is not possible to confer administrative powers on some clergy to run political operations like the JDPC or any other agency that connects directly with government and yet expect them to remain untainted. Dr. Enwerem conceded that the Church's canon law justice system cannot provide adequate deterrence to errant clergy.⁴² Yes, there are Catholic organizations in other parts of the world, and some clergy lead church-sponsored not-for-profit organizations, but the system of accountability and audit

⁴² Iheanyi Enwerem, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 323-24.

are totally different from what one finds in Nigeria. Catholic Social Services in North America such as Catholic Charities USA could serve as a model here.⁴³

At the heart of this issue lies the relationship between the state and religion. I concede that religion has the potential to exert positive influences in the political process if the leadership of the Church properly harnesses its influence over the followers. This can only be possible where the Church serves as the custodian of public moral and high ethical standards, rather than as an extension of every ill that plagues the general society.⁴⁴ Can religious leaders that live ostentatious lives truly exemplify the servant leadership that the Scripture preaches? Can such leaders galvanize the grassroots except by deception? Nigerians have seen how awfully bad politicians are. They do not need religious politicians, as that might be worse than lay politicians.⁴⁵ An increase in righteousness among the religious leaders will produce a groundswell of people of faith who can in turn impact the political process.⁴⁶ This is what the country badly needs, as opposed to religious leaders

⁴³ The Catholic Charities USA, "Ccusa 2011 Annual Survey Report," May 3, 2013, accessed May 3, 2013, https://www8.georgetown.edu/centers/cara/ccusa11_report/CCUSA_2011_Annual_Survey_Report.

⁴⁴ When the leaders of the Church lead by example, they set good standards of acceptable moral behavior in every sphere of life. They approve of people who share their values to run for political offices and mobilize their base to ensure they win elections. They also hold them accountable for promises they make during campaigns. That is why Iheanyi Enwerem argues that when the Church successfully manages its public relation image, it successfully influences public opinion and government policy (Enwerem, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 257-259).

⁴⁵ Going by the crop of some religious leaders in Nigeria today – those that use pulpit to enrich themselves and impoverish their followers – the last thing Nigerians need now is "religious politicians" who will claim the right to rule as "divine" right. This will only further deplete the country's spiritual, social and economic resources. Unless Nigeria first embraces a total spiritual revival, many leaders in the Church today will be worse than our regular politicians, because instead of using their position to elevate the plight of ordinary people, they will further hinder their spiritual and political democracy.

⁴⁶ To cite Proverbs 29:2, "when the righteous increase, the people rejoice, But when a wicked man rules, people groan" (NIV).

who are actively involved in the political process of the country. A multilateral society where the Christian religion dominates in the South and Islam in the North requires a clear separation of religion from state. Add to such a political structure a culturally diverse society, and the result is a society that has little in common. Only a strict separation can rid the country of the incessant political-cum religious conflicts that have plagued the nation since independence.⁴⁷ The results from nation-states that have intertwined politics and religion are too clear; Nigeria does not need to replicate their mistakes.⁴⁸ In the absence of true separation of state from religion, any program that the church executes will be viewed

⁴⁷ For the longest time, the Nigerian federal government has been dealing with the menace of the Boko Haram organization. The terrorist organization looks to establish Sharia law across Nigeria despite the country's multi-religious and multi-ethnic nature. Similarly, the organization's name (Boko Haram) which in Hausa literally translates to "anti-western education" is instructive. See Ayodele Mobolurin, "Amnesty for Boko Haram: The Conundrum of Northern Political Leaders and a Lesson for Nigeria," *Nigeriannews.com*, May 15, 2013, accessed June 30, 2013, http://www.nigeriannews.com/guest/Ayodele_Mobolurin_05_15_2013.php. Similarly, as mentioned by Dr. Enwerem, a past military leader of Northern extraction once attempted to lead the country to the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) despite the country's religious and ethnic diversity (Enwerem, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 258). These are indications that a clear separation of religion from the state should be the basis for a peaceful co-existence among the component groups in the country.

⁴⁸ Although Nigeria practices a federal system of government akin to the United States, and with a federal Constitution that is supposedly supreme, some states in Northern Nigeria have adopted the Islamic Code/Sharia laws as their legal system. The clerics in these states argue that Sharia law is the supreme law in their states, and in many cases they have successfully enlisted local governors to support this. The implication is that even Christians in those states are subject to Sharia law instead of the Criminal Code as provided for by the Constitution. Some politicians successfully run for state elections on the promise that they will introduce Sharia laws in their states even when it is obvious that they are not ardent Muslims and lack serious desire about enforcing Islamic ideals. Such is the example of Senator Yerima, who was formerly the Governor of Zamfara State and the first to introduce Sharia law in a state in Nigeria. Similarly in Anambra State in Eastern Nigeria, a predominantly Christian state, elections to political offices have been reduced to a Catholic and Anglican Church affair, instead of electing capable and God-fearing candidates. One can also blame the situation on the present level of economic, social, and cultural developments in the country. Many Western countries have passed through such a period in history (such as the United States and Canada). It is in light of the above picture that I argue in favor of separation of religion from politics, rather than the persistent destruction of lives and property that characterize the political process in different parts of the country, particularly in the North.

with suspicion by non-Christians. It is commendable that some non-Christians enlisted in the 2003 election monitoring by JDPC.⁴⁹ However, it will only be a matter of time before such volunteers are brainwashed by the political class or even other religious groups that such a program is aimed at promoting an exclusively Christian or a particular denominational agenda. Second, as terrorism expands in Nigeria, especially in the North, such church-sponsored programs will be the subject of militant attacks. A non-governmental, non-church sponsored organization will be best suited for political action programs in Nigeria today. The Nigerian Catholic Church has already laid the groundwork for other interest groups to get involved, so that the church can focus on her mission of evangelization.

This book review will not be complete without conceding that the problems Dr. Enwerem identified with some top hierarchy of the Catholic Church goes beyond the church. The moral decay, lack of truth and poor accountability in the church reflects a larger societal problem – a decaying society that is riddled by corruption and a misplaced value system. In Nigeria, money is everything today. It is almost a sin to be poor. Such is the value system in the country, so that even the churches and religious leaders are not spared this moral decay. Indeed, the whole society needs a cure. I would argue that some of the Nigerian Catholic clergy are not very different from their counterparts in the developed countries. Instead, the checks and balances infused into the political process in developed societies make it difficult for fraud and similar problems to thrive. When a salaried clergy can have a fat bank account or a fleet of expensive cars without ecclesiastical discipline, one can see the level of decay in the church. Similarly, a situation where politicians dole out

⁴⁹ Enwerem, *Crossing the Rubicon*, 258.

millions of naira as birthday gifts to priests portends serious concerns for the church and society. No wonder even some clergy and religious leaders compete to have access to the political class, despite the damage it bodes to their values.⁵⁰ The Nigerian Catholic Church should borrow a page from the Catholic Church of Canada and the U.S. for their higher level of transparency, particularly in regards to managing church finances and how they fraternize with the politicians.

Religion and politics are inseparable and so is the church which, as the custodian of public morality and spiritual wellness, is thrust in the middle of the political debate. Unfortunately, in an ethnically diverse society like Nigeria, involving the church in the democratic process will not work. To the contrary, it will breed all sorts of worms as Dr. Enwerem shows in *Crossing the Rubicon*. The weak democratic structure in Nigeria like in most African countries has shown that the church is not a progressive agent of democratic change, but actually part of the problem.⁵¹ A culture of corruption that characterizes the entire political process has found accomplices even within the church, making the latter a mini-theatre where corruption, lack of truth and accountability are displayed by some clergy and top hierarchy. In the circumstance, any meaningful change will come from a total overhaul of the political structure, infusing it with accountability and other

⁵⁰ Jean Francois Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (Longman, 1993). The argument by Bayart that “all want a place at the table so they can eat the spoils“ may reflect the norm in the typical African political process, but completely contradicts the Church's gospel and leadership vision.

⁵¹ Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa*, 110-111. According to Haynes, in Zaire, which resembles the picture of the Nigerian church, some senior figures in the Catholic Church were bought off by material inducements. Similarly, too, based on the role the Nigerian Catholic Church played during the Nigerian civil war, as well as the official reporting of the 2000 election result monitoring by the then-president of the Nigerian Catholic Bishop Conference, the institutional role of the church was perceived to be supportive of the temporal regime. Echoing Romans 13, Bishop Malula of Zaire described his support for President Mobutu Sese Seko in the following terms: “God is thought to give governments authority.”

democratic principles that offer checks and balance. A general society undergoing reforms will force reforms in the church as well. The task is daunting, but not insurmountable.

Where there is a will, there is a way.

"The challenges in the reported phenomenal growth of the Catholic Church in Africa"

By: Iheanyi Enwerem, O.P.

A Response to Anthony Ikwueme's review of *Crossing the Rubicon: A Socio-Political Analysis of Political Catholicism in Nigeria*.

The phenomenal growth of the Christian faith into Africa is no longer news as millions of hitherto African traditional religious adherents continue to opt for the faith. However, accompanying the boom is a widespread poverty of socio-political governance of the African peoples as well as in the material existence of a significant majority of Africans most of whom are Christians. This state of affairs has led some contemporary African socio-political analysts to question the so-called religious boom in the continent, leading them to ask: is the poverty of governance with its attendant endemic corruption that characterize African social-political order also a feature of African ecclesial life and leadership?

The book before us, *Crossing the Rubicon: A Socio-Political Analysis of Political Catholicism in Nigeria*, is an attempt to answer the preceding question, using the Catholic Church in the West African country of Nigeria as a case study. In the wake of a Nigerian Catholic Church whose leadership, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), dabbled into political activism or what I describe as "Political Catholicism," believing itself to be the "conscience of the [Nigerian] society" and "voice of the voiceless" members of the citizenry, one is led to wonder whether the Bishops have what it takes to credibly fulfill the prophetic role they have assigned to themselves. In the course of exploring this issue, I conclude that the Nigerian Church hierarchy is no better than its counterparts in the political class. If anything, the membership of the Church hierarchy and the Nigerian

political class are two sides of the same coin, leading one to believe that it is only a matter of time before the balloon that is presently the triumphalist Nigerian church will explode, especially as people gradually begin to see the rot in its internal structures and the hypocrisy of its leadership.

Crossing the Rubicon, among other things, arose out of the concern and urgency for a new generation of African Christian leaders that can meet the needs and challenges of the African Church in a more “prophetic” way. This has also been a matter of concern in some theological circles (cf. Gifford, P., 1998; Knighton, B. ed., 2009; Allen, J.L., 2011; Katongole, E., 2011; Iruoma, I.H., 2012). Some of the issues raised therein demonstrate the validity of the argument for teaching or studying theology in a manner that relates it to the responsibility of exemplary praxis towards socio-political change in society. This is because the goal of theological enterprise is not just a matter of passing on or defending the faith – as important as this may be – but also of producing human agents who can serve as vanguards for a new and better society in any given context. For, as faith without good works is dead (James 2:14-23), so too is a theological engagement that engenders no human agents for socio-political rebirth in society.

Obviously interested in analyzing the extent to which *Crossing the Rubicon* helps the African Church meet the challenges of being authentically (Catholic) Christian and African, a Nigerian-born lawyer and layman, Anthony Brown Ikwueme, decided to critically review the book. Beginning with an acknowledgement of my “audacious effort” to expose the problems within the Nigerian Church, he concurs regarding “the lack of accountability, truth, and moral probity by the hierarchy of the church,” problems which are emblematic of the wider Nigerian society. Therefore, he adds his voice to the “call for an urgent attention

if the Church will continue to be the beacon of light and hope for [its] adherents.” That is the extent to which he seems to agree with the book.

In disagreement with the author, Ikwueme questions the justification for the Nigerian Catholic Church to involve itself in politics or, more specifically, the country’s democratic process. His reasoning for this position is twofold. First, he believes that “the Nigerian political climate is not conducive for the church to forge a healthy partnership with the political class given the socio-cultural and ethnic composition of the country.” This leads him to question the need for a Justice, Development and Peace Committee (JDPC) by the Nigerian bishops and to further question the JDPC’s viability as a meaningful instrument to bring about the needed solutions to the ills that plague the Nigerian Church and society. Second, he believes that “any relationship between the religious and political class is flawed from its very foundation because both are contradictory in terms and different in their values.” For Ikwueme, religion deals with the supernatural – the “ultimate concern” of humankind – while politics is a public affair that expresses broader society’s wishes.

I beg to disagree with Ikwueme on three grounds. First, a cursory look into his line of thought reveals him to be essentially characteristic of Nigerian Catholics who perceive a Nigerian society and church that is riddled with serious socio-political problems but are slow to accept that it is the business of the Church to dabble into political activism. Second, his argument essentially borders on a misunderstanding of both the nature of the human person and his/her politics. The human person is a composition of two elements, the soul (spiritual) and the body (material/physical). As such, in their everyday life, the spiritual (vertical) and the material (horizontal) interests of human beings are intertwined; both

components are one and can best be understood as two sides of the same coin of human existence, so to speak. Hence, I argue, one cannot speak of human beings in a manner that dichotomizes their worldly and spiritual interests or pursues such interests in a manner that separates one from the other. If anything, the two sides – the spiritual and material interests – must be addressed and attended to at one and the same time. Therefore, contrary to Ikwueme’s position, the Nigerian Catholic Church should be engaged in politics. The question, however, is this: what kind of politics?

The preceding question brings me to my third grounds for disagreeing with Ikwueme – namely, his apparent limited understanding of politics. Ikwueme betrays a narrow understanding of “politics” as the realm of partisan or, better, professional politics. This is regrettably reflective of the average man-on-the-street’s perception of politics. In “practical terms,” Ikwueme himself rightly concedes, it is politics as it “relates to the acquisition and application of power,” leading him to caution religious leaders against “dealing with the political class.” But contrary to Ikwueme’s thinking, politics is more than the mere acquisition and application of power. I would argue that a more serious and in-depth understanding of politics resides at both the non-professional and non-partisan level. In practical terms, it is the act of *consciousness raising* – namely leading the masses to know their rights and responsibilities as well as the effective means for uprooting a given oppressive and exploitative society and replacing it with one that will serve the interests of the masses and the common good. This non-professional-cum-non-partisan act of consciousness raising, I should point out, is a complex and taxing affair and can only be effectively addressed from the bottom-up, that is, beginning from the grassroots and extending to the upper echelons of society. To the extent that the Church is called to the

vision and mission of building a just society, it behoves the Church, as both *Mater et Magister* (mother and teacher), to be fully engaged in this political act of consciousness raising. Therefore, contrary to Ikwueme's caution, the clergy and religious leaders are compelled, by virtue of their position, to be engaged in politics, but only in the mold of its non-partisan and non-professional consciousness-raising character.

It is precisely for the preceding kind of politics, especially one geared towards creating a high moral ground for both church and society in Nigeria, that *Crossing the Rubicon* advocates not only for the needed instrumentality of the JDPC but also for its empowerment. I make this claim even as the bishops' commitment to JDPC's success is clearly questionable because of their poor financial support of the outfit and the way in which they have compromised themselves with the members of the corrupt political class. JDPC, it is worth noting, is the Nigerian equivalent of the U.S. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP), the very "Catholic Social Services in the U.S. and Canada" that Ikwueme advocates. In view of this advocacy, he seems to equivocate on the JDPC. On the one hand he questions its need and relevance but, on the other hand, he calls for the church to fund outfits whose *raison d'être* is the same as the JDPC he castigates – namely "outside independent pressure groups to champion [the Church's] cause, or even educate and energize their followers at all levels to be involved in the political process as change agents in a corrupt system." I concede to Ikwueme his valid observation that JDPC may not be as accountable or as independent of the church hierarchy as its counterparts in North America, given its lack of structural independence or the lack of effective checks and balances in governance structures in the Nigerian Church. However, these lacunae are not sufficient to justify Ikwueme's

disparagement and dismissal of the JDPC. If anything, the feasibility of having an “outside independent pressure group,” as Ikwueme suggests, is not realistic; it borders on the utopian. For as the saying goes, the one who pays the piper dictates the tune. Moreover, for all of their checks and balances and systems of accountability and audit, including even the separation of state and religion in the U.S. and Canada, the very Catholic Social Services in North America which Ikwueme eulogizes are still not immune from fraud and taint on the part of its lay (non-clergy) officials. This point is highlighted in chapter seven of *Crossing the Rubicon* but is surprisingly overlooked by Ikwueme.

Independent or not, headed by a clergy or a layperson, the issue at stake remains what Ikwueme rightly observed, namely the imperative to create a meaningful change that entails a “total overhaul of the political structure, infusing it with accountability and other democratic principles that offer checks and balance” on the activities of all of society, irrespective of people’s religious, political and cultural affiliations. But this is the goal of the JDPC; it is in JDPC’s pursuit of this objective that “the Nigerian Catholic Church,” as Ikwueme rightly conceded, “has already laid the groundwork for other interest groups to get involved.” Thanks, I might add, to the activities of the JDPC! On the basis of this achievement, at least, his argument against JDPC and the church’s potential as “a progressive agent of democratic change” collapses. At best, his arguments, especially against JDPC, are akin to throwing away the baby with the bath water. What Ikwueme fails to see is that it is not just a question of *whether* church or religion has the potential for socio-political change. Rather, the key question is this: Who is driving the change, and what kind of change do they seek?

In the end, one may ask the following questions. Are there possibilities for fashioning a renewed vision of the relationship between religion and politics, between the imperative to practically ground our religiosity in socio-political activism? Are there outstanding examples of religious-cum-political activism in Africa that have significant potential for teaching and evangelizing or the kind of religiosity that would, in the words of Saint Irenaeus, “glorify God in humanity fully alive” and renew the face of the earth? My and Ikwueme’s responses to these questions are in the positive even if our respective answers may be nuanced differently. Our differences notwithstanding, I see us proposing the need to expand the *lenses* for evaluating the much-celebrated growth of the Church in Africa. I have the confidence of my learned colleague, Mr. Ikwueme, to say that we do not pretend that we have exhausted the lenses for this needed evaluation. But one thing is sure: there is an urgent need to rediscover the criteria for judging the success or failure of the Church in Africa. *Crossing the Rubicon* has, at least, kick-started the search for these lenses!

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“African Catholicism: Intra-Ecclesial Challenges to Justice”

By: Joseph Ogbonnaya, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, USA

Review Essay of Iheanyi M. Enwerem, *Crossing the Rubicon: A Socio-Political Analysis of Political Catholicism in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: BookBuilders Editions Africa, 2010).

The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of the 2009 Second African Synod, *Africae Munus*, describes African Catholicism as a spiritual lung for humanity (AM 13). In the light of such a description of African Catholicism, it is important to examine the structure of African Catholicism so as to determine the impact of the massive growth of the Church in the public sphere. Although at face value, African Catholicism appears to be doing well and is commended for standing strong as one of the only hopes for social change in Africa, it still is necessary to inquire beyond appearances to probe the structural foundation. In particular, one should critically examine the power play of the hierarchical structure not only to strengthen the foundation of African Catholicism, but also to encourage its transparency in the light of the Gospel.

And so Iheanyi M. Enwerem’s book is timely and prophetic. *Timely* for providing an in-depth analysis of the organizational structure of an African Church, revealing the dynamics of Nigerian Catholicism vis-à-vis Nigerian social and political history. *Prophetic* for its emphasis on social justice and injustice in Nigerian Catholicism with a view to offering solutions for a stronger, fruitful, more faithful witness of Nigerian Catholicism to the Christian gospel. Thus the book contains a lot of historical detail about Nigeria: the activities of returnee slaves, the impact of British colonialism, Nigeria’s post-independence ethnic politics, and the Nigeria-Biafra civil war of the late 1960s. As befits the title, Enwerem's text offers particular insight into the European missionary enterprises in

western Africa, the indigenization of Nigerian Catholicism, and the subsequent abuse of what the author terms "political Catholicism," the focal point of the book. An underlying theme concerns the impact of social history on the Catholic Church in Nigeria, especially the era of the Biafra civil war and the post-war controversies concerning the Nigerian Federal government's punitive and reconciliatory policies.

Enwerem's highly-informative book chronicles the development of political Catholicism in Nigeria, building from the foundation of the episcopal conference of Nigeria in the 1960s and its general secretariat, the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria. His objective analysis of the personnel, especially of the secretary-generals of the Catholic secretariat, delves into the effort at reform of the organizational structure of this institution that connects the Nigerian episcopal conference with the public. What is interesting and admirable is the hiring of an external body, the Kenyan-based Christian Organizations Research Advisory Trust (CORAT-Africa), by the bishops' conference for this purpose of oversight. However, according to the author, CORAT's modus operandi shows it to be less than objective. For Enwerem, CORAT's selective research and interviews of major stakeholders excludes many grassroots centers of justice and peace in important regions of the country. This compromises its report as it appears to be writing the script of the person, the sitting secretary-general who hired them. Furthermore, the exaltation of the status of the secretary-general as ex-officio member of the episcopal conference and his function as the secretary of the bishop's conference is not canonical and therefore is not theological (Enwerem 2010, 127-128). Little wonder, the implementation of the CORAT report by Fr. George Ehusani led to flagrant abuse of power tilting to dictatorial tendencies (Enwerem 2010, 144-147).

Another area of abuse is the Catholic Church's election observation project by the Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC). This project, which grew out of the commitment of one of the religious priests to justice and peace in Ijebu-Ode in western Nigeria, was eventually adopted and practiced under the umbrella of CSN as one of the activities of political Catholicism in Nigeria. A lot of work was involved, but the JDPC Nigeria was equal to the challenges under the chairmanship of Enwerem who served then as the director of the department of Church and Society for the CSN. However, just as the moral integrity of each society is reflected in the quality of the church leadership, the Catholic Church's participation in election monitoring in 2003 and 2007 manifested some serious moral flaws in political Catholicism in Nigeria. Some of the abuses by highly-placed church leaders in financial matters included the activities of a senior priest from Ogun State who fraudulently sourced international donor funds on behalf of some dioceses without referencing the donors. This led to a cover up by the Church hierarchy, showing how difficult it is and will be for the Catholic Church in Nigeria to take the Nigerian leaders to task about corruption and bad leadership.

The author's analysis of the activities of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP) in conjunction with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in the Nigerian Catholic Church confirms the mixed reactions to the work of international funding agencies in developing countries. This is exemplified in CCODP's disregard of the request of the bishops of the Owerri Ecclesiastical Province for a copy of the proposal and the report of projects presumably executed in their dioceses without their knowledge by the CCODP-CIDA. According to Enwerem, this speaks volumes on the disrespect of international donor agencies to authorities in the developing countries.

The very fact that CCODP-CIDA produced the documents requested by the bishops only after intense pressure shows that concern for social justice should not just be "outside in" but also "inside out," for charity, as the saying goes, begins at home. One should commend the author's quest for truth. Often corruption and fraud have international collaborators who cover their tracks leaving the recipient countries looking bad and corrupt. The author's approach of relentlessly following the truth till the end should be the guide for virtually all inquiries.

The book's analysis of Nigerian political Catholicism is not all negative. For example, Enwerem praises the effort of the Nigerian Catholic Church hierarchy to engage Nigerian society and politics. At the same time it points out areas where political Catholicism is abused as in situations where some church bishops compromised themselves by receiving gifts from corrupt politicians. Such real-life abuses undermine the church's principled arguments against social injustice. Enwerem suggests what this political Catholicism should look like by urging the Church not to shy away from engaging with politicians but to be careful to engage "within the context of an inclusive and accommodating socio-political environment" (Enwerem 2010, 274). The book candidly chronicles the ills of Nigerian Catholicism including 1) financially fraudulent activities and the lack of transparency involving the Church hierarchy, 2) the marginalization of the laity, 3) the bastardization of titles exemplified in the title taking originally aimed at honoring responsible women of virtue in the Church, and 4) the endemic if unaddressed problem of ethnicity/tribalism crippling the Nigerian Church (Enwerem 2010, 259-304).

Iheanyi's vision for a more positive future for Nigerian political Catholicism revolves around the true federalism advocated by the founding fathers of Nigeria and practiced for

only six years before giving way to decades of military rule in the country. Not only should the JDPC be much more autonomous, free from the clutches of the totalizing control of the Secretary-General's office, but Nigeria's Conference of Bishops should be broken down on a regional level not only in the light of true federalism but also in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. The author offers additional suggestions on measures aimed at financial transparency and accountability, the moral integrity of the hierarchy, the recognition of and practice of the communion ecclesiology of Vatican Council II, and measures towards promoting civic education (Enwerem 2010, 318-334).

While the book is quite informative, revealing the inner workings of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, the attendant power structure, and leaders' manipulations of power, it gives an overwhelmingly negative impression of the Catholic Church in Nigeria. It singles out the Nigerian Church and demonizes its hierarchy and functionaries based on the activities of a few inglorious actors. I am also frustrated that the name of the Ogun-based senior priest is not mentioned in the book while the Nigerian ecclesiastical hierarchy and numerous social activists are mentioned by name. I wonder whether the author is afraid of this senior priest.

The author's concentration on the activities of the Catholic Secretariat and conceptual limiting of political Catholicism to the restructuring and/or failed restructuring of the CSN is equally troubling for me. Political Catholicism in Nigeria goes beyond the CSN and its in-fighting. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria is a highly responsible, dignified body that should not be maligned because they take risks to address political, social, and economic injustices in Nigeria. Of course there are abuses here and there and to the credit of the author, measures must be put in place to avoid their recurrence.

The Catholic social teaching and *Africae Munus*, the post-synodal apostolic exhortation of the Second African Synod, is ambivalent about what form or shape political Catholicism should take. While Pope Benedict XVI in *Africae Munus* insists the Church should not be involved in partisan politics, it emphasises that the church must not ignore the plight of the poor (AM 22). *Africae Munus* also notes the structural sin responsible for unjust structures that keep people socially and materially poor. In particular, the pontiff writes, “On the social plane, human consciences are challenged by the grave injustices existing in our world as a whole and within Africa in particular. The plundering of the goods of the earth by a minority to the detriment of entire peoples is unacceptable, because it is immoral” (AM 24). In this sense, I agree with Enwerem that the church should walk the talk by living above board if it is to retain credibility while speaking out against corruption and bad governance in Nigeria.

However, the author’s personal involvement in the *dramatis personae* of events at CSN as the director of Church and Society of CSN and JDPC makes the book read like a one-sided story of political Catholicism in Nigeria. The fact that the author’s tenure at CSN was not renewed – and that his tenure was later characterized as incompetent (Enwerem 2010, 299) - affects the author’s objectivity. The book is not free from bias, namely the individual bias that generally protects one’s self-interest. In summary, *Crossing the Rubicon* is involved in self-defence and self-exoneration. The author is entitled to it. There is no problem in clearing one’s name. The challenge is whether one is allowed to paint an institution black while doing so. The author may have suffered glaring injustice at the hands of Nigeria's ecclesiastical hierarchy. That is unfortunate. However, political

Catholicism in Nigeria goes beyond CSN, Fr. George Ehusani, Bishop Matthew Kukah, and their ilk.

As a person who has not been exposed to much of the ecclesiastical hierarchical structure of the Nigerian Church, the book is quite revealing to me. However, I await further input concerning the circumstances surrounding the author's removal from the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria and a rebuttal from the officials of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria. Until that is done, this book chronicles an important aspect of political Catholicism in Nigeria but may not be the whole story.

In spite of these shortcomings, this book is a success in concretely chronicling political Catholicism in one of the fastest-growing Catholic nations in the world. Written from the purview of personal experience and with the experimental analysis of a sociologist, *Crossing the Rubicon* is an achievement. Reflecting the rare honest voice of an insider, the Church is presented in its true colors: namely as a divine institution dependent on the grace of God where saints and sinners labor and work out their salvation. How I wish all local churches were subject to the critical scrutiny of scholars like Iheanyi Enwerem! I highly recommend this book.

**"Shying Away from the Truth:
The Necessity of a Critical Evaluation of the Church in Nigeria"**

By: Iheanyi Enwerem, O.P.

A Response to Joseph Ogbonnaya's Review of *Crossing the Rubicon: A Socio-Political Analysis of Political Catholicism in Nigeria*

One major irony of the reported phenomenal growth of Christianity in Africa is the widespread poverty of governance in the continent's socio-political order - a governance that is characterized by corrupt, exploitative, selfish and kleptomaniac leaders - and an endemic lack of the material goods for a meaningful existence for a significant majority of Africans, many of whom are Christians. To borrow a phrase from the Canadian theologian Bernard Lonergan, this state of affairs reveals "inauthenticity" with regards to the boom, leading some contemporary African socio-political analysts to question whether the church and its leaders are any better than their secular counterparts.

Crossing the Rubicon: A Socio-Political Analysis of Political Catholicism in Nigeria is an attempt to answer the preceding question, using the Catholic Church in the West African country of Nigeria as a case study. In the wake of a Nigerian Catholic Church whose leadership, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), dabbled into political activism, believing itself to be the "conscience of the [Nigerian] society" and the "voice of the voiceless" members of the citizenry, one is led to wonder whether the Bishops have what it takes to credibly play out this role they gave themselves. In the course of exploring this issue, the book concludes that the Nigerian Church hierarchy is no better than its counterparts in the political class; if anything, its membership and the Nigerian political class are two sides of the same coin, so to speak, leading one to believe that it is only a

matter of time before the balloon that is presently the triumphalist Nigerian church will explode, especially as people gradually begin to see the rot in its internal structures and the hypocrisy of its leadership.

In light of the foregoing remarks, Dr. Joseph Ogbonnaya, a Nigerian-born priest and professional theologian, took interest to critically review the book. To begin with, he sees *Crossing the Rubicon* in a generally positive light. At the same time, this positive appraisal is balanced with several criticisms of the author. Three of his critical observations or comments are worth responding to, at least for the sake of clarity.

First, Ogbonnaya is frustrated with my failure to name the Ogun State-based senior priest whose detailed acts of fraudulency and misappropriation of funds are addressed in the book. Ogbonnaya notes that I do name "such high ranking publicly efficient Nigerian ecclesiastical hierarchy and social activists," thus leading him to "wonder whether the author is afraid of this senior priest." Looking back now, Ogbonnaya is right. This failure on my part is perhaps the weakest point in the book that will surely be corrected in a subsequent work on the Nigerian Church and its hierarchy. However, Ogbonnaya seems to give the impression that the "high-ranking publicly-efficient Nigerian ecclesiastical hierarchy and social activists" are naturally immune from corruption, fraudulency or unethical behaviours. In this regard, he would have done the reader a world of good if he had debunked, with facts, the accounts about these fellows.

Second, Ogbonnaya questioned the wisdom in my "concentration on the activities of the Catholic Secretariat [of Nigeria]" and on my singling "out the Nigerian Church and demonizing its hierarchy and functionaries." The concentration is deliberate. This is because the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), ever since the country's independence,

has been the arrowhead of political Catholicism in Nigeria. As was stated clearly in the book, "not to understand the CSN is not to understand the Catholic Church of Nigeria; in other words, not to understand the politics that inform the CSN, its internal and external operations as evidenced in the leadership practices of its leaders and the implications and consequences that arise from these operations for the Nigerian Church is not to understand political Catholicism in Nigeria" (Enwerem 2010, 73). Since Ogbonnaya did not question the veracity of the assertions made about the CSN, it is most likely that his concern must have arisen out of his oversight or a misreading of the argument or reasoning for the assertions. As for singling out the Nigerian Catholic Church, it is precisely because this church is the church to which I belong, worked for, and understand the best. I am therefore in the position to call this church to honesty and transparency, given the exalted image it presents to the Nigerian public and beyond. I am especially worried about Ogbonnaya's claim that "a highly responsible and dignified body" like "the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria ... should not be maligned" - (the author prefers the word 'criticised') - simply because "they take risks to address political, social, economic injustices in Nigeria." One shudders at this obvious equation of "criticism" with "maligning" the Nigerian Church. In this sense, I shudder at Ogbonnaya's theological enterprise whose starting-point is non-criticism of the church as if a criticism of the church means a lack of love for the church. A position such as this does not augur well for theological advancement in Africa and its needed prophetic church!

Third, Dr. Ogbonnaya highlights a personal situation that he believes negatively affected the book, namely the manner in which I was eased out of the CSN at the end of my first tenure in September 2003 and the subsequent negative characterization of my

tenure with the CSN. Long before I embarked on writing the book, as I made clear in the introduction of the book, I expected that this issue would be an easy 'tool' for the Nigerian hierarchy to discredit the book. This is perhaps even more true for a Nigerian Catholic audience the majority of whose members possess a religiosity that cannot imagine the possibility of clerical misconduct. Despite these realities, I still proceeded to write the book and openly invited those whose acts of commission and omission were discussed in the book to counter or, indeed, demolish the author's accounts with superior arguments of their own. That none of the people concerned have so far dared to step forward speaks volumes on whether they have more to hide than to reveal, thus leaving members of the reading public to judge for themselves the veracity of my accounts in the book.

On a final note, reading between the lines of both *Crossing the Rubicon* and Dr. Ogbonnaya's review, there is the underlying issue about the goal for theological enterprise in Africa or any contemporary society. Here, *Crossing the Rubicon* saliently argues for the urgency for a new generation of African Christian leaders and adherents who can meet the needs and challenges of the African Church in a more "prophetic" way. Therefore, the book further argues that studying and teaching theology is not just a matter of passing on or defending the faith - as important as this may be - but must relate theology to the responsibility of exemplary praxis towards socio-political change in society. That is, theology must produce human agents who can serve as vanguards for a new and better society in any given context. For, as faith without good works is *dead* (James 2:14-23), so too is a theological engagement that engenders no human agents for socio-political rebirth or renewal in society.

When the preceding imperatives are brought to bear on Dr. Ogbonnaya review, it is doubtful they are a priority in his theological enterprise. To buttress this assertion, recall his accusation that I maligned the Bishops simply because I criticised them. Ogbonnaya's theological vision would be slow to either critically evaluate the so-called growth of the Church in Africa or to search for the lenses for such a needed enterprise. One also doubts that Ogbonnaya would recognize the urgent need of producing vanguards for socio-political change. In any case, without in any way pretending to have exhausted the lenses for this needed theological evaluation in the Nigerian context, one thing is sure: *Crossing the Rubicon* has, at least, initiated the search for the lenses!

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