

## **RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NIGERIA**

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### **Introduction**

Nigeria is a pivotal country in Africa. Among other things, it occupies an important place in the socio-economic development of the continent. Unfortunately, the country has not lived up to its bidding. Despite huge resource endowments – human and natural –, Nigeria performs below expectation in development indices. With an average life expectancy at birth of 53.9 years, maternal mortality ratio of 814 per 100,000 live births, infant mortality rate of 66.9 per 1,000 live births and adult literacy (15 years and above) rate of 51.1% (United Nations Development Programme 2018), the country performs lower than some less endowed African countries on development indices. This, however, does not mean that there have not been some improvements on the country's development profile. Contrary to overly pessimistic views that portray Nigeria as a colossal failure, the country's development trend shows it has witnessed some improvements in her development profile. These improvements, however, are not strong enough to engender the kind of growth that leads to a qualitative leap in the living conditions of most of her citizens. In recent times, the country has witnessed significant growth in her gross domestic product (GDP), overtaking South Africa to become Africa's largest economy. Nevertheless, this GDP growth has failed to translate to improved living conditions for most of her people. This fact strengthens the argument that economic growth does not automatically translate to better living conditions for most of the people. The challenge, therefore, is how to bring about inclusive growth and sustainable development so that more Nigerians can benefit from the country's wealth. This is a complex exercise that requires multi-level and multi-sectoral collaboration. Since different actors must collaborate in order to realize the objective of inclusive and sustainable development in Nigeria, this paper focuses on the contribution of the Catholic Church to the socio-economic development of the country. Theoretically, the paper is based on the functional theory of religion. The theory argues that religious ideas, institutions and individuals contribute positively to the socio-economic development of societies. In contrast to the conflict theory which views religion as a source of conflict, social inertia and even the subjugation of people, the functional theory of religion argues that religion is a positive force in society and a driver of human and social progress. In fact, religion is not only an instrument

of social integration and the maintenance of order but also an agent of positive social change (Scarvaglieri 2005; Bajzek and Milanese 2006: 93-97). Hence, the core argument of the paper is that religion has played – and still plays – positive roles in the socio-economic development of Nigeria. This is more so the case with the Catholic Church in Nigeria. In order to demonstrate this, the paper begins by broadly discussing the interaction/interface between religion and development. Then it proceeds to discuss the bases of Catholic social action after which it delves into the major areas of the Catholic Church's interventions for social development in Nigeria. Before concluding, the paper identifies some of the challenges to the efficiency and effectiveness of the development initiatives of the Catholic Church on the country. Methodologically, the paper is qualitative and data are sourced from the author's field experience in the unit of analysis as well as from secondary sources such as published works related to the topic under discussion.

## **Religion and development**

Religion is an important variable in contemporary development research. This, however, is a recent development. Between the later part of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century, religion was perceived as traditional, static and a counter-current to social progress. This attitude coincided with the flourishing of the modernization theory which also happened to be the basis for the secularization theory of religion. This theory views the modernization process and the practice of religion as negatively correlated. As such, the more modernized a society becomes, the less religious people are expected to be and the less the impact of religion on society. The consequence is that religion would have no serious role in society as it would be relegated to the realm of private belief. Since modernization and social progress were seen to be inextricably related, religion was considered antithetical to social progress. Religious ideas and beliefs were held suspect for retarding human progress as they were considered non-scientific and, sometimes, support unjust social structures that constrain progress. The exclusion of the religious factor from development planning was also sustained by the economic growth model that was in vogue in the field of development research and among development organizations. This model of development lays emphasis on the growth of gross domestic product or gross national product, GDP and GNP, respectively. The promoters of this model hoped that the accumulation of wealth as demonstrated by growth in GDP/GNP would eventually trickle down to the poor (Peet and Hartwick 2009: 6-7). Unfortunately, GDP growth did not easily translate to improved standard of living for the poor. The basic needs approach to development also did not consider adequately the role of religion in development programmes,

as its objective was simply to provide basic needs like food, shelter, sanitation, water, etc., for the poor (Payer 1982). This approach can be said to be paternalistic in character as it concentrates more on providing basic sustenance to the poor while paying less attention to the development of capabilities (Sen 1999).<sup>1</sup>

Despite the initial neglect of religion as a key factor in the development plans and implementation strategies of governments and inter-governmental institutions, religious groups and individuals have always engaged in different initiatives aimed at improving the material conditions of people. Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies identify religion as a source of social integration and stability in societies.<sup>2</sup> Religion and religious actors have also been credited with the development of capitalism and the development of modern economic institutions. Max Weber identifies some religious beliefs, ethical principles and practices as the seed of modern capitalism.<sup>3</sup> Although the Franciscan Order of the Catholic Church is known for her emphasis on poverty, some economic historians trace the development of modern economic institutions to the activities of Franciscan Friars. Bruni (2010: 64) argues that the Franciscans were the first to establish a sort of a bank – *i Monti di Pietà* – and the modern micro-credit system. More so, Franciscan thinkers like William of Ockham, Pietro Giovanni Olivi, and Duns Scotus were among the first to engage in systematic reflections on the value and prize of goods, money, and the economy in general (Bruni 2010). In addition, most religions have developed some form of socio-political theology. Hence, the interaction between religion and social progress has not been always dysfunctional as the conflict theorists of religion present it.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of religious engagement with development is that religious initiatives adopt a holistic approach to development, in the sense that they seek to tackle poverty not only by mere accumulation of material wealth or the provision of basic needs but also by caring for the spiritual, psychological, moral, etc., needs of the poor. This approach to development has been variously called “authentic development” (*Gaudium et Spes* 1965), “true development” (*Populorum Progressio* 1967; *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* 1987) or “integral development” (*Caritas in Veritate* 2009) by the Catholic Church.

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the capability approach see Sen, Amartya. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>2</sup> See Durkheim’s discussion of mechanical and organic solidarity in Durkheim, Emile [1893] 1938. *The Division of Labour in Society*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press and Tönnies’ differentiation between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* in Tönnies, Ferdinand. [1887] 2001. *Community and Civil Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Weber, Max. 2001. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Talcott Parson. London and New York: Routledge.

Given the apparent failure of both the economic growth and basic needs approaches in combating poverty as quickly as envisaged, beginning from the early 1990s, the World Bank began to conduct Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPA) aimed at directly discovering the experiences, aspirations, constraints, and coping mechanisms of the poor and how to help them. This project was vigorously pursued under the leadership of James D. Wolfensohn and culminated in the publication of three books on separate world-wide study of poverty entitled “Voices of the Poor”.<sup>4</sup> The first study covered fifty countries in which 60,000 people were interviewed on issues they considered important to their well-being. Among the responses, religion and spirituality emerged as prominent factors. As a result, James D. Wolfensohn initiated a process of dialogue and collaboration with religious leaders on development issues. In fact, one of the enduring marks of James D. Wolfensohn’s tenure as Director of the World Bank is his promotion of the engagement of religious actors in development projects. Together with then-Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, Wolfensohn convened the first meeting of world faith and development leaders at Lambeth Palace in 1998. The group was increasingly enlarged leading to the establishment of the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD).<sup>5</sup> Wolfensohn’s belief in religion as a partner in development is captured in the following statement:

Religion is an omnipresent and seamless part of daily life, taking an infinite variety of forms that are part of the distinctive quality of each community. Religion could thus not be seen as something apart and personal. It is, rather, a dimension of life that suffuses whatever people do. Religion has an effect on many people’s attitudes to everything, including such matters as savings, investment and a host of economic decisions. It influences areas we had come to see as vital for successful development, like schooling, gender quality, and approaches to health care. In short, religion could be an important driver of change, even as it could be a break to progress (Wolfensohn 2011: xvii).

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<sup>4</sup> The reports include: Naraya, Deepa et al.(eds.) 2000. *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us ?* New York: Oxford University Press; Naraya, Deepa et al. (eds.). 2000. *Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change*. New York: Oxford University Press; Naraya, Deepa and Patti Petesch (eds.). 2002. *Voices of the Poor: From Many Lands*. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.

<sup>5</sup> For more discussion on the formation of the group and its early meetings, see Marshall, Katherine and Lucy Keough. 2005. *Finding Global Balance: Common Ground Between the Worlds of Development and Faith*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

Wolfensohn's statement echoes the views of several scholars on the place of religion in the worldview of the African.<sup>6</sup> Mbiti is famous for saying that "Africans are notoriously religious" (Mbiti 1969: 1), and he explains it thus:

Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament (Mbiti 1969: 2).

Hence,

It is religion, more than anything else, which colours their understanding of the universe and their empirical participation in that universe, making life a profoundly religious phenomenon. To be is to be religious in a religious universe. That is the philosophical understanding behind African myths, customs, traditions, beliefs, morals, actions and social relationships (Mbiti 1969: 262).

Since the dialogue between James Wolfensohn and George Carey, there has been a growing research interest in the intersection between religion and development (Belshaw et al. 2001; Marshall and Marsh 2003; Marshall and Keough 2004, 2005; Marshall and Van Saanen 2007; Ter Haar 2011; Tomalin 2015).

From the engagement with religious leaders, the World Bank adopted the human development approach to development. This approach is multi-dimensional because it is not based on only income generation and the growth of GDP or GNP but also on factors that are not directly related to income accumulation like education, health, physical security, social values, inter-group and inter-personal relationships, respect for basic freedoms, the environment, and the expansion of human capabilities (Sen 1999; Ruben 2011). The human development model is personalist in nature as it places the human person at the centre of development programmes and seeks to address all issues – material, spiritual, relational, psychological, environmental – that might either impede or help accelerate the well-being of the human person. In sum, the principal objective of the human development approach is to enlarge the capacity of people to make choices so that they are increasingly able to shape their own futures. Since the engagement of religious actors in development programmes,

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<sup>6</sup> Scholars like Parrinder 1961; Idowu 1962; Mbiti 1970, 1990; Awolalu and Dopamu 1979 argue that religion suffuses the life of the African.

religion has become a major factor in development planning and implementation. However, the Catholic Church's social engagements are based on several principles elaborated in a body of teachings known as the Catholic Social Teaching or Thought.

### **Bases of Catholic Social Action**

The social interventions of the Catholic Church are anchored on certain principles which are meant to promote the well-being of the human person. Some of these principles include:<sup>7</sup>

*Dignity of the human person:* Catholic Social Teaching places the human person at the centre of development. This entails upholding the equal dignity of human beings, respecting the sanctity of human life, protecting human rights and ensuring a worthy standard of living for all peoples (Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, nos. 11-27).

*Universal destination of the goods of the earth:* This principle argues that although the wealth of the earth are not equally distributed among the regions and peoples of the earth, they are not the exclusive property of the places and people where they are found. Rather, "God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples" (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 69). This principle affirms policies of wealth redistribution and solidarity between people.

*Solidarity:* The principle of solidarity promotes the universal brotherhood of humanity. Human beings have a common creator and should, therefore, care for one another. As such, the suffering of one person is the suffering of all of humanity. The principle lays emphasis on the horizontal relationship between peoples. As Pope Benedict XVI states in *Caritas in Veritate* 38, "Solidarity is first and foremost a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone with regard to everyone, and it cannot therefore be merely delegated to the State."

*Subsidiarity:* The principle of subsidiarity is particularly aimed at addressing inter-institutional relations. The principle supports the devolution of powers and responsibilities to institutions that are closest to individuals and communities. It

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<sup>7</sup> For an elaborate discussion of these principles see Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. 2004. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana; Brady, Bernard V. 2017. *Essential Catholic Thought*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Orbis Books.

argues that larger institutions should not absorb all the powers of decision making. Rather, priority should be given to institutions that are closest to the people in decision making and policy implementation. It is only when local institutions do not have the capacity to drive a policy that institutions at a higher level can step-in, always with the view to the common good. The principle “warns against the dangers of large institutional efforts to combat problems that are essentially local and impervious to grand schemes” (Booth 2012: 3).

*Respect creation and protection of the ecosystem:* This ecological principle is increasingly gaining attention in Catholic Social Teaching. The principle simply argues that the earth is the common home of humanity and should not be destroyed by human activities. As such, it is the responsibility of all to act in a manner that promotes the ecological stability of the earth (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*).

*Common good:* This principle argues that the principal objective of individual and collective actions should not be the pursuit of parochial individual or group interests. Rather, it is the commitment to the “good of all and of each individual” (Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38). It also entails the creation of conditions that would permit people “either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1906).

These principles are not mere social principles. Rather, they are deeply rooted in the Sacred Scripture, the Traditions of the Catholic Church and the magisterial teachings of the Popes and Episcopal conferences. The Sacred Scripture is replete with both direct and indirect references to the principles just mentioned above. For example, one of the statements that reflect the social dimension of the ministry of Jesus Christ is found in Luke 4: 18-19: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (New Revised Standard Version).

With regard to Tradition, throughout history, the Catholic Church has distinguished itself in the service to the poor, weak, needy and most vulnerable members of society. The Catholic Church has produced holy men and women who dedicated their lives and ministry to education, health care delivery, prison ministry, running of orphanages, hospices, hostels, and soup kitchens as well as creating awareness on ecological issues. Some of the prominent Catholic saints whose ministries were remarkably social in dimension include Ignatius of Loyola, Aloysius Gonzaga, Francis of Assisi, John of God, John Bosco, Teresa of Calcutta, and Óscar Arnulfo Romero.

The teachings of the Catholic Church on social issues are also contained in a body of teachings collectively referred to as the social magisterium. Before the evolution of the practice of writing formal encyclicals and pastoral letters, people like saints Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae*) and Augustine of Hippo (City of God) had written great treatises that discussed social issues, apart from other purely spiritual matters. However, in recent times, the Popes and Episcopal conferences have articulated their responses to pressing social problems in formal encyclicals and pastoral letters. Social issues are complex and these documents try to address them in a comprehensive manner by adopting both inter-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approaches.

Some of the major documents of the social magisterium include *Rerum Novarum* (1891) – issued by Pope Leo XIII to address some of the questions raised by industrialization, especially with regard to labour-relations, workers’ rights, the duties of employers, private property and wealth distribution; *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) – issued by Pope Pius XI in commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. It addresses issues related to the aftermath of World War I, the rise of totalitarian governments in Catholic-majority countries like Portugal, Spain, and Italy as well as the emerging challenges of liberal capitalism; Radio message of Pope Pius XII (1948) – a Christmas message that was meant to appeal to the consciences of world leaders on the evil of war; *Mater et Magistra* (1961) – issued by Pope John XXIII on the seventieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. It enjoys the distinction of being the first encyclical to be addressed to an audience beyond the Catholic world, “To all People of good will”. The encyclical strongly promotes greater interdependence among people and international cooperation for the common good of humanity; *Pacem in Terris* (1963) – also issued by Pope John XXIII. Although the encyclical discusses human right, justice and peace in the world, it is mostly associated with the Pope’s intervention in the Cuban Missile crisis; *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) – it is the last document of the Second Vatican Council but it is about the most famous because of its intervention in various aspects of social life. It is mostly known for its opening statement: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ” 1.

Others include *Populorum Progressio* (1967) – issued by Pope Paul VI to address various issues of human development in an atmosphere that was charged with the tensions of the Cold War. The encyclical is famous for its usage of the term ‘authentic development’; *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971) – issued by Pope Paul VI in commemoration of the eightieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*; *Justitia in Mundo* (1971) – also issued by Pope Paul VI as a publication of the deliberations of the Third World Synod of Catholic Bishops held in 1971; *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975)

– issued by Pope Paul VI as a concluding document of the Fourth World Synod of Catholic Bishops held in 1974. Although it is more of a theological treatise, it also discusses the social dimension of the gospel as well as the socio-political obstacles to the Church’s mission of evangelization;

Pope John Paul II issued *Laborem Exercens* (1981) to commemorate the ninetieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. The encyclical concentrates on the relationship between labour and capital, people and profit, workers’ rights, just wage, freedom of association, and questions of global solidarity. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) was written by Pope John Paul II to address pressing issues of development, particularly in the developing world where there was increasing economic dysfunction and hardship. In 1991, Pope John Paul II issued *Centesimus Annus* to commemorate the centenary of *Rerum Novarum*. The encyclical addresses issues bordering on the excesses of capitalism and the need for ethical and juridical frameworks that give pride of place to the human person in economic activities and social policies.

*Caritas in Veritate* (2009) was issued by Pope Benedict XVI amidst the 2007/2008 global economic crisis. The encyclical calls for greater ethical consciousness in the financial market as well as the creation of effective institutions of global governance. Shortly before the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, Pope Francis issued *Laudato Si’* (2015). The encyclical raises alarm on the impending ecological disaster the world faces and the need for more action to combat climate change.<sup>8</sup> Catholic Pontiffs have also issued documents that address issues in specific regions of the world. With regard to Africa, two Post-Synodal Exhortations – *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995) and *Africae Munus* (2011) – were issued by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, respectively. They address a vast range of social issues affecting the people of Africa and the Catholic Church’s evangelizing mission on the continent. The African Enchiridion (2005) is a collection of statements by various Episcopal Conferences in Africa on social issues.

Several Episcopal Conferences have also issued major documents on social concerns in their societies. Some of the better known include: *Medellin Conclusiones* (1968) by the Latin American Episcopal Conference; “Economic Justice for All” (1986) by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; “The Common Good” (1996) by the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales; *Aparecida Document* (2013) by the General Conference of Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean.

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<sup>8</sup> For a summary of the history and core elements of the Catholic Social Teaching see Aubert, Roger. 2003. *Catholic Social Teaching: An Historical Perspective*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press; Charles, Rodger. 1998. *Christian Social Witness and Teaching*, vols. I & II. Herefordshire: Gracewing; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. 2004. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Unfortunately, there is no notable document that has been issued by any of the Episcopal groupings in Africa on the social issues the continent is grappling with.

The Catholic Church's social engagement is carried out through institutional mechanisms like the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and its national and diocesan variants, *Cor Unum*, *Migrantes*, *Caritas Internationalis* and, recently, the Dicastery for Integral Human Development have been coordinating the social interventions of the Catholic Church in various parts of the world. Other major Catholic-inspired organizations with a focus on social development include the German Catholic Episcopal Conference's humanitarian agency, *MISEREOR*; the UK-based Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD); the US-based Catholic Relief Service (CRS). These organization often partner with Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, dioceses and religious congregation in carrying out development projects in Nigeria.

### **Catholic-inspired Development Initiatives in Nigeria**

One of the major contributions of the Catholic Church to the development of Nigeria is in the area of human capital development. Beginning from colonial times, the Catholic Church has played a major role in the provision of education and health care delivery in Nigeria. Catholic schools and health centres have been among the first of such initiatives in many communities in Nigeria. In fact, Catholic schools are the largest group within private, religiously organized education in the country (WFDD 2018: 90). Catholic schools and hospitals are spread all over Nigeria and they are, sometimes, not just the only existing educational and health facilities in communities but they rank among the best in the country. The Catholic Church's educational facilities range from kindergarten to universities while their health facilities range from primary to tertiary health care institutions. Suffice it to note, however, that the Catholic Church has been a major player in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. Besides the establishment of special centres or programmes in most Catholic hospitals for the provision of care and treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS, dioceses and parishes have action committees on HIV/AIDS. Unfortunately, actual data on the number of Catholic schools and hospitals in Nigeria are hard to find because they are run by parishes, dioceses, religious congregations/orders and are in constant evolution.

Natural and man-made disasters are among major causes of poverty and social insecurity in Nigeria. Apart from threatening the livelihood of people, they often cause population displacement and deepen poverty. The Catholic Church in Nigeria has, however, been a leader in the provision of immediate relief and other humanitarian interventions after communal conflicts, natural disasters and

the protracted Boko Haram terrorist activities, especially in the north-eastern part of the country. Catholic-inspired organizations like *Caritas Internationalis*, Justice and Peace, *MISEREOR*, CRS, CAFOD and their local partners – particularly the Justice Development and Peace Commissions/Caritas (JDPC) of the various Catholic dioceses - have been involved in the provision of short-term relief materials as well long-term rehabilitation programmes to disaster-hit communities in Nigeria.

As part of efforts to mitigate man-made disasters like violent conflicts, Catholic actors are engaged in various peacebuilding activities like preventive diplomacy, Interreligious Dialogue, peace education, peace accords, transitional justice and post-conflict reconstruction. Regarding peacebuilding, most of the interventions are carried out by locally-based Catholic-inspired organizations, even though they are often funded by international partners. Some of the prominent Catholic-inspired peacebuilding initiatives in Nigeria include the Dialogue, Peace and Reconciliation Centre in Jos, the Kukah Centre for faith, leadership and public policy in Abuja and the Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace in Abuja. Recently, the Rome-based Community of Sant'Egidio is beginning to establish presence in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja as well as in Lagos, Niger, Nassarawa and Plateau States (World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) 2018: 114). It is not clear the type of interventions the Community of Sant'Egidio is presently carrying out in these states but the group is internationally known to have either facilitated or supported peace processes in various part of the world including African countries like Mozambique, Liberia, Algeria, Burundi, Uganda and South Sudan.

Even as individuals, Catholic clerics have been in the fore front of peacebuilding in the country. The Archbishop of Abuja, John Cardinal Onaiyekan, is the founder of the Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace. He is a member of the Nigeria Interreligious Council as well as a member of the National Peace Committee. Archbishop Ignatius Ayau Kaigama is a strong voice of peace in conflict-prone Plateau State. Archbishop Kaigama is the founder of the Dialogue, Reconciliation and Peace Centre in Jos as well as the former co-Chairman of the Plateau State Interreligious Council on Peace and Harmony. Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah is one of the most famous Catholic clerics in the country because of his contributions to public debate and national development. Bishop Kukah is currently the Chairman of the Ogoni-Shell Reconciliation process, the founder of the Kukah Centre for faith, leadership and public policy in Abuja and convener of the National Peace Committee. He was also a member of the Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission popularly known as the "Oputa Panel" as well as a member of the National Political Reform Conference.

The Catholic Church has also been directly involved in the economic empowerment of Nigerians. Catholic-inspired organization have been involved in providing seed funding for business start-ups, giving microcredit loans to traders,

agricultural extension service, training people in various vocational skills and helping trainees to set-up economic activities. These interventions are driven by Catholic-inspired organizations like the procredit micro finance banks owned by a number of Catholic dioceses in Nigeria, the JDPC of the various Catholic dioceses, and the numerous vocational schools run by Catholic organizations. Apart from empowering people to start their own economic activities, the Catholic Church is one of the major direct employers of labour in Nigeria, outside the government.

Closely related to economic empowerment is the Catholic Church's interventions in the provision of basic facilities to help improve the living conditions of individuals and communities. In this vein, through its various organs, the Catholic Church has been involved in the digging of wells and boreholes for communities<sup>9</sup>, provision of improved agricultural inputs and better farming equipment to rural farmers. An interesting case is the *Nwanne Di Na Mba* Social Housing Estate built by the *Umuchinemere* Procredit Micro Finance Bank of Enugu Diocese. The project aims to provide affordable housing to low income earners.

Finally, the Catholic Church has distinguished itself as both the voice of the poor and a human rights advocate in Nigeria. Apart from its policy of always standing with the poor, the Catholic Church has been a strong advocate of good governance in Nigeria. It believes that good governance will translate to a better management of resources and, ultimately, improvement in the general well-being of the Nigerian people. Hence, it is one of the strongest advocates of democratic governance, anti-corruption and the building of strong institutions in the country. Catholic agencies like the JDPC of the various Dioceses are involved in voter education, election monitoring and peace education. Individual Catholics like the emeritus Archbishop of Lagos, Anthony Cardinal Okogie, and Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah were prominent pro-democracy advocates during the military era of 1983 to 1999.

## Challenges

The preceding section has amply demonstrated that the Catholic Church is making immense contributions to the socio-economic development of Nigeria. This, however, is not without challenges. Although the challenges are many and vary according to social contexts, we identify some of the broadly shared ones.

The first challenge to faith-inspired interventions in the socio-economic development of Nigeria are arbitrary government policies and interventions in

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<sup>9</sup> For example, the Catholic Rural and Urban Development Programme (CARUDEP) of the Archdiocese of Jos has been partnering with communities in the digging of wells and the provision of potable water.

their activities. Immediately after the Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafra War (1967-1970), the Nigerian government nationalized all faith-based schools. Unfortunately, most of them were owned by the Catholic Church. The official reason given by the government for nationalizing these schools was to foster national integration after a war that nearly led to the division of the country. However, popular feeling from Catholic quarters is that it was a way of punishing the Catholic Church for its alleged support to the Biafran separatist movement. The nationalization of these schools was a huge setback to the Catholic Church's contribution to human development. Nevertheless, suffice it to note that some of those schools have been returned to their original owners, after years of mismanagement and bastardization.

Secondly, the fear of Christian proselytism by Muslim-majority societies has led some state governments in northern Nigeria to adopt covert restrictions on Christian-inspired initiatives, both social and pastoral. For example, the adoption of the Sharia legal system by twelve states in northern Nigeria has been a huge obstacle to Christian activities in those states. In addition, since 2010, there have been attempts in Nigeria's National Assembly to pass bills that seek to tightly control the activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The first bill titled "Non-governmental Organizations Regulation and Co-ordination Bill 2010" was introduced in the Nigerian Senate in 2010 by Senator Dahiru Awaisu Kuta while the second bill titled "Bill for an Act to Provide for the Establishment of the Non-Governmental Organizations Regulatory Commission for the Supervision, Co-ordination and Monitoring of Non-Governmental Organisations, Civil Society Organisations etc., in Nigeria and for Related Matters" was sponsored in the House of Representatives by Honorable Umar Buba Jibril in 2016. Both bills aim to place heavy restrictions and excessive government interference and control on the activities of NGOs.<sup>10</sup> However, at the time of writing this paper, none of the bills has been passed into law because of widespread opposition. Christian groups are particularly opposed to them because, firstly, religious groups are categorized as NGOs or Civil Society Organizations. Secondly, since Christian groups account for most of the faith-based NGOs in the country, Christians view such bills as an attempt to curb their activities (WFDD 2018: 51). The religious card is also being played in the opposition the bills because the both sponsors of the bills are Muslim legislators.

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<sup>10</sup> See "Non-governmental Organizations Regulation and Co-ordination Bill, 2010" accessed 08.04.2019 (<http://nass.gov.ng/document/download/1321>) and "Bill for an Act to Provide for the Establishment of the Non-Governmental Organizations Regulatory Commission for the Supervision, Co-ordination and Monitoring of Non-Governmental Organisations, Civil Society Organisations etc., in Nigeria and for Related Matters" accessed on 08.04.2019 (<http://placbillstrack.org/upload/HB585.pdf>) for the full content of both bills.

Apart from perceived threats and actual constraints from government policies, Catholic-inspired development initiatives in Nigeria also face the internal challenge of poor information sharing, collaboration, and coordination between them. Every group seems to be working on their own without reference to others. They do not seem to be sharing information on good practices or partnering with one another for more efficient service delivery. Sometimes, they even give the impression of being in competition with one another by the way they unnecessarily duplicate interventions and services in the same communities. The director of a prominent Catholic-inspired peace initiative narrated how two organizations in the same Diocese were working against each other, duplicating their activities and seemingly in competition for funding from the same donors.<sup>11</sup> There are several instances of Catholic-inspired initiatives in different parts of the country that carry out similar activities without collaborating with one another or reference to each other. Obviously, the lack of information sharing and collaboration between Catholic-inspired development initiatives lead to the duplication of interventions, waste of resources, and repetition of mistakes.

Another challenge facing Catholic-inspired development initiatives is the problem of accessibility to the very poor. Although the principal target of Catholic-inspired development initiatives is the poor and needy, some of the services rendered by these institutions like in the areas of health care delivery and education are too expensive and unaffordable to the very poor. Some Catholic parents interviewed by the author expressed sadness about their inability to access some Catholic educational and health facilities due their high cost.<sup>12</sup> There is real danger that high quality Catholic schools and hospitals in Nigeria are becoming elite institutions. While it must be acknowledged that it is very costly to provide quality service at a cheap rate in a country that lacks basic infrastructure like electricity, Catholic-based initiatives must seek for ways of balancing between cost and quality service delivery, if they must remain accessible to the poor. This notwithstanding, suffice it to note that Catholic schools and hospitals are among the cheapest of such faith-based initiatives in Nigeria.

The final challenge is that of sustainability. In fact, sustainability is the greatest challenge of Catholic-inspired development initiatives in Nigeria. A lot of Catholic-inspired development initiatives are either entirely funded or heavily subsidized by foreign donors. The aid-dependency syndrome is a major concern for the sustainability of projects. Once project funding period is over, projects either end automatically or find it difficult to survive. Another reason why Catholic-inspired development

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<sup>11</sup> Author's interview on 20.03.2019.

<sup>12</sup> Author's interviews with some Catholic parents in Jos, Enugu, and Abuja in March 2019.

initiatives find it difficult to survive is because they record a lot of indebtedness by their poor beneficiaries who are often not able to pay for the full cost of the services rendered to them.<sup>13</sup> The challenge of sustainability, however, must be seen as a wake-up call for Catholic-inspired development initiatives in Nigeria to explore new ways of raising local funding for their projects. Among other measures, they must work to increase the culture of the local ownership of projects, otherwise many projects would remain *ad-hoc* and unsustainable. Closely related to the challenge of sustainability is the poor institutionalization of some Catholic-inspired initiatives. Some of these initiatives depend on the charismatic ability, fame and connection of their founders. They are hardly institutionalized and their survival, to a large extent, depends on their affiliation with their charismatic founders.

## **Conclusion**

This paper demonstrates that religion is a veritable agent of integral human development. This is, more so, the case with the Catholic Church in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, the role of the Catholic Church in either poverty alleviation or the general development of Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized, as Catholic-inspired initiatives have played key roles in the development of communities in Nigeria. Catholic-inspired initiatives are, sometimes, the sole providers of social services in communities, other times they fill the gap where there is a short-fall in government-provided services or they complement the government through partnerships aimed at improving service delivery. As such, Catholic-inspired social initiatives cannot be overlooked in the planning and implementation of development programmes in Nigeria. Nevertheless, although Catholic-inspired development initiatives play vital roles in the development of Nigeria, they face major challenges which must be addressed urgently, if they are to maintain their leading role as one of the largest – if not the largest – non-state actor in the socio-economic development of Nigeria.

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<sup>13</sup> While discussing the challenges of sustainability to Catholic health centres in Africa, the Medical Missionaries of Mary Sister Mary Teresa Reilly argues that, in the case of the Kitovu Hospital in Uganda, while all patients would like to pay their bills, “only 30% can pay 100%; 45% pay a portion and 25% are unable to pay anything” (see Reilly 1995: 116). Obviously, this situation makes it almost impossible to run the hospital without external aid or to assure quality service delivery at prices that are affordable to the poor.