

THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN NIGERIA'S COMPROMISED DEMOCRACY

Cyril Udebunu PhD

Pope John Paul II Major Seminary Okpuno,
Anambra State Nigeria
cyudeb@yahoo.co.uk

ABSTRACT

Democracy in Nigeria seems to be a pre-emptive one, which was ignited through the “instrumentality” of John Paul II in his historic visit to Nigeria in 1998. Though Nigeria, as at that time, was held at the jugular by the dictatorship of Sani Abacha, John Paul II left the church and the government with the tenets for a true democracy. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to investigate how the church and government have upheld the tenets of a true democracy in Nigeria over the past years. In order to address the aim as stated, the analytical method of research is employed to understand the church’s role in Nigeria’s democracy. This paper explores the meaning of democracy, the church's official statements in favour of democracy, and the state of democracy in Nigeria. This paper recognizes that the church plays a major role in ensuring true democracy since it deals with the whole man, but bemoans the fact that sometimes the Church is weak in this respect. In conclusion, the church ought to take up its obligation towards true democracy to make itself relevant in the lives of the people and to remain meaningful in the world.

Keywords: Nigeria, Church, democracy, corruption, and respect.

INTRODUCTION

At his second visit to Nigeria in 1998, John Paul II outlined his vision for 'new and better' Nigeria based on tolerance, democratic reforms, respect for human rights and pointed out the Church's key role in the whole agenda. In his address to a three- quarters of a million people in Abuja he said: the dignity of every human being, his inalienable fundamental right, the inviolability of life, freedom and justice, the sense of solidarity and the rejection of

discrimination: these must be the building blocks of a new and better Nigeria."¹ As at that time however, Nigeria had not yet become democratic as Abacha's dictatorship still hanged on the neck of every living Nigerian, but the Pope made bold to say that such respect for human dignity is the duty of every citizen and of the government, and it should constitute the guiding desire in the efforts in pushing for democracy: "Respect for every human person, for his dignity and rights, must ever be the inspiration and guiding principle behind your efforts to increase democracy and strengthen the social fabric of country."² To the bishops he asked to make the Catholic church more relevant to the lives of people in Nigeria: "Do all that you can...so that your people will feel more and more at home in the church, and the church more and more at home among your people."³

He urged them and indeed all religious leaders to enter into constructive dialogue with all sectors of society as Nigeria pressed for an implementation of political and social change. And while the dialogue lasted, it should not prevent them from presenting openly and respectfully the Church's convictions as it "touches such important matters as justice and impartiality for all citizens, respect for human rights, religious freedom and the objective moral truth, which ought to be reflected in civil legislation."⁴ To the joyous surprise of all, as if God had visited his people, three months after the visit of the Pope, the nation woke up in great jubilation at the news of the demise of the General Sani Abacha, giving way to a true democratic process that culminated in the election and passing over of the administrative baton to Olusegun Obasanjo on October 1, 1999. It is now another historic moment in which the fledgling democracy is about to pass into other hands and be tested. It requires therefore, that we look back on our polity and institutions, see how both the government and the Church have fared in their responsibilities to the people and sound it to them again the obligation they must live out in order to remain meaningful.

Defining Democracy

Aristotle defines democracy as "the rule of the many for the good of the poor" as opposed to oligarchy which is the rule of the few for the good of the wealthy." By this contrast, Aristotle points out the intrinsic character of the two polities: whereas in one, the rulers are few because liberty is enjoyed by all alike.⁵ In democracy therefore, liberty is the ground on which the people lay claim to government.

Although there can be nuances in the world's democracies, it is generally a government in which power and civic responsibility are exercised by all citizens, direct or through their freely elected representatives. Democracy is a set of principles and practices that protect human freedom; it is the institutionalization of freedom. Abraham Lincoln would later on 19 November, 1863, at the Union cemetery at Gettysburg, Philadelphia give this polity which is conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal, the most popular conceptualization: "a government of the people, by the people and for the people."⁶ All democracies, while respecting the will of the majority, zealously protect the fundamental rights of individuals and minority groups. In all democracies, there are usually regular free and fair elections open to all citizens. Elections in a democracy cannot be facades that dictators or a single party hide behind, but authentic competitions for the support of the people. That was why James Foley as early as March 17, 1998 in a State Department press briefing in U.S. condemned the cosmetic electoral process which Abacha was then putting in place to transform himself into a civilian president saying:

To suggest that anything that is going on in Nigeria today is tantamount to the beginning of a free, fair electoral process-credible electoral process- is really illusory and unfounded."⁷ That same year, Susan Rice, the state department's assistant secretary for African Affairs gave another similar definition of democracy stating that: "Our

road map for measuring democratic progress is universal and unwavering. A credible transition would include a transparent and participatory process;... provisions for free political activities and party formation allowing all those who wish to run to do freely; freedom of association, speech and the press unrestricted access to the media by all candidates and parties, impartial electoral preparation; and elections open to all.⁸

Democracy has also an aspect of economic empowerment, ie.- the democratization of economic power-economically empowering smaller units such as the individual, or the community, or the people collectively - through democratic mechanisms. This is done according to Alistair McComanchie through a creation of money which should be a "public service, under public control for the public good."⁹ It means that the ongoing method of money creation or money-lending, whereby every money grant to a society arrives as an interest bearing debt owed to the private banking system in country to the democratic imperative, because they often strangle economy and impoverish young democracies where corruption take time to die. Democracy must lead to prosperity and social progress. This economic aspect is highlighted by the US secretary of State, Madam Albright, in her definition while addressing African democracy in February 2000. She said about democracy: "Elections, moreover, are but one note in the democratic symphony. A full orchestra is required, including markets that reward initiative..."¹⁰

World's Preference for Democracy

Some people argue and ask why all this fuss about democracy, after all every political system is as good as the other. This argument points out that there is always something good about any political system but it is however, too simplistic to level everything and to think that any good is equal to the other. Democracy inspires political creativities and goodwill stifled by all other political

systems. It is not that democracy has not its defects, but one important aspect of democracy is that it raises humanity to a higher level. What makes democracy different from totalitarian regimes is its belief that each individual has certain basic rights which are neither conferred by nor derived from the state, but are God-given. This is expressed in the sublime words of Thomas Jefferson at the declaration of American independence in 1776: "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."¹¹ In the history of the world, no other socio-political document has expressed in such profoundly outlined in the contents of democracy.

In democracy is the affirmation of human rights and natural law. This explains the Church's close tie with the principles of democracy, - the democracy's affinity with the Gospel and Christ's mission declaration" the spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and give sight to the blind, to free the oppressed and announce the lord's year of mercy" (Lk.4: 18-19). In his visit to Chile, a reporter has asked John Paul II whether he expected to help restore democratic politics to Chile. The Pontiff's reply summarized the relationship between the Gospel, the human rights and democracy: "yes, yes" he said, "I am not the evangelizer of democracy, I am the evangelizer of the Gospel. To the Gospel message, of course, belongs all the problems of human rights, and if democracy means human rights then it also belongs to the message of the Church."¹² For John Paul, the Church's interest and preference for democracy to other systems is that: "the people have right to their liberties, even if they make mistakes in exercising them."¹³

Church's Official Statement in Favors of Democracy

There are many of the Church's documents dealing with justice and social order of things, but the most celebrated document of the Church on her courtship with democracy is the social encyclical *Centesimus Annus* of Pope John Paul II issued on 1 May, 1991. In a May 19, 2006 address to the *Centesimus Annus*- pro pontifice foundation, Pope Benedict XVI reaffirmed this official sentiment with regard to democracy. Democratic government is, he said, the most valid historical instrument for advancing human rights and development. It has proven, he maintained, to be an affective means of guaranteeing the future in a way worthy of man. He added, nevertheless, that democracy relies on the existence of other institutions that uphold a stable society. ¹⁴

In *Centesimus Annus* we read: "The Church values the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees of the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them and of reloading them through peaceful means when appropriate."¹⁵ Here the Church reiterates those elements of democracy which guarantee the freedom of the people in charting their destinies through their individual wills expressed in a fair electoral process. She discourages therefore any "formation of narrow ruling groups which usurp the power of the state for individual interests or for ideological ends."¹⁶ This is so because she believes that authentic democracy is possible only in state ruled by law, and organized on the basis of proper conception of the human person.

The Church however, is not ignorant of the crisis within democracies, even of the current philosophical tendency such as agnosticism, cortical relativism and the claims of their being basic attitude corresponding to democracy form of political life, a tendency to banalization of certain basic truths in accordance with one's taste and variation of different political life, all under the umbrella of democratic liberty. She observed in this regard that if

there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and conviction could be manipulated for the purpose of power. The document reminded us that "a democracy without values easily turns into open thinly disguised totalitarianism."¹⁷

Church's Role in Democracy: A Retrospect

The church can and has played important role in democratization. The notion that religion and politics do not mix is extremely naive and no Christian with some dint of the knowledge of Church history could give him/herself in to that opinion. Church institutions play major role in forming the consciousness of people and shaping society values. The Church was very powerful during the early period, when Christians rejoiced for being counted worthy to suffer for their belief. Then were the days when the "Church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was the thermostat that transformed the mores of society. "¹⁸

In those days when the early Christians entered the villages the power structure became disturbed and immediately sought to convict them for being 'disturbers of peace' but they were never intimidated and were able through their courage to bring to an end some of the ancient evil practices.

The church, says Pope Paul VI, "cannot remove herself from temporal affairs, because the temporal is the activity of men, and all that concerns men concerns the Church. A disembodied Church, separated from the world, would no longer be the Church of Jesus Christ, the Church of the Incarnate Word. The Church, on the contrary, interests herself closely in every general endeavor which helps to set humanity on the road to heaven, but also in the search for well being for justice, for peace, for happiness on earth.

In carrying out this duty the Church does not take up leadership of the polity, she criticizes, counsels and condemns the evil things in the system which deprive men the opportunity to live out their full human life. "The first step" says Gutierrez, "on the road to liberation is a thoroughgoing critique of ideology, an unmasking of the human suffering caused by social, economic, and political systems and an exposing of the deceptions of dominant rationalization of the system."²⁰ It is the Churches' duty therefore to recognize the urgent need of taking a forthright study on some crucial social issues and not keep silence as the generality of religious leaders do. For often that is how we come to live in falsehood. "If we lack freedom" says Fr Jerzy, executed for his pro-solidarity stance in Poland, "it is because we submit to falsehood" It's because we don't expose it, don't dispute it each and every day. We don't try to recite it. We remain silent pretending to accept it. That's how we come to live falsehood."²¹ It might interest us to know that it was the death of this young priest that marked the watershed in the freedom struggle in Poland.

This idea of unmasking the errors of political systems condemning the evil interest in the polity has also been recognized by Pope St. Gregory the Great in one of his Pastoral Rules as an essential role of the Church in an encounter with the government of the land. He spoke especially against the indifferences of some religious leader who keep silence where they should voice out opposition to the wrongdoings of society:

... ill advised silence can leave people in error when they could have been shown where they were wrong. Negligent religious leaders are often afraid to speak freely and say what needs to be said for fear of losing favor with people,... they are acting like hirelings, because hiding behind the wall of silence is like taking flight at the approach of the wolf... If a religious leader is afraid to say what is right, what else can his silence mean but that he

has taken flight? Whereas if he stands firm in defense of his flock, he is building up a wall for the house against its enemies.²²

Nhat Hanh who invested himself to ending the conflict in his country, organizing talks in which he offered concrete interpretation of the historical, political and social background of the agony of Vietnam, came close to what we think the Church should serve in the democracy of one land. Speaking from Buddhist space, he sees religions as a form of permanent opposition to the government, a role which he deemed important but thinks it better that Monks not be directly involved in politics: "The role of the monastery is not to rule the social and political order but to serve as a laboratory where people can make discoveries and then go elsewhere to aid other people. "²³

The Church empowers and actively supports the laity to carry out the work of realizing the freedom of the people enchained by evil systems. Indeed, the Polish experience remains a vivid example where the mission of proclaiming liberty to the oppressed expressed in the Gospel is not a vain word but a concrete reality. "The university of Christian love", Says Gutierrez, "is only an abstraction unless it becomes concrete history, process, conflict. "²⁴ The polish Church was an integral part in the polish struggle for democracy, the freedom of a soul that had been crushed by the weight of communism. In the words of a Polish student, "Polish priests were very active in the liberation struggles and Catholicism came to have a special place in the newly independent Poland, the Catholic hierarchy was quite involved in the Polish resistance movement... Poland wound up being almost religiously homogenous. This was the picture of Poland in which the Pope was also a major player, "one in which the role of the Catholic Church as an agent of social consciousness, moral purification and political transformation was far from being ambivalent in any way. "²⁶ The

Church did this by strongly supporting solidarity which was a resistance movement totally committed to non-violent principle.

Cardinal Glemp who succeeded Cardinal Wysinski at the head of the Catholic hierarchy in Poland justified their commitment thus: "the Church is supporting solidarity not as an ally, but as defender of human rights in the spirit of the Gospel... We do not want to dominate solidarity, but we are ready to defend it if human rights are violated."²⁷ John Paul II did not isolate himself from the reality of his own people because he was a religious leader. In fact, his experiences with the politics and history of his country drew him closer to the main struggle for the soul of Poland. More significantly and unlike leaders of flock in his position, he was deeply patriotic and concerned about the political future of his homeland. His coming to the Papacy had to set in motion a chain of events that later had to turn world history around. His involvements in the struggle did once again rekindle the debate about the role and place of religion in the social and political transformation of society. He believed like Rauschenbusch that for "the gospel to have full power over an age, it must be the highest expression of the morals and the religious truths held by that age... When the world is in travail with a higher ideal of justice and freedom, the Church dare not ignore it if it would retain its moral leadership."²⁸

It is to be remarked that neither the Pope nor the Polish hierarchy led the political front but served as leitmotiv to solidarity, a non-violent resistance movement. Not even after the fall of communism did the Church attempt to ascend the throne by direct interfering in the politics of Poland. The Church still managed to keep enough distance that allowed it the opportunity to continue playing its critical role of defending and promoting the essential elements of civil society and democracy such as justice and human rights. According to Fr. Matthew Hassan Kukah:

the Catholic Church was very successful in staying the course between civil society (represented by solidarity) and the state. Even under the state of emergency, the Church served as an instrument of moderation between the tyranny of the state and the anger, frustration and agony of an emasculated civil society. Whatever may be the limitations of the trials of democracy in post-communist Poland, there is hardly any doubt that for being a midwife of democracy, the Catholic Church in Poland did what it was prophetically called to do. ²⁹

The South African story is another case in point where the role of the Church in democratization was not in question; that is aiding to destroy the sinful body of an apartheid system that weighed on the shoulders on the people for generations. The Catholic Church was not at the forefront of this crusade but it was equally not excluded. The Christians was actively involved and the Church was actually the main shelter or umbrella for the struggle. In no smaller way, Archbishop Desmond Tutu managed to accomplish for the Black people of South Africa what the Pope did for his Polish people. His arrival did change the context of Church involvement in the struggle against apartheid regime and the creation of a democratic society.

Tutu started off his struggle by an open letter to the Prime Minister Vorster in 1976. With an appeal to history in justifying the claims of the Black people to freedom and justice in their land he wrote:

I am writing to you, Sir, as a member of a race that has known what it has meant in frustration and hurts, in agony and humiliation, to be a subject people. The history of your own race speaks eloquently of how utterly impossible it is, when ones desire for freedom and self-determination is awakened in a people, for it

to be quenched or to be satisfied with anything less than freedom and self-determination.³⁰

Archbishop Tutu was brought closer to the apartheid machine when he was appointed the Archbishop of Cape Town, capital of the apartheid state, but there he spoke in his sermon saying:

God calls us to be His fellow workers. He wants to enlist our support, to be His agent of transfiguration, of transformation. There is much evil afoot in the world, in this land."³¹ Evidently the state did not fold up its arms in the face of these conscience- perturbing oppositions from the Church. It unfolded measures against the Church leaders placing restrictions on them. But expressing support and unity with their religious leaders, some 150 lay faithful left St. George's Catholic Cathedral, Cape Town in rows, arm in arm. When intercepted by the Police, they knelt down and began singing and praying; and events reported by an elated BBC journalist thus: "the Church has unmistakably taken over the front line of the anti-apartheid struggle."³²

THE STATE OF NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY

One of the credits of Nigeria's fledgling democracy is the ability to have held on for eight good years without a military coup d'état, the taming of the military appetite despite the fact that all enabling element or components that nourish coups exist already in abundance. "Coups grow when it finds fertile soil" says Tam David-West, "coups do not grow in the desert, neither in brackish water. Coups grow in well matured soil of discontent, mismanagement and frustration."³³ These ingredients of coups are profuse in Nigeria at present but tends to be growing discipline and determined resistance of our military to say 'no' to our brutish nature and confine themselves to the global movement towards a

better culture, we have now stepped out of the tooting age of democracy.

Again, the positive developments in recent times within Senate and the Judiciary not only strengthens the argument how bad leadership had been the bane of the country's problem, but joyfully points also to the new hope they instill on the people with respect to Nigeria's democracy. In his article "Senate's Historic Duty" Ikechukwu Amechi explained how these two bodies now try to re-invent the nation's democracy. Praising Ken Namani's Senate Presidency which "has imbued in the chambers proceedings a measure of credibility and trustworthiness that many had hitherto thought impossible", he expressed how Nigerians now "rekindle their hope in the upper legislative body." ³⁴ It is however a different thing when it comes to obeying the court decisions and orders by the executives. But the fact that the judiciary is no longer cowed by the executive arm of the government is a movement of hope. Democracy subjects government to the will of law and ensures that all citizens receive equal protection under the law and that their rights are protected by the legal system. But President Olusegun Obasanjo sweeps the constitution and the laws of the land with impunity and without consequence. Not even court rulings could tame his growing dictatorship. He has continued to disobey court orders, even the Supreme Court order to make "immediate release" of seized funds belonging to the Lagos State Government has been disobeyed till date, now two years after the court ruling. This can best be characterized as an end-product of arrogance of power. Wole Soyinka in his interview to The NEWS magazine said, "there is a constitution. There is a law. Any serving official who flouts the law should be dealt with by the appropriate mechanism of the law. And we cannot have a *headmasterish* approach to governance in this country because that is how it begins... The government of this country defiled the Supreme Court, continues to pretend that he did not understand the judgment of the Court and ignored the hardship

that was imposed on millions of people."³⁵ He refused to restore the security details of the Governor of Anambra State and not even the combined effort of the party chairman of People's Democratic Party who wrote him to bring to a halt the criminal and treasonable activity on the governor and the people, could make him move an inch. He even sacked Audu Ogbeh, the Chairman for daring to write him on peace when indeed he delights in anarchy and celebrates hatred. He does all this with flagrant disdain to the constitution and law of the land. This is because ours is a democracy without power of checks and balances.

Democracy in Nigeria today is facing many problems, problems of insecurity, education, health, food, poor economy, unappeased tribalism and resurgent ethnicism. On insecurity, one is bewildered over the frequency of disasters, both natural and man-made let loose on this country since the regime of Obasanjo; disasters which include plane crashes, ritual and political killings, sponsored kidnappings and burning of State infrastructures to forcefully remove governors who do not make returns by sending back the state fund through godfathers to the President and his cohorts, allowing anarchy to reign in certain States and showing unimaginable diffidence to the sufferings of a people. There is poverty, dishonesty, misgovernance, dissatisfaction with the system, insecurity and hopelessness in the land. The people are forlorn, disgusted and dismayed. In his Open New Year Message to the President, Gani Fawehinmi did remind him that "the agony, the anguish, the pain and the pang of crushing poverty brought on the majority of Nigerians since his administration had given no hope to better future."³⁶

About 5 years ago, the Nigerian Catholic bishops issued a statement critical of President Olusegun Obasanjo's government for failing to live up to expectations for democracy after the end of a military dictatorship. "It is sad to say that the Government is not living up to our hopes and expectations," the bishops said. "We see many

members of the political class, at federal, state, and local government levels, looking not to the needs even the most basic needs of the people, but spending time and money looking only how they can be re-elected." According to the bishops, "we see government at all levels dissipating scarce resources on expensive projects that do not directly improve the lives of the people." For them, "it is surely a sign of the democracy which is deficient."³⁷

At the State and Local Government levels, the story is the same. It is baffling to hear that a State Governor should spend a whooping sum of N800 million to produce simple almanac and 'other essential documents' when millions of young men and women roam the street and go insane in that very state for want of job."³⁸ In Rivers State, according to a human rights' survey, the office of the governor budgeted for 2006 more than US\$10 million for "entertainment and hospitality... gifts and souvenirs" and US\$100,000 a day for travel and unspecified "contributions" while basic services decayed. Also, on his shopping list was a private jet to replace the previous year's new helicopter, but this is a state where in some health clinics the patients are often required to bring in their own beds and medicines, and most schools run out of chalk and use bare cement walls for blackboards. This high level of corruption is applicable to almost all the 36 States of the country. There exists widespread graft which some officials try to cover up by requiring colleagues to swear oaths of secrecy³⁹. There has been accusations and probe on how President Obasanjo and his Vice, Atiku, made away with millions of Dollars from the PTDF account. Not even the admission by Atiku that he stole from the account but Obasanjo got more from the loot had been seen sufficient to impeach them and make them account for stolen fund.

A concerned Nigeria once wrote in his article 'These Dangerous Times': "We are entering a most dangerous time of our political history. And it is important that notice should be taken of it and

warning should be sounded.! The periods from now until the elections are conducted in 2007 may constitute injury time not in the sense of the system having to run its full tenure but because a lot of damage has been inflicted on the body polity. "40

The Church and Nigerian Democracy: A Call for Action

In modern psychology, the word "maladjusted" is so much used to depict man's inclined disposition against what is generally despicable. And in our social order, we must be maladjusted to corruption, thuggery, dictatorship, injustice, wanton destruction of a people's life and property for the purpose of achieving power, we must be maladjusted to the suppression of people's will and choice perfected through rigging. We must pray God to "grant that we will be so maladjusted that we will be able to go out and change our world and our civilization. And then we will be able to move from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man to the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice."41

The book of Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the Social Crisis, in which he gave to American Protestantism a good sense of social responsibility, should serve some constant reminder to the Nigerian Church. For him, 'the gospel at its best deals with the whole man, not only his soul but his body, not only his spiritual well-being, but his material well-being. Any religion that professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them and the social conditions that cripple them is a spiritually moribund religion awaiting burial'42 Many social encyclicals have been written showing the symmetry of the human frame; how the harmony between the body and the soul should be maintained in a balance. A number of Church scholars have also devoted their energy dealing with the socio-political problems of bad governance in Nigeria 'Where deep spirituality lives side by side with Fr. John Odey, Fr. George Ehusanya, Fr. Matthew Kukah, Fr. Obiora Ike, etc. But in spite of these efforts, very little has been achieved

bringing to the fore the recurring question: what has really gone wrong? It is highly probable that among other things, ignorance on the part Of Catholics and Christians at large has contributed considerably to his situation.

In addition, the inability of the Catholic Church to establish tertiary institutions to address the socio-political needs and aspirations of the laity has led to the ineffectual laity who are unable to address the problems of political participation and how the matters relate to their spiritual lives. The Church insists in its emphasis on the human person and the resistance to any structure that militates against it. She seems to suggest in its encyclicals that it is a sin to wallow in poverty amidst plenty. This explains Pope John Paul II's attack on what he calls the structures of sin as the main obstacles of achieving the dignity of the human person. It is the role of the Nigerian Church to be at the vanguard of combating these barriers but unfortunately, she is often weak in this respect, an ineffectual voice.⁴³ One calls to mind *The Prophetic Church*, a book written by George Ehusanya, which stirred some hornets. Matthew Kukah remarked that 'although the book did not even come close to issues raised in a number of the social encyclicals, many who considered themselves orthodox or conservative Catholic seemed to have been taken exception to the book's radical interpretation of the Biblical and Pontifical texts. '⁴⁴ Such is the situation in which we lived. Indeed, we cannot ignore the fact that our standards do sometimes fall short. One of the sure signs of maturity is the ability to rise to the point of self-criticism. We must admit we do not have a strong and united prophetic voice. The situation is not restricted to the biblical texts and the Church's social interpretation of them but also political. Some highest ecclesiastics even get divided on the basis of ethnicity and socio-political alignments, thereby diluting moral offensive against the evil of our bad political systems. Kukah writes that "the challenge of a new. Nigeria lie partly in whether those who

understand the Church's teaching can take up the challenge across the artificial borders of ethnicity and religion."⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

We must work hard and with determined courage to remove from the body politic the cancerous disease of corruption which is preventing our democratic and Christian health from being realized. Then and only then will we bring into full realization the dream of our Nigerian democracy - a dream of a place where all our gifts and resources are held not for ourselves alone but as instruments of service for all Nigerians. For all the talk about structures of sin, maladjustment to other various forms of social ills, prophetic denunciation of evil systems, establishment of the Church tertiary institutions etc., not much will happen unless lay people fully assume their role in the Church and society. Whether in politics, economy or social life, there is very little that the clerical class can do in terms of bringing about direct. political change unless the laity is fully educated and equipped to take the ball and play. Pope John Paul II and the Catholic hierarchy of Poland were all involved in the political struggle in their homeland but never as direct players in the political changes. The same was true of Archbishop Desmond Tutu; they were only motivators, the moral force beyond the struggles of people on whom were foisted the social injustice and immoral structures of their society. The people must therefore be ready and indeed show signs that they want to liberate themselves from the structures that oppress them.

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