DEVELOPMENT AS AFRICAN THEOLOGY TODAY

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Introduction

The missionary mandate of Matthew 28,19: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all the teaching I gave you, lo I am with you till the end of time” is understood by the Church to have three dimensions namely: proclamation of the Word, celebration of sacraments and witnessing. This third aspect touches the various aspects of life in human community. One of such aspects is integral development. Looking at the economic, political, social, environmental and human development in our country Nigeria today one cannot but notice that most people seem to have no direction and are just following the wind. Even many of the so called elites find it hard to distinguish between common good, good of all and personal good. History shows that the Western development was built on Christian principles and foundations which emerged mostly as a result of the Church’s engagement in the championing of development in all its aspects.

In our time, the Church’s engagement for a better life for humanity has not waned. The Second Vatican Council provided a big opportunity for the Church to articulate very well her development principles which should be the foundation for development in our time. Going through the pages of the Vatican II document on the Church in our Time, Gaudium et Spes, one cannot but ask one question: what role should the Catholic theology in Nigeria play today for the promotion of integral human development? To answer this question, we will delve briefly into the history of missionary activities in southern Nigeria. From the history, we will pick up the essential elements of the missionary work of the epoch that are related to development. We shall then replace those elements in the context of the Church’s teaching on development in the light of Gaudium et Spes. To conclude, we will X-ray the condition of things in Nigeria today and the Church’s engagement so far before proposing what we think the Church in the person of her theologians should do to make our development more Christian and more human.
Missionaries as Theologians of Development

After the 15th century’s failed attempts by the Portuguese missionaries to implant Christianity in Nigeria through the Delta Regions, successful attempts were made in the 19th century. One of such attempts was the arrival of young French Spiritan missionaries at Onitsha on 5th December, 1885. Before being allowed to see the King of Onitsha this group of four young missionaries: two priests Fr. Joseph Lutz and Fr. Jean Horne with two brothers Hermas Huck and Jean Gotto were made to sign a treaty with the colonial representatives the Royal Niger Company, a treaty of non-commercial or trade interference with the natives. The British colonial masters wanted to make sure that the missionaries would not become their rivals and in this way tamper with the colonial economic and political interest in the region. This group is made up of priest specially trained for the pastoral work and brothers specially trained for technical work for advancing human development. Even though one of them, Brother Jean Gotto died of malaria few days after their arrival, the others continued with the mission which was not only proclamation of the Word, but also social developmental work. In the words of a professor of history these young missionaries under the leadership of Fr. Joseph Lutz “introduced the use of schools (for boys and for girls), charitable work (dispensaries, hospitals, orphanage and asylum), trade and industrial institutions (for carpentry, masonry, tailoring, shoe-making etc.), farming and gardening as means of attracting and retaining converts to the Catholic religion.”

Fr. Lutz worked tirelessly for ten years, laying the foundation of the Church in Southern Nigeria and on 17th December, 1895 took a final bow, leaving behind him a young Church with a solid foundation.

The successor of Lutz, Fr. Leon Lejeune who worked from 1900 to 1905, continued with the foundation period of the mission. He pushed the missionary initiative for human development further. He founded high schools and introduced a new architectural method by building the mission residence with burnt bricks and even building upstairs. In introducing the use of burnt bricks, he was also introducing for the natives a new way of building houses, for burnt bricks would henceforth begin to replace the mud bricks that the natives were using for their own constructions prior to his coming. He believed that if missionaries are well housed, a lot of money spent on sending them overseas for medical treatment could be directed to other areas of importance in the mission work. He abandoned the expensive practice of buying slaves and running a Christian village and concentrated more on hospitals, orphanages, boarding schools and overseas

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campaign for funds. In doing this, he obliged the Christians to become contributors to Church projects and not just passive receivers. For him, everybody be he young or old, sick or healthy should contribute to the building of the church. This initiative was the seed-sowing which has today materialized into a very active and generous participation of our people towards church projects and church personnel. Commenting on this brief but active five years period of mission under Fr. Lejeune, a historian writes:

> Within the period of five years he was Prefect Apostolic, he reorganized and brought initiatives that would eventually put the Niger mission squarely on the missionary map. He had ambitious pastoral programmes and revolutionary ideas on how to capitalize on the school apostolate to the advantage of all concerned. He set the parameters with which his successors Shanahan and Heery operated.

After Lejeune, the direction of the mission entered the hands of Fr. Joseph Shanahan, a young Irish Spiritan. He took up the task of expanding the mission territory to the Igbo hinterland and through his courage and charismatic leadership spread the faith to all the corners of the then Eastern Nigeria which includes the Delta regions of what is known today as the South-south region of Nigeria. Under his leadership, it was said that the mission expanded tremendously in both scope and activities. His success in making the achievements was as a result of his personality, vision and method of carrying out missionary work. He was bold and fearless, mixed freely with people, reasoned with them and understood them. Through intensive personal pastoral visitations of almost all the communities under his charge he was able to come in direct contact with the people and their needs. After the Prussian war, the Germans having lost the war were obliged to relinquish all the countries allotted to them to colonise in Africa. The same decision touched the German missionaries in Africa. Consequently, some part of Cameroun under the charge of German missionaries passed to the charge of Bishop Shanahan. Shanahan therefore decided to visit these communities. It was a thousand mile trekking. After that visit, Shanahan’s health never returned to normal.

Shanahan was succeeded by Bishop Charles Heerey. During his period 1931-1967 known by historians as the period of consolidation, Heerey concentrated in the consolidation of the school apostolate and especially in the

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2 Udoye, *Resolving The Prevailing Conflict Between Christianity*, 170.
4 Udoye, *Resolving the Prevailing Conflict Between Christianity*, 171.
establishment of secondary schools and the resuscitation of the medical apostolate. It was at his time that Catholicism was given more administrative carvings in the lower Niger Catholic mission. Creation of local clergy and congregations were also vigorously pursued having as result the emergence of indigenous priests and religious.\textsuperscript{5}

**Essential Elements of the Missionary Period In Relation To Development**

Having gone through the period of foundation, expansion and consolidation of the missionary period in Southern Nigeria, I wish to underline the basic developmental initiatives of the period.

Under Fr. Lutz, the following were initiated: buying of slaves, Christian village, school for children, dispensaries, orphanages, asylum, trade and industrial institutions, technical workshops, farming and gardening. Under Fr. Leon Lejeune and Shanahan these activities were intensified while Heerey for his part consolidated what others had done while introducing the administrative structures. We can group these into four: human formation (school and Christian village), engagement for justice, peace and human right (asylum, buying of slaves), professional formation for promotion of life with dignity (trade, building technology and industrial institutions), charity (orphanage) and investment on human capital (medical apostolate). These four categories of activities fall into the categories of what is known today as integral human development, that is, the promotion of man in every aspect of his existence. Let us now study each of these in the light of the Second Vatican Council and her teaching.

**Human Formation**

Even though the missionary period (1885-1965) started before the Council, that is to say that the council did not so much influence the decisions of the missionary to engage themselves in the development of their mission territories, it is pertinent to note that they carried out their work in the spirit of the council. They in fact anticipated the Council. While affronting courageously the situation of the people to whom they were sent to evangelize, the missionaries very quickly understood that “the black African is so much attached to the ancestral and traditional world, a world that is not so much exploited and not so much understood but a world that conditions all his decisions.”\textsuperscript{6} Understanding

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.

this is very vital for development because a man cannot begin to transform his world if he does not understand it. For the African, the world is a mystery to be worshipped and not a reality to be transformed. At that time, “the black African has grossomodo a passive attitude of someone who suffers nature, who participates in nature but does not dominate it, does not master nature and does not subdue it.” The result is the mystification of nature. He sees the forces of nature as something to be pacified or to be endured patiently or even worshipped. The missionaries understood that only education in faith and in secular realities could solve this problem. That was why education of children was a priority for their mission. While educating children, it was also important to liberate the adults from the mentality of wonderment before the forces of nature. For this reason, Fr. Lutz introduced the Christian villages where all the converts to Christianity lived, separate from others. The idea of separating the Christians from others however, may not today be seen as an ideal since Christians are supposed to be lambs among wolves and to be the light in darkness. Besides, running the Christian village was very expensive and weighed on the funds for other missionary projects. However, at the period it proved an efficient means of education in faith necessary for inculcating a mentality of domination over nature and the ancestral misbeliefs.

The Council Fathers confirmed the option for education which was a priority for the early missionaries. They insisted on the necessity of education for development, especially through a proper understanding of nature and its values. “It is one of the properties of the human person that he can achieve true and full humanity only by means of culture that is, through the cultivation of the goods and values of nature.” This cultivation of goods and values can only come through education, especially through formal education. Culture is understood here to mean “all those things which go to the refining and developing of man’s diverse mental and physical endowment. He strives to subdue the earth by his knowledge and labour; he humanizes social life both in the family and in the whole civic community through the improvement of customs and institutions.”

Given this importance, the Fathers insist that ignorance is a “curse” which all, especially Christians should strive to deliver the human race from. For them, there must be provision of sufficient basic education for all “lest any be prevented by
illiteracy and lack of initiative from contributing in an authentically human way to the common good.”

It was this refining of mentality and behaviour and the mental empowerment that the missionaries aimed at through schools and the Christian villages. It is only through the realization of true and full humanity that a society could be said to have developed. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the imbibing of Christian mentality and the spirit of understanding rather than mystifying natural phenomena came more through school than through preaching. It was with school that children were introduced into the realities of the world through geography enabling them to understand that the universe has its own law and that all is not directed by the blind forces of nature and the spirits.

**Engagement for Justice, Peace and Human Right**

Even though the trans-Atlantic slave trade was officially abolished in 1841 in England that is, before the arrival of missionaries in Southern Nigeria, the missionaries still observed that in practice slave trade was still in place. Knowing full well that the perpetrators of this evil were the powerful people in the society with their European brothers, the missionary resorted to buying back the slaves and setting them free. It was an expensive enterprise as this gulped huge sum that would have been invested in other missionary projects. However, it was their way of saying no to an insult against human dignity. They also noticed that the people have some practices that go against human right and dignity like human sacrifice, killing of twins and a caste system whereby some people were dedicated to gods and by this very fact, regarded as inferior human beings who should live apart from others and not have any social relationship with the free-born. The missionaries in their desire to promote human right and dignity had to provide asylum to such people and even create orphanage for twins recovered from the evil forest where they were usually dropped to die. Again in many occasions, the missionary had to voice out their non-acceptance of some unjust treatments meted out to the Africans by their white colonial brothers. Often, they were engaged in direct opposition and conflict or they brought to their support those afflicted by the colonial masters. It was their way of promoting justice, peace and human dignity.

The defence of human right and dignity as well as the promotion of justice and peace occupied a lot of pages in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. The first chapter of *Gaudium et Spes* was devoted to the dignity of the human person. The Fathers maintained that man is created in the image and likeness of God. Even when he fell into sin, God did not abandon him, but sent his only Son

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11 Ibid.
12 Udoye, *Resolving the Prevailing Conflict Between Christianity*, 162.
13 *Gaudium et Spes*, 12-22.
to redeem him, showing by this the immense dignity of this creature that is man. The Fathers maintained that man is superior to every other created thing, “for by his power to know himself in depths of his being he rises above the whole universe of mere objects.”\textsuperscript{14} He has a spiritual and immortal soul, intelligence and conscience. By all these, man merits to be treated with respect and honour. Above all man is created to be a free being, being responsible for his action. “Man’s dignity therefore requires him to act out of conscious and free choice, as moved and drawn in a personal way from within, and not by blind impulses in him or by mere external constraint.”\textsuperscript{15}

A close reading of the Council’s teaching helps to appreciate the action of the missionaries in their clear light. They knew that slavery is a total contradiction of God’s will that his children should be free moral agents. They knew that killing of twins and human sacrifices are against the fundamental right to life which God has given to all his children. They recognized that the cast system which reduces some people to social outcast goes against the right of every man to be treated with respect. By their position against such social evils, the missionaries laid a solid foundation for social justice and peace without which any development\textsuperscript{16} will remain an illusion to be pursued but never attained.

Professional Formation for Promotion of Life with Dignity

Before the coming of the missionaries, our people were already practising some professional and commercial activities. However, the advent of the missionaries opened the doors for new ways of doing things. Life in the Christian village was not devoid of activities and these activities were not concerned only with spiritual exercises. The converts were taught new ways of working like carpentry, shoe-making, tailoring, masonry etc. Our people had a way of building with mud, thatches and ropes. The mission building had to be constructed, especially from the time of Fr. Lejeune with burnt bricks, zinc and nails. This provided opportunity for our people to be trained in the modern way of building as masons and carpenters. The converts were given clothes to attract them to the faith and with that came the practice of dressing like the white which was different from our traditional dressing with weaved clothes. This created the need to have tailors and the missionary rose up to the challenge by training tailors from among our people. In so doing, they put in place a new profession. Foot wears were not so common among our people. However, with the missionaries it started

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{16} Pope Paul VI in his encyclical on the Development of Peoples \textit{Populorum Progressio}, 26 March 1967 maintained that development and peace are inseparable. For him development is the new name for peace.
being common especially with the catechists and teachers. Such necessitated the training for shoemakers. In doing this, the missionaries were in fact creating economic outlets for bettering the life of our people.

The Council document will confirm this initiative in the third chapter of the second part of *Gaudium et Spes* titled “economic and social life.” The Council Fathers insisted that the economic and social lives are areas where the dignity and entire vocation of the human person have to be respected and fostered. Man is seen as the source, the focus and the end of economic and social life. The Fathers were of the view that faith in Christ should push Christians to work for a better world. “Anyone who in obedience to Christ seeks first the kingdom of God will derive from it a stronger and purer love for helping all his brethren and for accomplishing the task of justice under the inspiration of charity.” Such activities are seen by the Council as a way of contributing “to the prosperity of mankind and to world peace.”

There could be no better way of explaining the inspiration of the missionaries in training their convert on professional and economic activities. The missionaries were acting under the influence of their faith because they were really seeking first the kingdom of God and they knew that that kingdom begins here on earth.

It is a mistake to think that, because we have no lasting city, but seek the city which is to come, we are entitled to shirk our earthly responsibilities, this is to forget that by our faith we are bound all the more to fulfil these responsibilities…let there, then, be no such pernicious opposition between professional and social activities in one hand and religious life in another.

**Charity and Investment on Human Capital**

The missionaries also invested much on human capital. By this, I mean the facilities and structures that help to keep man on top of his abilities, making him fully alive. Such include the maternities, orphanages and hospitals. These structures were totally inexisten before the advent of Christianity in our region. However, the missionaries could not fold their arms and watch babies recovered from evil forest die. The twins that were picked from the evil forest could not be returned to their mothers and adoption was not yet a practice then. For this reason, orphanages were created. There was also a high rate of infant mortality and even maternal post natal mortality. This too made the missionaries to create

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17 *Gaudium et Spes*, 63-73.
18 Ibid., 63.
19 Ibid., 72.
20 Ibid., 43.
maternities. The creation of hospitals came also as a necessity for curing sick people. Fr. Lutz had a formation in medicine and was particularly instrumental in the establishment of these structures. Bishop Heerey would bring the initiative to its height with the great Charles Borromeo Hospital Onitsha, the Holy Rosary Hospital both in Onitsha and Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital Ihiala. The orphanages could not continue because our people understood with the teachings of the missionaries that twins were not actually evil omen but rather signs of God’s love.

One could see that the missionaries were not just acting a script. They were confronting life as they met it in their mission territory. Their attitude would be acknowledged years later by the Council Fathers who praised the attitudes of the missionaries of the Church who down through the ages have laboured to make life easy through the development of their mission territories, bringing better life for their people. For them, the mission that Christ bequeathed to his Church was not in political, economic or social order. It was rather a religious one. Yet, “the Church is able, indeed it is obliged, if times and circumstances require it, to initiate action for benefit of all men, especially those in need, like works of mercy and similar undertakings.”21 The healthcare of the people in the mission territory is part of activities described above as “similar undertakings”. In this way, the Council recognized the correctness of the missionary initiatives for the improvement and security of human capital through the provision of health services.

Theology, understood as creative interpretation of the Word of God and the teaching of the Church in the light of human experience, is fully manifest in the work of the missionaries. Theology for me is not just a reflection about God and man. No, it is rather human experience explained in the light of God and His Word. The engagement of the early missionaries in four vital areas of development is a veritable theology that should form the basis of our evaluation of Catholic theology in Nigeria of today. A brief look at the situation in Nigeria today will help us see if the Church has remained faithful to the initiatives of the founding fathers of our faith.

**Nigerian Situation Today**

The Second Vatican Council ended in December, 1965. Before the Nigerian Church could have time to digest the teachings of the Council, the country was launched into a civil war which started in July, 1967 and lasted till January, 1970. The end of the war witnessed the repatriation of all the expatriate missionaries in the Southern part of the country. The Nigerian government accused them of having made the war to last longer than expected through the

21 Ibid., 42.
support they procured for the Biafrans. It was expected that without their presence and the propaganda work they carried out in their own countries, the war would have ended within a short time. This left the Church in Southern Nigeria very weak without enough pastoral agents. It was at this time that catechists were empowered to direct churches with the few available priests.

After the war, the immediate need of the Church was not the application of the council’s teachings, but rather the reconstruction of the war ravaged Southern Nigeria. The unprepared departure of the missionaries made it impossible for them to handover to the very few indigenous priests who took over from them. One of the results was that most of the council’s teachings were not really received as they should.

Today, the country has recovered from some of the aftermaths of the war, but authentic human development is a dream yet to be realized. This is in part because of the rapid and tumultuous transformations taking place on a global level and which affects humanity as a whole. There are series of new situations in the world. “Ours is a new age of history with critical and swift upheavals spreading gradually to all corners of the earth…we are entitled then to speak of a real social and cultural transformation whose repercussions are felt too on the religious level.” Nigeria is richer today and yet a huge portion of the people is plagued by hunger and extreme need, while countless numbers are totally illiterate. Social injustice has become the order of the day in spite of the clamouring for human right in every quarter. 1% of the population live on the 70% of the nation’s wealth. Freedom is desired and pursued by all and yet there emerges new forms of slavery. People seek solidarity and yet a lot of oppositions along ethnic cleavages dominate the mentality of Nigerians.

The diverse discoveries of science and technology like the telephone and the internet have modified enormously our people’s culture at all levels. The traditional perception of family, understanding of family ties, sex, marriage, wealth, honesty and other traditional values have been put to question by the phenomena of urbanization, capitalism and intellectual libertinism. The emergence of new religious movements that focus on miracle, prophecies and prosperity has greatly modified the way of understanding failure and success in economic and social endeavours. Corruption and the corresponding impunity in the country give the impression that it pays to be a criminal, it pays to enrich oneself rather than contribute in developing the country.“There is lastly a painstaking search for a better material world, without a parallel spiritual advancement.”

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23 Gaudium et Spes, 4.
24 Ibid.
As one can easily see, the situation at the time of the early missionaries was quite different from that of today. It would not be an overstatement to say that in spite of our rich human and natural resources, we are retrogressing. Bearing in mind all that the missionaries were able to realize in their time one cannot but ask this pertinent question: what should be the contribution of the Church through her theologians for the development of Nigeria today?

The Task for African Theologians Today

Like the missionary Church, the Church in Nigeria has in general done a lot for the improvement of the people’s life. Education, health services, fights for social justice, charity and above all adequate involvement in moral formation of consciences of the masses are the areas where the Church has excelled. I do not want to dwell on these areas but rather to explore new avenues where the Church can still be useful especially through the theologians.

Theology according to great medieval theologians and teachers, as a science of faith, is first of all a participation in God’s own knowledge of himself. Many tend to think that theology is merely discourse and not action. Pope Francis writes:

> It is not just our discourse about God, but first and foremost the acceptance and the pursuit of a deeper understanding of the word which God speaks to us, the word which God speaks about himself, for he is an eternal dialogue of communion, and he allows us to enter into this dialogue. Theology thus demands the … striving to investigate, with the discipline proper to reason, the inexhaustible riches of this mystery.  

If theology is not just our discourse about God but concerns the pursuit of the word which God speaks to us about himself, we have to accept that through the incarnation, God has revealed himself as human. For this reason, theology, be it systematic or practical is first of all about God and human life here on earth and then hereafter in heaven, purgatory or hell as the Scripture has revealed. This means that any theology worthy of its name must take seriously what human beings go through otherwise it becomes a theology for angels; in which case, it becomes irrelevant for human beings. African theologians should therefore, meet the African people where they are. They should concentrate their effort in making the African man stand on his two feet and face the challenges of his time. According to Pope Francis, “theology must be at the service of the faith of

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Christians that it must work humbly to protect and deepen the faith of everyone, especially ordinary believers.”

Our theology accordingly must begin with the people and their problem, especially in the areas where the ordinary believer has problem otherwise his faith runs a risk of dying.

Today, the greatest problem facing the ordinary African believer is development, development understood as a movement from a less human way of life to a more human way of life, a movement that is integral, that is, taking into consideration the improvement of every aspect of human existence in a systematic and coordinated manner without favouring an aspect to the detriment of the others. These aspects include human development which has to do with the promotion of authentic societal values through education, religion and good governance and provision of common good, economic development, social development, political development and environmental protection. It is in these five areas that African theologians should prove their mark if they are to be useful to the society. This does not in any way mean that classical theological orientations should be neglected since they form the theoretical basis for every theological reflection.

Priests, religious and catechists form a greater percentage of African practical and systematic theologians. The general expectation from the people is that they are normally spiritual gurus. However, spirituality as we could see from the missionary activities is not just a sacristy or sanctuary affair. “Spirituality to be relevant today must be translated into a personal stance towards people and society at large. Holiness has a social dimension with a commitment that involves justice.”

Theologians must today revaluate the way they understand piety of the pastors and religious. Excellence in virtue of purity, humility, celebration of sacrament and prayer should become visible in the engagement for the transformation of the society. “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us a constitutive dimension of the teaching of the gospel, or in other words, of the Church’s mission for the salvation of human race and its liberation from every oppressive situations.”

We will like to consider four areas which seem to be the most important: engagement for social justice, preferential option for the poor, parish empowerment projects and protection of the environment.

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26 Ibid.

27 By common good I mean the ensemble of things that make it possible for people to more easily realize their potential and live happily. It is the job of the government to see to the provision and promotion of common good.


Engagement for Social Justice

According to an African theologian, “The great dangers to the faith in African will not come from dogmatic beliefs, but rather from the imperative of action. Will the African Christian be counted among the most active and effective agent in the promotion of the African society? Will he be able to respond to the cry of the African man? Injustice and unjust structures abound in the African society today. One cannot but ask what should be the contribution of theologians towards the eradication of these social evils? African theologians should not only reflect and preach against injustice. They should engage in fights against injustice by first of all making themselves free from unjust social acts. For example, they should give humble service to the people, respecting each person as a subject of human dignity which God has bestowed on all human being independently of their social status. They should promote good salaries and better working conditions for mission workers. They are not obliged to employ people if they cannot pay them well but if they employ, they should be well paid. They should see that those working for them do not work like slaves but should have adequate time for rest, holidays and leisure.

Charity does not end at home. It is for this reason the Catholic theologians should not only rid themselves of injustice but should also encourage others through their reflections, preaching and their personal engagement. Martin Luther King Jnr was a powerful pastor, but if he only preached against injustice without going out to engage the consciences of the oppressors he would not have obtained the right of equal treatment for the American blacks of all times. It is a question of faith with good work. Such an engagement calls for detachment from wanton quest for material things that is gradually eating up the preachers of the word and making their voices to be drowned by their selfish desires. As Pope Paul VI puts it, preaching is not enough for our contemporaries listen more to witnesses than to preachers and if they listen to preacher it is because these are witnesses.

Fundamental Option for the Poor

The second area is that of fundamental option for the poor. This expression “option for the poor” came into being when the Latin American Churches tried to live out the social implications of the teachings of Second Vatican Council. In a simple terms, this means “not just living poorly but an empowering of the ‘poor’ through searching with them for the meaning of

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Christian faith in our world.” It means solidarity rather than charity, a concrete sharing in the sorrows, pains, joys, hopes and fears of those who are marginalized. “It is the commitment by individual Christian and the Christian community at every level to engage actively in a struggle to overcome the social injustice which mars our world.” Such solidarity involves a commitment to working and living within structures and agencies that promote the interest of the less favoured sector of the society.

What do we mean by the less favoured sector of the society? By this is meant in the first place, those who are materially poor. Secondly, it means the groups that are politically marginalized or oppressed. Thirdly, it includes people discriminated against, no matter the basis of such discrimination. Fourthly, it involves the people that have been culturally silenced or oppressed. Finally, it has to do with those who have been religiously disinherited or deprived.

How does the Church through the person of her theologians promote development in these marginalized sectors? The first thing to do is the commitment of pastors not to become allies of any unjust public authority, regime or individual, but rather to campaign actively against such powers. They should back up with the authority of the Church the effort made to challenge unjust and sinful structures in the society and should refuse Greek gifts coming from those who oppress the poor. They should in parishes undertake the empowerment of the poor through professional trainings and enlightenment programme and public awareness lectures. They should also make the Church more just in such a way that the poor can see in the Church a partner in their struggle for better life and enhanced human dignity. The poor should in this way be allowed to participate in decision-making in the Church.

The papacy of Pope Francis is a special light for all theologians on the best way of theologizing today. Pope Francis does not only give good reflection on poverty. He gets involved in the life of the poor. His whole life in itself is a theology of poverty. His simplicity of life, his visits to the poor and his solidarity with immigrants speak volumes for the elaboration of theology of the poor. The Pope goes to meet the people where they are. African theologians should meet Africans where they are today and that is no other place than development.

**Empowerment Theology**

How does it feel to see healthy young and sometimes educated people playing card at the productive hours of the day? We certainly feel that such people are lazy and will someday become criminals if they are not yet. But do we ask the question: why are these people playing instead of working? The generous master of the vineyard in the gospel once asked such a question and the response he got

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33 Ibid., 4.
was: we are not working because nobody employed us. If many youths are idle today, is it not because nobody has employed them? Work is a human right. Every individual has a fundamental right to work, for in the beginning God ordered man to work. But if there is no work, how is one to be blamed for being idle? It is at this point that the African theologian should begin his work on the theology of work.  

During the Pope’s visit to Brazil in July, 2013 for the World Youths Day, many journalists commented on the success of the new evangelical Churches in Brazil, a success that has as consequence the reduction of the number of Catholics in the country. One of the reasons adduced by Catholics for leaving their faith and joining the evangelical Churches was the disappointment they felt in following a Church that was always talking about the poor but doing nothing to change their situation. Apparently, the new evangelical Churches were also talking about the poor but they not only talked, they also act so that the poor find a better life.

Borrowing a leaf from the evangelical Churches in Brazil who like the apostles tried to empower the Christians, the African theologian should think out ways of empowering the youths who are the future of the Church. It might not be right to wish away this task by saying that it belongs to the state to empower her citizens. As a matter of fact, the important structures that form the pride of most developed countries of Europe today were initially put in place by the Church. We have to know that development is first and foremost about people and their well-being and not just question of bricks and mortar. If we do not realize this, theologians especially parish pastors will continue to build structures to pump up their personal ego as builders to the detriment of their role as the feeders of the flock of Christ.

At the wall separating Jerusalem from Bethlehem, I read a bold inscription: “It is better to build bridges than to build walls. Tear down this wall.” Instead of investing on projects that are only occasionally useful, parish pastors should focus on projects that can create job and yield money for the parishes. It is better to build a small scale industry that can yield money to the parish and give job to five youths than to build a magnificent parish gate. Fr. Ejike Mbaka, Mgr. Obiora Ike, Fr. Emmanuel Edeh and the leaders of some female religious congregations in Nigeria are among the good examples of empowerment theologians. It will be right to think that these theologians have the means of empowering the youth but it is not all about means, it is also and especially all about understanding the role of theology in Africa today.

Parishes and institutions should through their theologians have the courage which comes from their faith in Jesus Christ, not only to give food to the poor but also to find ways of helping the poor to get their own food. From the book of

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Genesis, we draw a passage from the creation account to put forward the idea that man, created in the image and likeness of God is also a co-creator. If we recognize theologically that man is a co-creator, we have to practically realize this idea by giving man the possibility of being really a co-creator. African theologian should ask the pertinent question: how am I helping each man to be a co-creator? One may ask what the precise role of the theologian should be in the field of empowerment. Should the theologian be the one to get money and empower people? The theologian’s first role is that of providing options that are theologically sound. These options could be well defined orientations for actions; it could also be structures if one has the necessary means of setting up structures. My position is that theologians should make their reflections to be practical and action oriented.

Environmental Theology

In this write-up, we take environment to mean the earth and all that draw their existence from it - the air, the atmosphere and the aquatic universe. After creation, God entrusted the earth to man saying to him: “increase and multiply, dominate the earth.” Theologians have interpreted this text to mean that man has to sustain his life from the good of the earth and also has to take care of the earth. Recent happenings have revealed that man could by his disordered exploitation of the earth bring disaster on the whole of creation. The melting of the ice, the rising of the seas level, flooding and drought resulting in famine, the enlargement of the opening in the ozone layer, desert encroachment, deforestation, disappearance of many species of animals and plants, erosions and landslide all demonstrate the risk that man is running if he continues to refuse to protect the earth. The danger is so real that the world political class has put in place many initiatives to bring order in man’s relationship with nature. Today, we have World Earth Summit which brings together all the countries in the world. The religious organisations are not indifferent to the treat. The Second Vatican Council and the recent encyclicals of popes dwelt much on the problem and call the attention of Christians to the implication of not respecting the environment for the world and for our faith in God the creator. All these culminated in the emergence of the expression “sustainable development”, which is the development which satisfies the needs of the present generation without jeopardizing that of the future.

In Nigeria, environmental problems are not lacking but the great problem is that many people are not yet aware of the risk that is awaiting us if we do not ameliorate our environmental conditions. People continue to cut trees without planting new ones, houses are built in the cities without proper drainage

35 *Gaudium et Spes*, 69 -70
36 See especially, the encyclical *Caritas in Veritates* of Pope Benedict XVI which dedicated a whole chapter to this question.
arrangements, there is indiscriminate disposal of refuse with the result that the environment is dirty. In the villages, bush burning is a regular occurrence and animals are indiscriminately massacred on daily basis. In the face of all these challenges, what should be the role of African theologian?

Long before the advent of Christianity and the western civilization in Africa, Africans already knew the importance of protecting the environment based on their religious awareness. To protect rivers and streams, they reserve a day in which nobody is allowed to go to fetch water from them. To protect the forest, they consecrate them to deities and in this way prevent people from cutting down tree. To protect certain animals that could not easily escape death because of their slow movement they declare them properties of deities. The advent of modernity has wiped away all these classifying them as superstitious. The theologian today has the role of reinventing the sense of the sacred for the environment. In doing this, they do not have to go back to the superstitious beliefs of our ancestors since today sources abound to prove that indiscriminate exploitation of the earth and its products will eventually lead to great environmental disaster for all.

Theologians should be able to lead people to understand that unfriendly attitude to one’s environment could be responsible for certain sicknesses. Cleanliness is next to godliness. This has to be made very clear to the people. Our faith in God obliges us to make the world a better place for what shall it profit a man if he gains heaven while doing nothing to save the earth. Our salvation was accomplished here on earth and not in heaven. The earth is as dear to God as heaven. Liturgical celebrations and pastoral actions should be designed to help Christians know that the protection of the environment is an obligation that their faith in God the creator imposes on them.

The disastrous flood that ravaged the country in 2012 is a sign of what neglecting to take care of the environment could bring on us. Many sicknesses that we witness today come because of our refusal to take care of the environment. The erosion that is currently chasing away many communities in the eastern part of Nigeria speaks volume about what the refusal to care for the environment can do. Theology today cannot be indifferent to this problem.

**Conclusion**

The history of theology is the history of human problems and man’s effort to solve these problems relying on what God has revealed about himself and about his creation which has man as its crown. The dogmatic quarrels and ecumenical councils are all human effort to respond to problems that man faces as man in his relationship with God. It is in human history that God continues to reveal his plan for the world. If man should stop to pay attention to history, man will stop being in true relation with God.
Theologians will certainly lose their relevance if they remain prisoners to what God said in the past and what the Church understood in the past without trying to discover what He is saying to the Church today. For this reason, theology has remained a science that is open to other disciplines, trying to enrich itself from the discoveries of other sciences. The complexity of the modern world raises a lot of new questions which constitute new challenges to theologians.

It is in response to these challenges that the Latin American Churches came up with the theology of liberation. Africans spoke of theology of inculturation. Today, reading and interpreting the signs of the time, we cannot but speak of theology of development. Development is the sign of the time for Africa today and no meaningful African theologian should avoid focusing on development. It is for this reason that I have no fear in proposing development as African theology today.