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***TOPIC:***  
***THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF THE CHURCH AND THE  
MANAGEMENT OF OIL AND GAS WEALTH IN NIGERIA***

**CONFERENCE THEME:**  
**NIGERIA: MAKING OIL AND GAS WEALTH SERVE  
THE COMMON GOOD**

**VENUE: DIVIVNE LOVE RETREAT AND CONFERENCE  
CENTRE,  
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## **1. Introduction:**

This contribution explores Catholic Social Thought and Action in Nigeria. It has its starting point in a statement of confidence in Christianity which teaches the dignity and worth of each human being created in the image of almighty God (*Genesis 1:27*). The paper emphasises the influence of history on ideas and argues that despite the many limitations we find in the inability of the Nigerian people and elite to find a lasting solution to its social and political problems thus far, Christian Social Principles contains useful guidelines and values that would surely help in the search for solutions to the Nigerian problem. It gives hope founded on solid ethical orientation and sustainable African wisdom and human values that challenge all to accept the principle of “live and let live” (‘*suum cuique*’ - St Thomas Aquinas) as a sure basis for a faith that does justice. This is the surest guarantee of peace amongst humans on earth. Individual human beings, acting alone with principles founded on social doctrine and ethics or in collaboration with others within society as stakeholders can make this happen. It is not just the State that is called to action. Each individual human person and all the agents within the social-political and economic forum within Nigeria are called as stakeholders to collaborate in this agenda- the Church and the Christian faithful, Citizens, including Civil Society Groups, Niger Delta Development Commission, the International Community, Communities in the Oil producing areas, Oil and Gas operating Companies, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, Department of Petroleum Resources, Federal Inland Revenue Services, Local Government Councils, State Houses of Assembly, State Governments, the National Assembly and the Federal Government. This is the basis for the desired social change that guarantees the proposed end of making Oil and Gas wealth serve the common good, promote peace and generate social harmony for all Nigerians. I congratulate the organisers of this conference and all their collaborators and agents at the Directorate of “*Church and Society*” of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria.

It is obvious that the “*grave drama*” of the contemporary world caused by the numerous threats that often accompany human progress cannot leave anyone indifferent. In a context of worldwide plurality, competing claims and confusion arising out of subjective interpretations of history and man’s place and role within it, the desire to share ones beliefs in truth and in charity, as found in Christian values correspond to the challenges facing social thought, universally and locally today. About this reality, Pope John Paul II writes:

*“Today, Social Doctrine is called upon with increasingly greater urgency to make its own specific contribution to evangelisation; to dialogue with the world; to the Christian interpretation of reality and to the guidelines for pastoral action in order to enlighten the various initiatives on the temporal plane with sound principles. Indeed, economic, social, political and cultural structures are experiencing profound and rapid transformations which put the very future of human society at stake and thus they need a sure orientation. It is a matter of promoting real social progress, which, in order to effectively ensure the common good of all people, requires a just organisation of these structures. If this is not done, there will be a return of great multitudes towards that situation of a “quasi-servile-yoke” which Leo XIII spoke about in “Rerum Novarum” (John Paul II, 1988).*

## **2. KEY ISSUES IN RE-ENGINEERING ACTION FOR THE COMMON GOOD**

There is no shortage of pronouncements that we are now at a key point in human history as far as Africa and the extractive industries including oil are concerned. This critical moment has several defining moments but I submit some key points at the onset of this paper for mentioning and for our reflection. The attempt to focus on the knowledge and spread of principles of Catholic Social Thought and Action as they relate to and could be applied to “*NIGERIA: MAKING OIL AND GAS WEALTH SERVE THE COMMON GOOD*” raise fundamental issues of justice as the foundation of peace and the public good which is the basis for integral development and progress.

1. The scramble and partition for Africa which took place in Berlin around 1884/1885 was a first phase in the exploitation of Africa in the past. In the present times however, the scramble and partition of Africa has continued in a more intense and scandalous manner with all its negative consequences on the dignity, value and worth of the both the human person, the society and the environment in general. The Gulf of Guinea region, covering west and central Africa, is generally viewed by the oil industry as the world’s premier “*hotspot*” and a new “*El Dorado*” soon to become the leading global deepwater offshore oil production centre. Sub Saharan Africa is home to eight oil exporters – Nigeria, Angola, Congo- Brazzaville, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan. A powerful convergence of interests between African governments, international oil companies, International Financial Institutions and Northern Governments is propelling the rush to exploit Africa’s oil reserves. *The question to ask while this “oil boom” lasts is whether there is actually an opportunity to create a policy environment for turning oil wealth into viable post-oil economies aimed at permanent poverty reduction.* What the global big players do during this period is critical for determining whether oil riches will actually benefit the poor or further impoverish the continent(CRS Doc,2003).
2. Building transparent and accountable “*petro-states*” focused on reducing poverty and building viable post-oil futures is one of the key challenges facing Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How can the oil boom contribute to poverty alleviation? *The primary responsibility for this task lies with Africa’s governments. But many governments within Africa including Nigeria “have their hands tied” and seem to lack incentives to change without a more transparent and accountable international policy environment for revenue management.* These governments are only a web of interests and relationships involved in this “*oil boom business*”. Other key actors, and ones with often overwhelming clout, are foreign oil companies, International Financial Institutions (especially the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund), and Northern governments which are home to multinational oil companies. *Unless these actors work together to make specific policy changes, Africa’s oil boom is unlikely to foster any significant poverty reduction and may instead contribute to increased corruption, mismanagement, environmental destruction and human rights violations.*

3. The “*paradox of plenty*” generally referred to as “*poverty in the midst of plenitude*” remains the bane of Nigeria and many developing nations. The country is rich but the people are poor. It is the paradox of wealth generation. The surge for industrialisation, the growing exploitation of mineral and natural resources and the attendant improvement in scientific and technical knowledge continues to encourage unbridled tendencies on the part of local actors, global players, governments and corporations. *The dominance of extractive industries in Nigeria’s trade relationships means that it is vital for the country and indeed African nations to make the best use of its oil. As the records show, more than 50 percent of Africa’s exports and 65 percent of all foreign direct investment during the 1990’s are dominated by “extractive industries” especially the oil, gas and mining businesses* (Bottom of the Barrel, CRS Document, 2003, p.5). Dependence on petroleum however for development is dangerous. This is the reality in many countries including Nigeria which has performed worse in terms of basic social indicators. Having received over USD 350 billion in oil revenues over 25 years, per capita income is less than \$1 a day. Yet, the challenge is making oil and gas wealth to serve the common good. If this is not achieved, the consequences would be destabilisation, decline and perhaps war which in turn will degenerate to more human and environmental disasters characteristic of failed states. God forbid!
  
4. The questions contained in the Statement by the Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) in the document titled: “*Nigeria- The travesty of Oil and Gas*” are revealing: “*How come the huge wealth derived from these God-given resources has failed to foster economic development and has in effect led to a deterioration of the rest of the Nigerian economy and by implication, the lives of Nigeria people? How come these God-given resources have not been harnessed to create long term, sustainable development? To what extent have the activities in the oil and gas sector been open, transparent and accountable? What has been responsible for the enthronement of the so-called “resources curse” on a nation so abundantly blessed by God? Why is it that petroleum activities have brought so much destruction and devastation of the environment and has so far remained largely unchecked? Why is it that there are so much conflict, violence, loss of life in circumstances associated with the exploration and exploitation of petroleum resources? Are there legal, regulatory policy changes that need to be put in place to promote the efficient management and fair allocation of oil and gas revenues in a manner that serves the common good? Why is there so much misery, poverty and anguish in the nation amidst plenty?*”? Answers to these questions are attempted in this paper where the Social Teaching of the Church is asked to offer guidelines based on Christian moral thought and practice of solidarity, sustainable development, common good principles, preferential option for the poor and preservation of creation as an ethical obligation for environmental protection.

5. The fact of value disorientation and a missing emphasis on the public good known as the common good calls to urgent reflection as to what are those critical ingredients that make it possible for a society to be founded and oriented on sustainable human and ethical values. It calls for the establishment of rational foundations and moral principles to provide light for social harmony, communal living, sharing of wealth and why eating alone is bad eating in a Nigerian and universal culture at this crucial time. It is certainly clear from our experience of history and enlightened observation of worldwide trends that technological prowess alone is not the basis of civilisations today. While the title of Pope John Paul II's 1990 World day of Peace Message, "*Peace with God – Peace with All of Creation*" seems almost a slogan meant to be easily remembered, it actually goes to the very heart of the environmental challenges that we are facing today. These complex problems are not actually environmental in the first place, nor are they primarily technological or economic. They are rather theological and moral". Actually, quoting from a document of the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace, the Vatican, authored by Sr. Marjorie Keenan RSHM "*the search for solutions to the present ecological crisis cannot be separated from our basic worldview: from our understanding of the human person, of relations among persons and peoples, and of our relationship to all creation*" (Ref: Care for Creation- Human Activity and the Environment, 2000, p. 13). Throughout the Bible, there are references to God's creation that help us to understand why and how we are to promote a sound and healthy environment for all. The most basic values of the Social teaching of the Church also point directly to the moral obligation to care for the environment. In addition, an environmental crisis knows no borders. It touches a large number of people, governments, communities, corporations, Churches and other religious bodies. The consequence therefore is that the foundations upon which nations and industries are building worldwide may not work without a strong value and moral orientation that considers the common good and the preservation of the earth. And this is the crux of the matter. What does seem clear is that in the present tense, industrialisation will continue unabated. Desirable though it may be can we think of an industrialisation that has sustainable bases with criteria that give it content founded on human, social and universal ethical values? This brings me to the topic I was assigned to reflect upon at this conference, namely to share thought on *THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF THE CHURCH AND THE MANAGEMENT OF OIL AND GAS WEALTH*.

### 3. CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT: RELEVANCE AND CONTEXT

The Social Teaching of the Church is an application of theology and other relevant scientific disciplines, especially of moral theology and social ethics to the questions raised by human beings and societies and the principles for their solution. While its sources are in revelation (Bible) and the tradition of the Church from the earliest times, as an organised body of doctrine, it dates from 1891 with Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*. While this teaching has long been an integral part of the Catholic heritage, John Paul II, like no other before him has raised the issues addressed by Social Thought to a new level of applicability (Apostolic Letter: *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, 1994, No. 36).

However astonishing it may appear, it is probably true or at least difficult to deny that the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church together with their interpretation and development in the last 100 years has attracted, especially since the Vatican Council (1962 – 1965) worldwide attention and interest. Whether it is in the numerous papal encyclicals beginning with the “*condition of workers*” authored by pope Leo XIII “*Rerum Novarum*” of 1891 or in Latin America with the debate on “*liberation Theologies*”, or more recently in the United States of America with some pastoral documents of the catholic Bishops Conference such as the “*A Call to Solidarity with Africa*” (2001) and “*Catholic Social Teaching and the US economy*” (1983) to mention but a few, or still in the large body of Episcopal Statements and Social Thought contained in the document “*The Voice of the Voiceless 1960 – 2002*” of the Nigerian Bishops Conference, one is convinced that the Social Doctrine of the Church has become more than ever, an intellectual force with a universal ethical appeal and standard to reckon with, gaining more and more in vitality and influence within and outside of the Church. There is urgent and continued need for the knowledge and spread of this teaching, progressively drawn from biblical insights, the tradition of the early Fathers, theological reflection and contemporary experience. In it, we experience the irreplaceable evangelising presence of the Church in the complex world of temporal realities which condition the destiny of mankind. Christianity developed out of Jewish culture and religion and the ministry of Jesus was exercised in this context. The central message of the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth was the kingdom of God which had social, cultural, economic and religious implications. Care for the environment is ultimately a call to respect of all of creation and to assure that human activity, while transforming the earth, does not destroy the dynamic balance which exists among all living things that depend or turn on land, air and water for their every existence. The environmental issue has become central to the social, economic and political thought precisely because of the growing degradation, which often strikes in a particularly severe way the poorer sectors of society.

The Nigerian context and the reality of the devastation of the lives of the people of the Niger Delta with the growing number of natural and man made disasters affecting the entire nation call into question the present course of the nation. The justice question seen in the ever-growing gap between the rich and poor cannot leave anyone indifferent, nor can the over-use of the resources of the earth and accelerating specie-loss. The degradation of the environment affects all life on earth; its solution therefore calls for the collaboration of all. It is a matter of opening the eyes of mind and heart and spirit to see the relationship between care for all creation – persons as well as material goods – and our fundamental relationship in and with God. To proclaim the goodness of God’s creation and our obligation to care for it is ultimately to call to change, to conversion, to care for the least and the poorest. A reflection on God’s creation and our use of its goods is a powerful integrating force in life and action, both individual and social. The guiding thread could well be an integrated approach to justice and peace within the context of the promotion of a sound and healthy environment for all. This is our scope for it is the responsibility of the Christian to engage in a world of injustice and ensure justice and peace and global change.

As Pope John XXIII says of the importance of each human person in making an input for social change:

*“Individual human beings are the foundation, the cause and the end of every social institution. That is necessarily so for people are by nature social beings. This fact must be recognised as also the fact that they are raised in the plan of providence to an order of reality which is above nature”* (John XXIII, Mater et Magistra; No 219).

#### **4. RELEVANT ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE**

a. One of the primary principles which govern our approach to environmental questions is: *THERE IS AN ORDER IN THE UNIVERSE WHICH MUST BE RESPECTED*. The accounts in the Old Testament book of Genesis chapters one to three which is so rich in their imagery and rhythm is the root for this belief for it is a paradigm, replicated in many other cultures and traditions of the world. First of all, creation belongs to God, all of it. Secondly, creation is a work of harmony and beauty that forms a whole in diversity. There is, in fact, an existential bond among everything that exists from the very fact of its having been created by God. One creature stands out however: the human person. Created in the image and likeness of the creator and utterly dependent on him, this person exists essentially in relationship. This principle not only sets limits to human activity; it also directs it towards a careful and reverent use of the earth. When the human person or human societies ignore or consciously violate this order, an imbalance is provoked that has inevitable consequences in several fields. Let us simply think of uncontrolled industrialisation and the resulting pollution of air, land and water. The summary of the relevant points from the Bible that find an echo in the Social Teaching are:

- *All of creation is fundamentally good;*
- *God’s plan for creation is one of harmony and order;*
- *Creation forms a whole, a cosmos;*
- *Within creation, the human person enjoys a consummate dignity;*
- *Inherent to this dignity is that of exercising a wise and just stewardship over the rest of creation;*
- *Sin brought division into the entire world. Its effect is felt not only within and between human persons. They also affect the earth;*
- *In a mysterious way, Christ’s redemptive mission extends to all of creation.*

b. A second principle is no less essential: the Human Person occupies a distinctive place within creation. *“Man is the author the centre and the end of all social and economic life. Economic developments must remain under man’s direction”* (Gaudium et Spes, No. 63). There is a tendency today to deny this centrality of the human person, to place human beings on the same level as other beings as regards care for the environment. The reasons for this are complex. One pretext is that an anthropocentric approach to the environment has resulted in its destructions. This argument ignores, among others, the relationship of the human person to God. It can also lead to a dangerous negation of human responsibility. Without a doubt, human persons and, indeed, entire societies have abused of the environment with impunity. We all see the result. Without a doubt, it is by

heightening the centrality of the human person, not by denying it, by stressing the responsibility of the human person for creation, not by ignoring it, that we all shall be better able to promote and preserve a sound environment for all.

c. Another ethical principle with immediate application to the environment is that of the *inalienable dignity of the human person*. The promotion of this dignity is “*the ultimate guiding norm for any sound economic, industrial or scientific development*” (Pope John Paul II, Message on Word Day of Peace, 1990, No. 7). Inordinate depletion of resources without thinking of the needs of others, reckless land use; exploitative industrial practices are only some of the modern phenomena that are contrary to this principle. Today, there is a rather widespread anthropological error that also directly affects the relationship between the human person and the environment. The modern person, fascinated by the capability of the human mind, can set him or herself up in the place of God (John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no 37). The person effectively becomes the centre of a universe built in his or her own image. Everything is judged in relation to the individual whose needs, often artificially created, must be met at all costs. In the thirst for profit, modern society often does often uses and abuses the goods of this world with little thought for others and still less for future generations. Entire societies built on such a consumer-oriented system can suffer from this anthropological error. “*The purpose of economics is the service of people, their material needs and those of their moral, spiritual and religious life. Economic activity is to be carried out accordingly to its own methods and laws but within the limits of morality*” (GS 69)

d. Concerning the teaching on property, the distribution of wealth, ownership and service, working for the common good and the universal destination of created goods, Catholic Social Teaching has come out with relevant principles that give to a sure guide towards social reconstruction and harmony if followed. The principles it advocates are of universal application and can be followed by all. The Gospel frequently tells us that the possession of goods is as fleeting as life itself, and the usual Catholic moral teaching on ownership is that man can only expect to “**use**” goods which he or she owns. Man is only a steward (GS n. 69). “*All property has a social mortgage. All people are to respect and share the resources of the earth. By our work, we are co-creators in the continuing development of the earth*” (John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 1981). St Thomas Aquinas’s explanations of ownership begin with the assertion that the natural law primarily dictates the common ownership of goods. But he says that *private ownership is not against the natural law because the apportioning of ownership is done by particular agreements, which are not precisely a part of natural law which deals in generalities* (St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II – II, 62 – 2 ad 1). It is noticeable that natural resources, as well as human factors as capital and enterprise which will make them available, are very unevenly distributed. Much of human effort must be applied to the redistribution of goods; and they should be distributed as between people who have a real respect for each other: “*created goods should flow freely to all, regulated by justice and accompanied by charity*”. *Everybody has a right to a share of the earth’s goods sufficient for himself and his family*”. There is a Christian duty to give to those in need. In times past, this duty was expressed in terms of almsgiving. It has now become very largely a social and institutional service, more concentrated where the country is economically developed.



The Vatican Council compared the methods of distributing wealth in developing and developed countries and made some comments. It said that these countries often have their “*own customary and traditional ways of ensuring that goods are distributed, so that each member receives what he absolutely needs. Customs should not be regarded as unchangeable if they no longer answer to present-day requirements but neither should they be rashly discarded if they can still be so adapted as to remain useful*”. As for the advanced countries, the Council recognised that social security services can play a legitimate part in bringing about the redistribution of wealth. It stresses the need for further development of support for the family, and also for services assisting education and culture. Pope Paul VI did not hesitate to state in his famous document *Populorum Progressio* that “*the goods of the earth, including those produced by human activity, are ultimately destined for the benefit of all, not of just the few. All other rights whatsoever, including those of property and of free commerce, are to be subordinated to this principle*” (*Populorum Progressio*, 1967, no. 22) Known as the universal destination of all earthly goods, this principle has continued to lead to a right understanding of the mystery of creation where humans are only stewards of created good and not absolute owners in an extreme sense. Consequently, all peoples, all countries, must have access to those goods – natural, technological, intellectual and spiritual – that assure their integral development, that is, a development that promotes the good of the whole person and of the entire human community.

e. In clear text, the human person, alone among all other creatures on this earth, is *morally responsible* for his or her acts which must be oriented towards the **good of self**, of **others**, and of **the very earth** and of all that is in and on it. *These three form an inseparable whole. This affirmation is the keystone of a sound approach to the environment over and against one based on sentiment, on a vague nostalgia for a non-existent “paradise lost” or on a pseudo-religious exaltation of nature (Ref. Care for Creation, op. cit, p. 52).* The concept of responsibility can also be translated into the language of identifiable “**RIGHTS AND DUTIES**”. These, in turn, can and often do, find expression in juridical instruments that regulate relationships between and among peoples and groups, as well as between and among States, regarding the environment. Structures can be set in place that assures the observance of such defined rights and duties. That is, the concept of responsibility concerns not only individual behaviour but also relates to entire societies and to the international community as well.

f. Taking about the Common Good, Pope John XXIII stated that “*the common good is the sum total of all those conditions of social living- economic, political, cultural which will make it possible for women and men to readily and fully achieve the perfection of their humanity. Individual rights are always experienced within the context of promotion of the common good*” (*Mater et Magistra*, no. 65). The implication of this teaching was further stressed by John Paul II in the famous Encyclical Letter “*Laborem Exercens*” where he writes: “*The economy is for the people and the resources of the earth are to be equally shared by all. Human work is the key to contemporary social question. Labour takes precedence over both capital and technology in the production process. Just wages and the rights of workers to form trade unions are to be respected. Women and disabled people, migrants and unemployed share fully in the profits of the production process in*

*solidarity*” (John Paul, LE, 1981). Concerning solidarity, a term that is used by all and sundry to mean varied and different things, Paul VI argued that “*we belong to one human family and as such have mutual obligations to promote the development of all people across the world. In particular, the rich nations have responsibilities towards the poor nations and the structures of the international order must reflect justice*” (Populorum Progressio, 1967). To promote justice therefore is to transform structures which block love. This is the challenge facing Nigeria in the search for credible and adaptable methods for making sure that Oil and gas wealth serve the common good. The knowledge is there. But the will is lacking. It is time to challenge all those who have means and ability to make sure that where there is a will, there is a way. The common good must remain the priority reason for this engagement.

## 6. CONCLUSION:

With the realisation that Catholic Social Teaching is not just a set of rules for one political party, nation or group, it behoves us therefore to see these principles as a guiding thread with wisdom and direction to help mankind find solutions to problems it faces daily in social cohesion. “*The church’s Social teaching has an important interdisciplinary dimension. In order to incarnate the one truth about man in different and constantly changing social economic and political contexts, this teaching enters into dialogue with the various disciplines concerned with man*” (Centesimus Annus, 1991, No 59). Despite the time that has elapsed, the message of Pope Pius XII to the world during at the height of the Second World War (Christmas message 1942) retains its validity and even reflects our situation in Nigeria and indeed worldwide today:

*“Never has it been so capitally important to understand clearly the true foundations of all social life as in these days when humanity, diseased by the poison of social errors, and tossed by a fever of conflicting desires, doctrine and aims, has become the unhappy prey of disorders created by itself, and experiencing the disruptive effects of false social theories that neglect and contravene the laws of God. The original and essential purpose of social life is to preserve and perfect the human person...Reason enlightened by faith assigns to each person and to each particular association in the social organism, a definite and noble place. Above all, it tells us that the purpose of the whole of the State’s activity, political and economic, is the permanent realisation of the common good: that is to say, the provision of those external conditions which are needful to citizens as a whole for the development of their qualities and the fulfilment of their duties in every sphere of life, material, intellectual and spiritual”.* (Radio message of Pope Pius XII, published in Acta Apostolica Sedis, January, 1943).

In conclusion, together with the words of this Christmas Message of Pope Pius XII, we conclude this paper, thus both as invitation to all and to the State and indeed all stakeholders to work for justice as the foundation for any lasting peace in Nigeria.

*“The ultimate, deep – rooted principle which lies at the foundation of society cannot be abolished by any effort of human ingenuity; they may be denied, ignored, disregarded or disobeyed, but they can never be deprived of their juridical validity”.* (ibid)

