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A Model for Church Leadership in Promoting Respect for
Economic Rights: A Means for Poverty Alleviation in Akwa Ibom
State – Nigeria

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A MODEL FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP IN PROMOTING RESPECT FOR
ECONOMIC RIGHTS: A MEANS FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN AKWA IBOM
STATE – NIGERIA

BY

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In spite of the obvious presence of the Christian churches and the experience of abject poverty in the Akwa Ibom State community, there is no model so far for the different Christian churches to join forces together in combating poverty. At the end of this thesis-project, I am creating a model that will help the Church's leadership to promote respect for economic rights as a means to poverty alleviation. The model to be created has been my passion, prompted by what the lack of respect for economic rights has contributed, namely poverty, at many places in the world including Akwa Ibom State in the southernmost part of Nigeria

It is rather unfortunate that, many people, including members of the leadership of the Church in Akwa Ibom State, do think or believe in the strict separation between Church and State. Many of the leaders sometimes do argue from the political perspective that the State is ordained to take care of the socio-economic and political and the Church the spiritual and religious aspects of human life. For such leaders, the Church and State run on parallel lines and sometimes in the opposite direction without any point of contact as far as human welfare is concerned. They support these perspectives with the response by Jesus to the biblical question as to whom we should pay tax: "Give to back Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."¹(Matt. 22: 2 NAB). A cross-section of the Church's leadership takes this response by Jesus literally. Hence, thinking and reflecting on these biblical interpretations and the meaning of Jesus' answer from other perspectives seem to be lacking. The consequence of this lack is the absence of adequate involvement in the socio-economic welfare that touches the lives of people both within and outside the Church and Akwa Ibom State community.

¹ Matt. 22: 2 NAB (New American Bible).

A closer look and deeper reflection on Jesus' answer to the question as to whom we should pay taxes reveals possible interpretations and meanings from other perspectives. From the perspective of the pastoral ministry of the Church, Jesus' response was first and foremost a call for due loyalty, support, obedience, love, and respect for both the state and the Church. This is because as Christians, we have dual citizenship. We (Christians) are citizens of both the state by the virtue of our birth or habitat and the Church by the merit of our baptism. Among the implications of such loyalty, support, etc., are the mutual relationship and co-responsibility between the Church and State in socio-economic issues and how those issues affect the citizens and people of Akwa Ibom State. Separation of Church and State seems to mean separation of this dual citizenship.

The Church's leadership in Akwa Ibom State also seems not to realize the emphasis and the leading examples by Jesus on socio-economic issues. Jesus fed the poor, cast out demons, healed the sick, corrected political leaders, discouraged scandals, etc. The Church's leadership seems also not to realize or to have a poor understanding of the call by Vatican II for the Church to read the sign of the times. In Nigeria in general and in Akwa Ibom State in particular, one of the greatest signs of the time is the prevalent endemic poverty. If Vatican II would very much call on the Church's leadership around the world to the awareness of poverty, it would expect the leadership of the Church in Akwa Ibom State community not only to be aware but also to address the poverty with much seriousness as a pastoral issue. In addition, if churches in many places around the globe are taking on the government by speaking from a pastoral perspective on pulpits and pastoral letters, then the Christian churches in the Akwa Ibom State community

should not be exempt. They can do what their counterparts are doing elsewhere to make poverty alleviation an integral part of the Church's mission.

The model "Churches Acting Together for Poverty Alleviation" (CAPTA) will be created at the end of this project. CAPTA will be a strong reminder to the Church's leadership, as well as the members within the Akwa Ibom State community, of the significant role that the Church is expected to play not only in the religious and spiritual but also in the socio-economic aspects of human life in particular and society in general. There is no doubt that the model will also assist the leaderships of different Christian churches and their members to come together to share in the ministry of the Church in the spirit of mutual trust and genuine concern for the pastoral care of the citizens, especially the poor within the state. The model will also help them as sharers in Christ's ministry to represent the people by speaking and listening to the government on poverty-related issues.

There are many places we see the Church taking the lead and playing a vital role in poverty alleviation as a significant and integral part of its mission. I have been privileged to witness different churches doing that in South Florida in the United State of America. I have decided to adopt one of the models I have found in South Florida. This work will indicate, and elaborate on the models and some other experiences as may be necessary. It will also create a similar model that is suitable to the context of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Alleviating poverty by means of respecting economic rights through the Church's leadership becomes the hinge on which the entire project rotates. Using theological methods, I will create a model for ecclesial leadership that enhances economic justice and

care for the poor. It is my belief that such a model will also promote the Church's mission and restore economic rights to the community.

CHAPTER ONE

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

1.1 Who I am

The importance of sharing with the readers who I am is incontestable and a welcomed idea as far as this thesis-project is concerned. Who I am will certainly give credibility to this research and help convince the readers that what they read in this thesis-project is from lived experience both within and outside the context of this work. This is because lived experience is of paramount importance in this type of research project as in many others. Without it, the researcher's discussions may either be shallow if not doubtful, to say the least.

Every practical theologian recognizes the importance of lived experience. It makes theology relevant to the context. A researcher or any person who engages in pastoral ministry needs to become part and parcel of the context within which he or she works. In his book, *Caminemos Con Jesus* (Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment), Roberto S. Goizueta dedicates some sections to introduce himself and to share his experience with his readers. These aspects of the book identify and acquaint the readers with the context within which the book is written. They also become fundamentally instrumental to understanding the entire work. He mentions in a unique manner the importance of lived experience in doing what he needed to do. This means that lived experience is essential to his understanding and commitment to the theological task.²

² Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latin Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 5.

In the course of my life, studies and priestly ministry, I have encountered issues of both poverty and wealth. These, along with my personal struggle, have shaped my views and determination regarding poverty alleviation apostolate. The latter is an important ministry to which I have always hoped and desired to commit myself.

When I look back on my personal history and those of my family, community and state, there are many stories I have heard, instances I have witnessed, and occasions I have shared about poverty. These experiences have manifested economic hardships, and a history of unpleasant struggles that people and community have had to deal with in the course of life. These imply that neither my immediate and extended families nor community is rich in terms of economic prosperity by the world's standard. We have had a history of struggle with life like many other families.

I personally believe that childhood is and should be a period spent in less labor that does not take a negative toll on young people. It is and should be a period of many fruitful interactions with friends and parents, the desire to go to school, keen interest in Church and religion, and dreaming and good planning for the future among other things. Unfortunately, I have borne witness to the contrary. I have seen children spending their childhood days in strenuous manual labor. They have fetched firewood from the farms and woods. They have cultivated and harvested fruits from the farmlands. They have labored for every meal as their way of assisting their families to fend for the daily meals. I have personally spent much of my time struggling with little or no hope for a secure and fulfilled life in the future. The road to success and future has been tough. It has not been a hitch-free one. It may sound a fiction to note that on many occasions, my siblings, many others, and I had to skip school to help our parents in the farms for there to be food in the

house and funds for our education after selling the farm products. On some occasions, we had to accept hard labor like sand drilling in the local river and construction works in the local community just for money to meet all our expenses.

I recall vividly that I became interested in poverty alleviation when I noticed the disadvantages I had in academic performance due to my background compared to other students who came from economically better families and elementary schools. I recall those moments I regretted due to my poor background and prayed for God's assistance. I was determined to work toward changing the situation I found myself. In school, I would identify with and encourage students with the same impoverished background and social circumstances as mine to work hard to make a difference for ourselves. Our concern for one another and determination to succeed paid off at the end when we won and received prizes and awards for excellence in some aspects of the seminary life like best-behaved and prayerful students. I did not know or understand until now that these were instances of sowing seeds for my passion for poverty alleviation apostolate.

When at home on vacation, the burning passion for the poor and my desire to do what I could within my power to help were alive and active. I always identified myself with the members of the St. Vincent De Paul's society who would give assistance in many forms to the poor and destitute in our parish community. For the Vincentians, as Miami Archbishop John C. Favalora notes, "They must visit the homes of everyone they help. Those meetings help them recognize that their spiritual growth, their very salvation, depends on their service to the poor. Charity is their way of life, it is their spirituality."³ I recall with delight and much happiness, how I used to fetch water and firewood for the

³ John C. Favalora, "Vincentians Help the Poor Year Round," *Florida Catholic*, 10-16 November, 2006, sec. A, p. 4.

elderly people who had nobody to help them. On every major holiday or festival like Christmas, Easter and traditional feast days in my community, I have since my youthful age maintained a regular schedule of identifying with some of the less privileged and elderly people. I visit them with presents prior to or on the feast days. I consider these gestures as my private way of keeping the ministry of Christ, adhering to God's injunction that we should feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcome strangers, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the prisoners.⁴ All these indicate to me now that the burning passion for the poor and my desire to do what I could within my power to help has been alive and active.

My passion and interest in the poor have informed some of my views about poverty and its alleviation. I personally believe that poverty has some negative toll or menace on people's life, especially children. In my childhood background, I experienced these negative tolls, and perhaps, there were many other children in dire and worse situation than I in my community. I regret such experience in my community, especially when I witnessed it out-rightly. In most cases, I sobbed while pondering what and how I could contribute to improve the situation. When I recall all these, my passion for poverty alleviation becomes more charged. This passion compels me to identify with the poor in one way or the other, directly or indirectly, emotionally, psychologically, physically and prayerfully.

My primary thoughts on encountering any people experiencing poverty centered on the fact that I could be in the same or worse situation. If such a condition arose, it was likely that I would want and remain grateful for any assistance from anybody or institution, no matter how little, if at all there is any help we can describe as little.

⁴ Matt. 25: 31-46 (NAB).

My passion for this thesis-project extends to my deep sense of justice and keen interest in socio-economic and political matters as they concern the poor. I have always advocated for progressive reforms that will benefit the poor in the pastoral ministry in my diocese in particular and Akwa Ibom State in general. One of such reforms is that the poor should not only be given alms but should also be provided good accesses to education in order to enable them realize their potentials and opportunities for themselves within and outside the state. If this is promoted and achieved, some of the poor will be helped to be self-reliant. They can equally be helped to reduce or even avoid, if possible, the long-term dependence on outside assistance.

My passion and interest in the poor have informed some other views. I always long for a meaningful and fulfilled economic life. I appreciate success and like to see people succeed in economic aspects of life, as I personally like to. I believe that any person who succeeds in that aspect of life has a moral responsibility and duty to assist others to succeed as well. This is why I always like to identify, listen, learn or share with both the rich and the poor who are optimistic about the future, are longing to improve their lives, and are ready and willing to continue to struggle in spite of the difficulties they face. I appreciate those who struggle to rise from nothingness to something. They are always great sources of encouragement and hope to my community and me.

I have encountered many people who desire and look for opportunities to help themselves and others. It is my intention to continue to be among those who can provide such opportunities. In other words, I vow to be committed to making a difference in people's lives as much as I can. One of the major reasons I chose to be a priest was to serve the needs of other people. I recall the many students, including the bright ones,

whose parents always had difficulty fulfilling their financial responsibilities for their children's education due to poverty. I tried to pay due attention to students from such families as part of my apostolate. I would go around requesting individuals and groups for financial support. I also recall numerous people who had little or nothing to eat. I recommended that the seminary enroll them in the food pantry program that I helped to establish. I remember negotiating with the bishop for funds to complete a building for a woman with many children whose husband was kidnapped and has not been seen to this day. I also recall three young school dropouts in my village I helped to start learning some trades. Today, they have successfully completed their apprenticeship and are eagerly awaiting assistance to start business on their own.

There have been positive testimonies on the part of other people. These people have pointed out and commended my keen interest and commitment to the welfare of other people. These testimonies have often generated an uncomfortable feeling for me, and an occasion to feel embarrassed since I always wish to offer the assistance without sounding my trumpet. I do realize today that my passion to reach out to the poor at different levels while serving as a college student president, seminary rector and pastor has been the major source of my success as a leader and an advocate for the poor and the needy. However, I speak when necessary and after weighing a number of issues surrounding the subject I may want to address. I often do like to listen to people before speaking. I reflect, think, and work hard and try to stand up for justice. I am always slow to ask for help without personal effort or attempt first. This is why I believe in personal effort and God's providence in getting my needs.

I imagine how life could have been for the poor without poverty. I imagine the kind of achievements they could have made had they been given the opportunity that many people have in other places.

1.2 Motivations for creating a model for Poverty Alleviation

As can be seen from the previous section of this chapter, there are several issues that have motivated me to work on this thesis-project, and I hereby condense them to some categories of motivations and claims. The primary motivation is the obvious presence and experience of abject poverty with its attendant consequence of suffering in the midst of abundant natural economic resources in the Akwa Ibom State community. This truth sounds like a contradiction or even a fiction. The thesis-project will reveal to any readers nothing but the truth of my claim. This serious problem needs urgent attention and practical solutions.

My secondary motivation is the fact that there is no problem without a solution, provided the problem is adequately addressed by the parties who should address them, proffering and implementing solutions to them. History is replete with stories of reasonable successes with solutions to different problems resulting from due attention given to them.

Although the problem I am addressing in this thesis-project may not be the same as those in other parts of the world, there are great sources that are similar in terms of the experience and poverty message. Some of these sources include the experience of economic oppression in South/Latin America, human rights in North America, apartheid

in South Africa and the dreams about the dry bones imagery in the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.⁵

Identified with the above experiences are great figures in history that have also been major motivations for me in this thesis-project including Archbishop Oscar Romero, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela and Prophet Ezekiel. Romero succeeded in leading a bloodless fight against poverty and oppression in El Salvador in particular and South America in general. Scott Wright describes him thus: “Romero was a pastor, first and foremost, and truly humble, but he spoke with great force in fidelity to the Gospel and in defense of the poor.”⁶ King was an outstanding religious leader who believed and expressed that the struggle for freedom from oppression is a religious duty and commitment. He promoted this philosophy until his death. Mandela spent more than a quarter of a century behind bars for his opposition to oppression that also caused poverty for the black race of South Africa. Prophet Ezekiel became an instrument of solution to the Israelites’ problem. Through his instrumentality, the sufferers identified with God. The prophet became a great prophet at a time of terrible distress in the history of Israel. However, there is never a hopeless situation wherever and whenever the sufferers identify with God with optimism and due action. As an exile himself, Ezekiel became God’s messenger of hope, consolation, encouragement, restoration and renewal for his fellow exiles in Babylon. He had the vision and predicted the restoration and renewal of life for his fellow exiles. He preached the message of hope for the distant future, prophesying that the dry bones will be reconnected with sinews and covered with flesh.

⁵ Ezekiel 37: 1-14 (NAB).

⁶ Scott Wright, “Remembering Archbishop Romero: What Would Romero Say Today?,” *Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico*, January/February 2005, 2.

God will breathe his spirit into them, and life will return to the deceased fellow in the plain.⁷

I am not here to show the historical proof of the above experience by Ezekiel. I wish, however, to register without mincing words that Ezekiel certainly captures and expresses the difficult exilic experience by the Israelites. The current experience of poverty and consequent bad feelings including seemingly abandonment by God within the Akwa Ibom State community are similar in many ways to what the Israelites felt in Babylon. There is the feeling of denial and deprivation of basic economic rights by the citizens and people of my home state. This feeling gives rise to what seems to be a hopeless situation. However, there may be no situation without solution provided the sufferers march their faith in God with hard work, and do not despair in spite of the feeling of pain. I trust in God's help for us.

The above individuals viz, Romero (South America), Luther (North America), Mandela (South Africa) and Ezekiel (Israel) experienced dark moments in their national history. However, they did not despair. They continued the struggle with love for the poor, hope to succeed in their struggle, faith in God to help them and smiles on their faces at some point. The struggles have continued in history and even today because they cannot be over until justice is served and allowed to reign in the society. Our entire life is confronted with the struggles that the poor and oppressed face daily, and my belief is that the brave men mentioned above are still with us in spirit helping us in our effort to achieve justice and care for the poor. There are many others including women in the same caliber. I strongly believe also that with confidence, struggle and adequate attention, the Church's leadership in Akwa Ibom State can make a difference, as did the few leaders I

⁷ Ezekiel 37: 5-6 (NAB).

have mentioned when and if it accepts the challenge of leading in poverty alleviation and practically does something about it.

The unbounded and integral nature of the Church's ministry that encompasses all aspects of human endeavor is another obvious motivation in this thesis-project. This is not and should not be restricted to the spiritual and religious wellbeing of humanity.

Mark Link dismisses such and any one-sided approach to the ministry when he writes:

To address the soul without addressing the body is to ignore the reality. In other words, we can't talk to people about heavenly things if we don't talk to them, also, about earthly things. The two go hand in hand for the simple reason that we are body and soul. This is why Jesus instructed his disciples to 'preach and heal'. They must attend to both the spiritual needs and the physical needs of the people.⁸

The Church in Akwa Ibom State community has shown concern for the poor. However, this concern centers more on the sacramental and spiritual than the physical and material welfare of its people. This should not be the case. It leads to unpleasant hopeless or despairing attitudes and responses towards the Church by the people, especially the poor. Indeed, experience indicates that many poor people have reduced interest in a Church that divorces concrete experience in temporal matters from its spiritual and sacramental ministry. When this happens, the poor are left to all forms of servitude and marginalization that expose them to danger. I am interested in identifying the economic needs of the people in which the Church needs to take the lead and not shy away from if it is to be integral in its ministry. After all, in the context of this project, the Church will not deny that it was founded by Christ as a sacred non-profit organization to take care of people's needs. Hence, my claim is that the Church in Akwa Ibom State needs to address more the fundamental causes of poverty in the midst of abundance

⁸ Mark Link, *Daily Homilies* (Allen, Texas: RCL, 1987), 93.

within the state and, of course, proffer solutions to them. This claim is important to the Church. The United States bishops see this as the tradition of the Church, at least, the Catholic Church:

As Catholics, we are heirs of a long tradition of thought and action on the moral dimensions of economic activity. The life and word of Jesus and the teaching of the Church call us to serve those in need and to work actively for social and economic justice. As community of believers, we know that our faith is tasted by the quality of justice among us, that we can best measure our life together by how the poor and the vulnerable are treated. This is not a new concern for us. It is as old as the Hebrew prophets, as compelling as the Sermon on the Mount, and as current as the powerful voice of Pope John Paul II defending the dignity of the human person.⁹

Another motivating factor for this thesis-project is my strong belief that the issue of poverty the citizens of Akwa Ibom State have been experiencing, was not and is not created by God. The people were not ordained to experience it in the magnitude we are experiencing now. The primary challenges and responsibilities go to the state, especially the leadership who should manage the resources we have. It is the aim of this thesis-project to awaken in the Akwa Ibom State community in general, and the leadership in particular, the potentials and the possibilities to change the course of events for the better, at least for the benefit of our future generations. In other words, we can fix it for it is fixable.

Knowledge and acceptance of any problem offer helpful means, at least, a starting point towards resolution of any problems. It is my belief that the outcome of this thesis-project will help the Church in the Akwa Ibom State community in general and me in particular to become more aware of the poverty and its root causes in my state. It will provide the Church with those challenges presented by poverty within the Akwa Ibom

⁹ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (Washington, DC: USCCB Publications, 1986), no. 8, vii.

State community. It will also stimulate more interest and the desire to pay much more attention to poverty. It will dispose the Church as an institution to acknowledge the roles it has played or not played to address poverty with the result that the state remains poor in spite of God's abundant blessings. It will help me in my ministry and the Church to learn more or better ways to carry on the poverty alleviation apostolate. I am very convinced that many programs in this respect will be established. This investigation will definitely make the poverty apostolate receive wider publication, acceptance and support. These guarantee strength and optimism for success.

Another category of motivations includes the rapid extension of this study beyond the context of the Church community to the secular context. I envisage the need and motivation to launch enlightenment programs as part of the ministry and outreach to the poor as may be necessary. Participation in such events will be opened to all, including the government, Church, corporate and local officials, and individuals. In this way, my investigation will pave the way for all to realize the challenges poverty poses and the urgent need to address them. Such challenges will certainly include the urgent call for all to contribute toward solving the problem. The government in particular will become more aware of its duty and responsibility to its citizens and the need to fulfilling them. The Church also will be more aware of its prophetic mission regarding economic matters.

It is my opinion that the benefits from my investigation will not be limited to my ministry. Any pastoral minister of whatever rank and ministry will gain a great deal from it. There is no doubt that scholars, including many theologians and other academicians, especially those who remain primarily in the realm of theory without practical

application, will find my investigation very revealing and informative about Akwa Ibom State and the role that the Church plays therein.

The topic of this thesis-project is strongly suggested and motivated by what I see as the prophetic role or mission of the Church. Such mission, as already indicated, is integral, attending to all the needs of all creation, particularly the human beings irrespective of sex, race, language, religion, etc. Vatican II makes this mission quite explicit when its emphasis states thus:

By its nature and mission the Church is universal in that it is not committed to any one culture or to any political, economic or social system. Hence, it can form a very close unifying effect on the various communities of men and nations, provided they have trust in the Church and guarantee it true freedom to carry out its mission¹⁰

Having grown up and been involved actively in the Church's programs at many levels, I also believe that the Church has the ability to effectively participate and lead in the poverty alleviation knowing that it is a critical part of its ministry. Vatican II makes this observation: "In fact, the Church is able, indeed it is obliged, if time and circumstances require it, to initiate action for the benefit of all men, especially, of those in need, like works of mercy and similar undertakings."¹¹ In this way, the Church contributes in an exemplary way to community building. With this mission, the Church in the Akwa Ibom State community is challenged to live up to its tradition and mission. The Church cannot just look the other way, or become either silent or indifferent.

My experience with the many projects the Church establishes or sponsors in other places including Nigeria and abroad to benefit many people including the poor also

¹⁰ Austin Flannery, ed., "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et Spes*), no. 42 in *Vatican II, vol. I: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1975), 942.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

motivates me to take up this thesis-project. Some of them include affordable housing, soup kitchens, food pantries, training programs, and small-scale industries among others. I wish to note that the Church in the Akwa Ibom State community has similar albeit limited projects. It is, however, capable of doing more and taking an aggressive lead in the agenda to reduce poverty.

Finally, I simply refer to my personal background and experience as other crucial motivating factors for this work. I refer to my background as a poverty-stricken one. I can say that I am poor because I hail from such community. When I refer to my experience living abroad in the United States in the last five years, the contrary is the case. I am rich because of the privilege of living in a somewhat affluent community and experiencing the desire to change mine. With my background and experience outside, I can point out the difference between rich and poor communities. The irony is that the origin of poverty is traceable to human beings while that of wealth is attributable to God. This means that God has created everything for use human beings. This claim goes back to the Book of Genesis where God saw everything He created to be good.¹² The possessions of the earth are gifts from God given to humanity. The latter is to care for these gifts as stewards. In other words, God creates wealth but never poverty. All that we possess as wealth are gifts from God that humanity has used well. Poverty is a result of our inability or refusal to use all or some of those gifts well. In addition, my experience through reading, research, and sharing with colleagues assures me that there can be improvement if something is done not only theoretically but also practically. God, time and untapped resources are on the side of Akwa Ibom State. There is light at the end of the tunnel. There is hope. There is

¹² Genesis 1(NAB).

potential success if we forge ahead gradually as is necessary. Failure will be the case only if we give up.

I am interested and concerned with the “poor standard of living” of the citizens and people of Akwa Ibom State. I use the phrase “poor standard of living” to refer to the absence of many necessities to make life comfortable for any group of people. I personally shared in that condition growing up, and there is no guarantee at this moment that the experience will change before I go back. Some of those necessities include among others educational facilities, good roads, hospital/healthcare, electricity, clean water, housing and food. Notwithstanding the level of improvement in the community as of the time of this study, however, the lack of these necessities constitutes strongly the reasons behind my passion for this thesis-project. How a community such as Akwa Ibom State, blessed with abundant economic resources, could be lacking in these necessities of life is something that remains a puzzling concern to me and may be to many people within and outside the state and abroad that have the opportunity to read this paper. Such concern would be addressed within this paper.

1.3 The Ministerial and Theological Issues and Concerns in the Thesis-project

This thesis-project is not aimed at giving definitive answers to the ministerial and theological issues and concerns that are imbedded or may be raised in this thesis-project. It rather seeks to contribute to how the Church in Akwa Ibom State can take the lead or, at least, participate actively in helping to alleviate poverty within the state. However, this work will be incomplete if it completely ignores the ministerial and theological issues

and concerns in the leading role the Church should play in alleviating poverty in my society.

The ministerial concerns and issues to be raised by this thesis-project enable us to cast our minds back to Christ's mission as he announced it at its beginning in Galilee: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord"¹³(Luke 4:18-19).

After learning about Christ's deeds on earth, there is no doubt that he reasonably worked for the fulfillment of the promises he made in his inaugural speech. I am not here to prove if he actually succeeded or not. The interesting thing is that he made an indelible mark in the history of poverty alleviation through many activities. Such activities were subsequently handed down to the Apostles who continued credibly well. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles is replete with proofs of the continuity of these activities. Some of them include the cure of the cripple,¹⁴ community life,¹⁵ the healing of Aeneas at Lydda,¹⁶ the raising of Tabitha,¹⁷ and the council at Jerusalem¹⁸ among others. In doing these marvelous works, the apostles were making Christ present and relevant to the people in different and specific contexts.

In the light of the above, the primary ministerial concerns and issues raised by this thesis-project are many. One of them is how the Church can continue the apostolic

¹³ Luke 4: 18-19 (NAB).

¹⁴ Acts 3: 1-10 (NAB).

¹⁵ Acts 4: 32-37 (NAB).

¹⁶ Acts 9: 32-35 (NAB).

¹⁷ Acts 9: 36-42 (NAB).

¹⁸ Acts 15: 1-35 (NAB).

tradition, making Christ and his Gospel present and relevant in Akwa Ibom State context, and especially to the poor within the state. Although the interpretation and analysis of the Gospel of Christ may be available in classic Christian texts, traditional theology, doctrines and laws, it will remain without any effect on the practical and daily life of the people if they are not accompanied by further action to make it relevant for them.

Many liberation theologians are convinced that Jesus was born poor, lived poor and died poor as a sign of his passion for and identification with the poor. His ultimate reason for embracing poverty was the salvation of the poor. The ministerial issues with the citizens of Akwa Ibom State are what and where salvation is in the midst of poverty, how they can see God in poverty and how can God bring them out of it. They even ask if salvation in the face of poverty is an illusion. If not, where will it come and when in the face of poverty?

Another important ministerial issue is the effectiveness of the Church's ministry in the face of great disparity between the rich and the poor in the same Church and community. Vatican II noted this concern: "Excessive economic and social disparity between individuals and peoples of the one human race is a source of scandal and militates against social justice, equity, human dignity, as well as social and international peace."¹⁹ How the Church can reconcile such imbalance, what it does so far to bridge the unchristian gap, and how it can apply to Christ's teaching on rich-poor relationships in such circumstances are great ministerial concerns.

Other ministerial concerns include how the Church can, in a ministerial context, teach the people that they have the potential to change the course of things for the better and what good things it has learnt from others and how to emulate or improve on and

¹⁹ Ibid., no. 29, 930.

apply what they have done to ensure success in our own context. These are important issues to me right now due to my experience. During the first five years I spent as a priest in my home diocese and state, I cannot recall any serious discussion in the presbyterial meeting about the socio-economic welfare within my state or a move to lead a delegation to the state on such crucial concerns on behalf of the citizens. This is surprising when we know that concern over poverty is an aspect that is not outside or beyond the Church's ministry. Christ even prioritized it in several ways including feeding the poor and narrating several parables that taught people about care for the poor.²⁰ I am not saying that the Church should be a politician or an economist. I, however, believe and suggest that, as an institution with pastoral and moral duties and responsibilities towards all people in the state, the Church can play the role of a religious-political economist in the context of poverty alleviation. The bishops of United States admitted this role when they wrote in the same context:

In our letter, we write as pastors, not as public officials. We speak as moral teachers, not economic technicians. We seek not to make some political or ideological point but to lift up the human and ethical dimensions of economic life, aspects too often neglected in public discussion. We bring to this task a dual heritage of Catholic social teaching and traditional American values.²¹

In other words, it falls within the mission of the Church to lead and participate in economic issues from the religious, moral, ethical and faith perspectives. These perspectives form the background that encourages the Church's leadership to assist the government to formulate and implement economic policies that can alleviate poverty in the state. In relation to Akwa Ibom State, I have never failed to think about the possible causes of poverty in a place that is so blessed with abundance of natural resources. I think

²⁰ Matt. 25 (NAB).

²¹ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, no. 7, vii.

about some of the speculations including the claim that poverty in the state is man-made. Such speculation is a ministerial issue that presents a great challenge to the Church within the state.

There is not one cause of poverty in Akwa Ibom State. While there are several causes of poverty, whether poverty is what God allows or not has remained and will continue to remain a theological issue. Many people including theologians may turn to human freewill as the answer. Except that the discussion on freewill is not within the scope of this paper, I would love to explore its role here.

What the precise roles that God and the Church play in such a predicament are equally a theological issue. When it is acknowledged that God is not directly responsible for the economy, the experience of poverty in the state leaves many questions about his almighty power and providence unanswered. The United States bishops noted this when they opined that economic life raises important social and moral questions for each of us in particular and for society in general.²² While many people including scholars begin to wonder if the Church has not devised a means to console the poor or keep them in check when it preaches acceptance of poverty as sharing in the suffering of Christ, there have been several questions raised. How can a good God allow his elects to suffer from a lack of essential and necessities of life? Why can God not repeat in our days the wonder of striking the rock for his thirsting children to drink? Why can't he stop as he did to Pharaoh any individuals who thwart his love for his people? Some even ask if suffering caused by poverty in the state in spite of natural and material resources in abundance, notwithstanding the human contribution to it, is part of the mystery of God or part of what makes God a mystery to human beings. Some still ask if the suffering has

²² Ibid., no. 6, vii.

accomplished any good that can enhance salvation. There is also a strong perception about it as punishment. The latter perception spurs a few other ironical questions: How can a loving and caring God with all the blessing of economic resources for the state be the same source the suffering the people experience? If the poverty comes because of people's sins, why can the forgiving God forgive and grant a life of comfort? Is God's providence not contestable or even doubtful? The list of questions that also expresses grievances, hopelessness and disappointment on the part of Akwaibomites can be long here.

There are so many Christian denominations in Akwa Ibom State. One does not need to be told that a good number of them, if not all, pray for improvement in the economic situation within the state. But it seems there are no answers to these prayers when there is a steady increase in the lack of the basic necessities of life within the state. This type of frustrating experience becomes a theological issue the people seem to express in chorus with the words of lamentation by Christ: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"²³ (Matt 27: 46 NAB). However, it leads to the theological sacrilege of thinking that God is either deaf or dead.

One would have thought that poverty was enough punishment on Akwa Ibom State. Unfortunately, it is not. The violence that is one of its effects is alarming. If a convicted criminal can be executed with care to avoid unnecessary pain, how much more care should be given the innocent citizens and people of Akwa Ibom State, who die from the cruel effects of poverty. It is true that we shall all die, but when it is due to undeserved suffering, it creates within the community the feelings of abandonment by God; Christology from incarnation to resurrection is questioned, and the poor see

²³ Matt. 27: 46 (NAB).

themselves always as unjustly condemned to hell fire even here on earth. In such a context, the beatitude is negated to read; woe to the poor, for they have already been condemned; blessed are the rich, for they have found their comfort here on earth. This type of lived experience gives rise to rather tense atmosphere and confused environment in the Akwa Ibom State community. It also leads to the feelings of faithlessness and hopelessness in God by the poor that include many citizens and residents of Akwa Ibom State. Anything that can make life good is absent. Instead, famine, sickness and many other anomalies become the people's immediate companions with neither solution nor improvement in sight. The young and the old who are not strong enough to withstand the ordeal easily give up through death. The strong ones among us whose best effort yields little or nothing positively satisfactory take to armed robbery. At the end, it is the dignity of the human person the Church holds and teaches as sacred that is not only diminished but also desecrated. Hence, it is a theological concern and responsibility to promote economic life that eliminates poverty and upgrades human dignity.²⁴ It is a theological issue that poverty poses formidable challenge to the Church and the faith it preaches to create tools and environment that can translate and make theology meaningful and relevant to all in the Akwa Ibom State community. It is also a theological issue that the Church has to bring and re-evaluate its theology in the socio-economic context of my community.

1.4 Theological Perspective, Methods and Technique used in the Thesis-Project

This thesis-project comes under the auspices of practical theology. The latter subtly differs from traditional or classic theology, at least, for being, in addition to other

²⁴ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, no. 13, ix.

things, a discipline that lays much emphasis on the practical aspects of any issues it faces. It is more open to involving other branches of knowledge, particularly the human and social sciences in its critical thinking. Practical theology is also more open to employing in its work the methods used by the human and social sciences. These methods enable it to analyze, interpret and integrate Christian faith tradition with lived experience. In this way, practical theology mediates and makes Christ and his Gospel present and relevant to the people in a specific cultural context. It ensures practical response to any issues including poverty that is the subject of this thesis-project.

The primary theological discipline that grounds my thesis-project is Catholic Social Teaching (CST). The latter has its root in the Scriptures. It integrates knowledge from other disciplines including moral theology, systematic theology and the social sciences in its teachings. Through CST, the Church speaks on certain welfare issues including socio-economic, political, healthcare and educational issues as they affect the people, especially the poor.

In the context of this thesis-project, CST will use moral theology to show the moral obligation the Church and all other parties within the state have in executing their duties and responsibilities to alleviate poverty for the common good. Vatican Council II and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) are among documents to be used in this respect. CST will also use ecclesiology and liberation theology. The first studies the Church and its activities in the world. With the help of ecclesiology, CST identifies and stipulates the different roles the Church can or should play in the poverty alleviation apostolate. This role will be explained later in the work.

The second theological perspective used in this work is Liberation Theology. The latter has been described and practiced in different ways and places including the Americas and South Africa. Even though some of its principles and practices have received heavy criticisms, it motivates, informs and guides Practical Theology and CST. However, it is important to point out that the Liberation Theology I embrace and wish to spread through this thesis-project does not admit or promote violence in any form. I reject any aspect of violence in the name of theology. My personal interest in liberation theology is rooted in and influenced by God's love for his people and interest in the reality of that love. It is rooted in love for God demonstrated in love for neighbor. It is love in service that shows concern for all people, especially the suffering in our midst and those who perpetuate that suffering. Jon Sobrino would see it as liberation for both the oppressed and oppressors or sinners through acts of mercy, forgiveness, love and compassion²⁵. This is the selfless love shown by Christ when he had to die on the cross for the entire humanity. This, however, does not rule out peaceful demonstration when necessary.

With this theology in mind, it becomes pertinent to state the method, that is, what I will actually do, what approaches and techniques I will use to collect and analyze the data while I am conducting this study.

The predominant method that I intend to use in the course of this work is the "Praxis-Theory-Praxis" method of practical theology. Many practical theologians have either explained or used this method in different ways in practical theology. Gerben Heitink gives the basic guidelines of this method in these words:

²⁵ Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 62.

Practical theology starts from the situation, the praxis. An experience people have (praxis) becomes the object of reflection on the basic theological statements (theory). This theory, which itself is the result of the thinking and actions of the past, and reflects the distribution of power of the past, apparently fails to convince people in their contemporary praxis. Many ask critical questions: Did the people of the past arrive at an adequate understanding of certain biblical texts, in the light of their time? This leads to a rereading of the Scripture, and subsequently to a revision of the theory. A new theoretical insight then asks critical questions with regard to the existing praxis. Why do things happen the way they do? These and other questions lead to a reexamination of praxis. Which factors are determinative of the current situation? Why do people think and act the way they do? Is there any alternative? This leads to further questions about the theory and many subsequent answers have their impact on praxis. People recognize their situation and learn to view this with new eyes, in the light of a 'fresh' theory. It prompts them to initiate and change things, the theory, leading to a circular process. This is often set in motion through meditative action, through education, group discussions, dialogue, or through participation in an action group that stimulates this process.²⁶

This three-stage method is closely knit together. No stage stands independent of the others. Heitink likens the method to the triple concepts of understanding, explanation and change.

Following this lead explanation by Heitink, the method of practical theology that will frame this thesis-project will be the three-stage method of attending, assertion and pastoral response by James and Evelyn Whitehead. The Whitehead's method corresponds to praxis-theory-praxis method of practical theology.²⁷ The first stage of attending (praxis 1) aims at seeking and giving information on a particular pastoral concern that is evident in a specific context. Since the pastoral issues that my thesis-project addresses are poverty and the leading role the Church can and should play in alleviating it within Akwa Ibom State, I employ a Likert-Style survey questionnaire created by me to collect data on

²⁶ Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains*, translated by Reinder Bruinsma (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 153-154.

²⁷ James D. Whitehead and Evelyn E. Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, rev. ed. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 13.

the concrete experience of poverty in my state. This questionnaire consists of 25 questions that were submitted to volunteers in my Akwa Ibom State community including the state and diocese, who will participate in the survey. The intent of this survey questionnaire is to seek the views and perceptions of poverty from different groups including the rank and file in the Akwa Ibom State community. Participation in this survey questionnaire will be open to the clergy, lay leaders of both sexes and regular parishioners between the ages of 25 and 75. The information from this survey questionnaire will serve as foundation to my argument about the involvement by the Church and State in poverty alleviation programs. I will give a thick description that will show the contextual experience of poverty in Akwa Ibom State. Such experience will examine the pre-colonial and post-colonial eras and their impact on pastoral issues addressed in my thesis-project. It will also look into the history and mission of the Church within the state.

The second or theory stage analyzes and interprets the information from the previous stage in order to render a sound and valid judgment. The Whiteheads see what takes place in this stage as “asserting.”²⁸ For Heitink, it is hermeneutical theory of action where interpretation of human action in the light of the faith tradition takes place.²⁹ It is dialectical hermeneutic for Groome.³⁰ Don Browning sees it as a stage of fusion of horizon between visions of contemporary practice (lived experience) and normative texts.³¹ The latter, in the context of this thesis-project, refer to the different documents,

²⁸ Whiteheads, 13.

²⁹ Heitink, 178-182.

³⁰ Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 249.

³¹ Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 228.

particularly the Bible, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Vatican II Document*, and the papal encyclicals on economic rights. All these documents among others provide the theoretical ways the Church has led or should lead in the poverty alleviation apostolate. However, the theory alone does not solve the problem. We need to be practical or at most, make the theory help translate issues into concrete realities. If this is ignored, the entire work becomes a failure.

Wayne Cavalier divides this stage into “judge 1” (theory) and “judge 2” (theory-praxis).³² To these two closely related categories, the Whiteheads assign the terms “conversation” and “crucible” respectively.³³ The first allows for and facilitates the harmonizing of diverse voices of concern in the speaking stage of attending. The second makes a critical analysis of all information with the view to filtering them before judgment.³⁴ In the light of this explanation, the responses to the questionnaire/survey were collected and analyzed with the percentage point indicated. This prepared the groundwork for the third section of my method, new praxis.

The third and last stage translates all relevant insights and solutions into action (new praxis). It is the stage of pastoral action or pastoral response according to the Whiteheads.³⁵ Groome describes it as a stage for decision and response for lived Christian faith.³⁶ It is a strategic practical theology stage for Browning.³⁷ Under this new praxis or practical solution that should enhance change, I also discuss the moral obligations of the different economic rights on the government and citizens of Akwa

³² Wayne Cavalier, “A Comparison of Models of Practical Theology,” presentation in Doctor of Ministry Integrative Seminar, June, 2007, 1.

³³ Whiteheads, 15.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Whiteheads, 16.

³⁶ Groome, 291.

³⁷ Browning, 219.

Ibom State, the federal government, the international community, wealthy nations, the external corporate investments and the Church within Akwa Ibom State. I discuss the practical pastoral leadership role the Church needs to play in alleviating poverty within Akwa Ibom State. I show how the Church can equally exercise its prophetic role in leading and guiding the different parties to fulfill the moral obligations imposed on them by the different economic rights. I endeavor to indicate models and methods already used in the poverty alleviation apostolate in different contexts that the Church within my state can adapt for implementation in Akwa Ibom State. Some of these models, methods and organizations include Catholic Charities, Amor en Accion, Foculare Group and People Acting for Community Together (PACT) among others. I, however, focus on PACT. I have an interview with the leadership of the organization to learn about both its theoretical and practical frameworks. Based on PACT and its strategic interventions and practical ways that have successfully ameliorated the ill affects of poverty in South Florida, I construct a heuristic paradigm and a model of poverty alleviation unique to the socioeconomic conditions of Akwa Ibom State. This forms part of my contributions to the pastoral response by the Church to the issue of poverty alleviation.

Since this thesis-project deals with the pastoral issue of poverty within Akwa Ibom State, I am a good inside source, and I stand the chance of sharing the first-hand experience of poverty from birth and throughout my upbringing in the community. This gives me the immense advantage of knowing and understanding what I am researching. In addition to this advantage, I had the privilege of spending eight years in another state within Nigeria for my undergraduate education in Philosophy and Theology. I have also spent approximately five years in the United States and witnessed a difference in

economic issues. This thesis-project has created an excellent opportunity for me to compare, contrast, synthesize and interpret all the data from my interviews, studies and experiences of economic issues regarding poverty.

CHAPTER TWO

Thick Description of the Economy and Lived Experience in Akwa Ibom State

2.1 Introduction

This “thick description” is aimed at giving the practical and concrete situation of life regarding poverty in Akwa Ibom State. It is divided into few categories. The first category will give a general but brief socio-economic situation prior to Nigeria’s independence on October 1, 1960 in its recorded histories of pre-colonial and colonial periods. This is because there is no time in a person’s or a community’s history that is not important. The past, present and what we expect in the future play significant roles in our lives. We look back to the past in order to understand and build the present. The present helps us to prepare fully and actively for the future. In the light of the importance of the past and present periods to shape the future of any people or community, we shall look at some aspects of Nigeria’s socio-economic, political and religious history and their impact on Nigeria’s economy. This socio-economic, political and religious history of Nigeria would be significant in assessing the current poverty conditions in the Akwa Ibom State community and offering appropriate ways the Church can lead in alleviating it.

The second category of this section will focus on the economic abundance in the state, indicating areas and items including the natural resources, the government and privately- owned industries within the state. It will also indicate either to what degree these resources are utilized or not, which often remains puzzling and creates some concerns for many people. Some of those concerns would be addressed within this paper.

The third category of this section is designed to show the practical experience of poverty in spite of the abundant economic resources in the state. In order to get the true pictures including data, feelings and any other useful information from the people on lived experience of poverty; I conducted a survey by means of a Likert-style survey questionnaire of 25 questions with 5 choices for each question. This survey was also aimed at serving two functions for this thesis-project. First, it sought to sample the practical experience of poverty by people across the state. Second, it sought to know the perceptions of the rank and file on what had been and should be the level of involvement by the Church, state, individuals and other institutions in the poverty-alleviation apostolate. The participants in this survey were 25. These included the clergy, lay leaders and everyday parishioners, rich and poor, both male and female, and ranging from 25 to 75 years of age. The questionnaire created by me indicated major and specific areas in which abject poverty is most experienced. These included education, healthcare/hospitals, roads/transportation, electricity and water supply, communication, industry and employment and food and housing.

The result of the analysis of the responses or choices by the participants in the survey showed that 100% strongly agreed that there is abject poverty and the areas indicated above are the major ones mostly affected within the state. The responses to the survey, however, showed differing degrees of percentage of poverty in the different areas indicated. These will be indicated during the treatment of each area. One hundred percent of the responses showed that poverty is an issue of great importance to deal with within the state. On the closely related issues of conducting the survey on poverty in order to learn more about it and to suggest ways to alleviate it as of great importance for the state,

15% strongly agreed, 70% agreed, and 10% disagreed, while 5% were unsure. Seventy percent of the participants in the survey agreed that the estimated percentage of poverty in the state was 90%. Twenty percent said that it was 75%, while 10 % said that poverty was so over-whelming that it defies any estimation. Eighty percent of the participants strongly agreed that the effect of poverty on the citizens and residents of the state was devastating, crises inducing and unsatisfactory. Twenty percent were neutral by refusing to say anything on the effect of poverty. Perhaps the reason was that the effects of poverty are indescribable. The responses to the survey expressed the discouraging state of affairs within the Akwa Ibom State community regarding socio-economic endeavors.

2. 2 Pre-Independence Socio-economic Conditions in Akwa Ibom State - Nigeria

2. 2 (a) Pre-colonial Period

Prior to the advent of Britain as the major colonizer of Nigeria and other Westerners, what is now known and called Nigeria was largely different ethnic groups often distinguished by differences in history, culture, political development and religion.³⁸ Each of the groups in Nigeria was a unique communitarian and family oriented society. Every person actually belonged to an immediate biological family in particular and the large or extended family of his or her ancestral heritage or patriarchal root. Every person was conscious of these unique and laudable culture and tradition. There was a good and true spirit of solidarity among all people including the less privileged ones. Every person worked for the unity and common good of the society. Hence, it was difficult and rare to see a poor person without a family, home and food or anything he or

³⁸ Elochukwu Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1996), 15.

she needed in order to live reasonably well by the standard of the time. This implies that the socio-economic welfare was the responsibility of all members of the family and ethnic groups. The rights of every person in terms of economic, social and cultural matters were respected by all. Each person had a share in the common good and was willing to fulfill his civic duties and responsibilities for the benefit of the rest. This, however, does not mean that there was no leadership structure that exerted control over many things in the society. Tribal structures and traditions as means for establishing a good system of governance were present. There were kings and chiefs who ran the affairs of each tribe.

One unique phenomenon that was present in many West African tribal societies including Nigeria was slavery in a modest manner. Uzukwu notes that slavery is a very ancient practice — as old as constituted kingdoms.³⁹ The kings, chiefs and some rich men had the authority and power to have other people to serve them as attendants or housekeepers. These slaves, who were mostly people of lowly economic status, would be unwaveringly loyal to their masters and mistresses even when treated with little or no dignity. Slavery was, however, taken to the extreme with the advent of the Westerners in spite of the economic benefits. Uzukwu notes that the European slave raiding and trading on the coasts of Africa have no comparison in the history of humankind. He points to records of the raiders and the trauma the victims underwent that may not be forgotten.⁴⁰ With the influence of Christianity, slavery was officially abolished in 1807 by the British. Nevertheless, a few disgruntled people managed to continue in secret the contraband trade but in a much reduced rate and a remarkable drop in income. With the rise of

³⁹ Ibid, 21.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

industries in the West, the one time booming business of trade in humans between Africans and Western dealers was substituted with raw materials like palm oil and African artifacts. Trade in palm oil alone was highly profitable.

2.2 (b) Colonial (British) Rule

The history of Nigeria in relation to colonization under the British rule given in this thesis-project is not a detailed history. This is not the major focus of this paper. Although the information given here is sketchy, it is important and directly connects with the socio-economic welfare and impact on Akwa Ibom State. This does not mean that I will hesitate to refer to British rule in Nigeria in general when it is necessary.

Through trade expeditions in the area that is now West Africa in the 1800s, the British, like many other Westerners, gained access through trade routes to some strategic economic markets in what we know and call Nigeria today. Some of these places included Lagos in the west, Sokoto, Kano and Kaduna in the north and Calabar and Port Harcourt in the south. Prior to 1987, what is now known and called Akwa Ibom State was part of Cross River State with Calabar as its capital city.

The drive for socio-economic and political exploitations by the British government led to the amalgamation or the merging of all these economically important and progressing centers. This eventually gave way to the annexation of the entire area and given the name Nigeria. The root for Nigeria as a country is traced to a river within the country named “Niger River.” The river runs from the southernmost part up to the northern part of Nigeria. It separates into another river known as “Benue River” to the west at the middle of the country while the original “Niger River” continues to the east.

The British used the “Niger River” as a major waterway or route for their trade. It is interesting to note that two states, namely Benue and Niger located at the confluence, are named after these two rivers. Benue and Niger form the central states in this region that is called “Middle Belt” in Nigeria. They are also known to be the “Food Basket” for the nation, expressing the waterways as the trade route and economic importance of the states during the colonial era. However, the original river (Niger River) traces its name to the word “nigger” which is a variant of “neger” taken from French “negre” and Spanish “negro” for the black color and a member of any dark-skinned race.⁴¹ For the colonial masters, the name “nigger” or “negro” reflected or expressed the black complexion or skin color of the human race in their newly found colony. The Westerners used the Niger River as one of the major water ways and means of transportation into the heart of Nigerian nation.

The amalgamation carried out by the British in Nigeria was putting people of different tribes into one group or nation. This was done to serve their selfish interest. This, however, had its grave consequences, including the socio-political and tribal conflicts Nigeria has experienced till today. On the other hand, some of the advantages brought by this amalgamation included the diversity of cultures, languages, and traditional religions to mention a few. I acknowledge these good outcomes which are either absent or existing in a limited way in many other places. With the annexation came the system of “Indirect Rule.” The latter was a means employed by the British government, making use of the local authorities including the chiefs and their immediate advisers as agents to sell their policies and assert control over the newly found territory. The adverse consequences of the annexation were many including the imposition of

⁴¹ *Webster New Collegiate Dictionary* (1981), s.v. “nigger.”

foreign, mostly western culture and tradition on the already diluted and adulterated individual tribal cultures that were forced together by the amalgamation. The consequences of this were far-reaching and discouraging. Some of them included the loss of individual distinctive traditions and cultures including the ones that favored socio-economic reciprocity or communal living among members of each family and tribe. There were also positive consequences including increase and novel trade transactions. The British respected to some extent the native authorities while reserving the ultimate power of decision making to their officials, especially in socio-economic matters that directly affected them. However, the British would not hesitate to conspire to depose any local authorities that did not do their bidding. They would buy over other authorities and helped to pass a vote of no confidence on those they perceived to be resisting their occupation.

The socio-economic welfare during the colonial rule in Akwa Ibom State cannot be discussed independent of that of Nigeria to which it is a part. The socio-economic welfare was not in the best condition as it could possibly be. This, however, does not mean that it was unbearable and nothing commendable took place.

It is pertinent to indicate here that the advent and rise of Christianity in the region coincided with the colonial rule. With both institutions working in tandem, there were average achievements and progress in socio-economic developments in several sectors including education, healthcare, roads/transportation, electricity and water supply, communication, industry and employment, and food and housing to mention a few.

Education was given a prominent role and an unprecedented attention. Many institutions of learning including elementary and secondary schools were established by

both the government and the different Christian denominations. More than 85% of the schools in the state date back to the missionary-colonial era. Teachers were well trained and duly assigned to schools upon graduation. Their performances in schools were excellent due to the good training received. The quality of teaching and learning was also commendable. Many people saw the need and actually had interest in education. The latter was a key to a meaningful life in the community. This is why many communities made education of their children the duty and responsibility of the entire community. Such communities would establish education endowment funds and other incentives to ensure that every child received basic education. Many people from what is now Akwa Ibom State in their 70s always recall how patriotic they were to their community due to the scholarships they received for their education. It was always a pride for any village to send one of their own to school. The least expected news at that time that is the experience today is that such laudable practice is death and the chance for its resurfacing as a common practice is slim or remote. There are no more educational endowment funds by communities for their children. The government has no good scholarship scheme. Individual families bear the financial responsibility of sending their children to school. This implies that it is difficult for poor families that cannot afford enough money to send their children to school.

The huge investment in education had a tremendous positive impact on the spread of the Christian faith. Some of the major Christian denominations made religious studies compulsory and a major part of the school curriculum. Many converts were won to the Christian faith through catechism classes in local schools and churches. Basic virtues and any other program that helped the students to have a solid foundation for their future lives

were also taught. In most cases, both the Church and school worked together to ensure integral formation. I must not fail to acknowledge that there was always a difference between students trained in missionary schools and those from the few public schools then. The immediate employment of elementary or high school graduates from missionary schools as clerks and auxiliary teachers, for example, is an eloquent testimony of the laudable and integral standard of education received in them.

Hospital/health care service was another sector that received good attention. Approximately, 75 % of the hospitals and health care centers in the state were established and equipped by either the colonial administration or earliest missionaries in the state. Even most of the medical personnel were expatriates from the West before indigenous ones were able to finish training for the services. Drugs were readily available, and patients received good health services in spite of the several setbacks like lack of health insurance, water and electricity. The government and Church realized the importance of health care and always gave due treatment to the medical personnel. Like any regular industry, health care system provided jobs to many people.

There were many employment opportunities following the industries that sprang up rapidly. What is now Akwa Ibom State and its surrounding communities depended on agriculture as the major economic source prior to the discovery and drilling of crude oil. Everybody was engaged in farming. Agriculture, especially farming, was such a very important tradition that even those with white color jobs as civil servants had some portion of land on which they cultivated. It remains part of the tradition, though many people neglect it now. Those who do not engage in aggressive farm work are regarded as lazy and are quickly pointed at as suspects of any robbery cases in the community. The

belief is that such people are parasites, living on the labor of others. Even though agricultural work was manual and purely based on personal efforts, without much or adequate financial loans to individual farmers, it still produced enough food for both local consumption and export. Few small-scale productive and service industries were established to boost food production and other agricultural works in particular and the economy in general. These industries provided employment for many people. This one-time booming sector of the economy collapsed with the oil boom in the post-independent 60s and 70s.

Construction of roads, ports and waterways represented some of the improvements in the transportation system in the country. The colonial masters also undertook these when they arrived on the West Coast of Africa. Though road construction as we see today was not the priority for the local authorities, the local roads sufficed for the business the locals were involved in. Communities showed their gratitude for the construction of roads with concrete and coal tar by locally calling these roads “usung mbakara,” that is, “white man’s road.” This was, however, not without some complaints as the novel developments in this aspect necessitated the loss of buildings, land, economic trees and other property by the locals. In other words, the construction of roads for better transportation system encouraged the widening of the existing ones or the opening of new ones by bulldozing any landed property on the path. The quality of the construction of any means of transportation system was excellent and reliable. Such system can only collapse when and where there is no good maintenance. Travel by car and buses were soon to replace the traditional bicycles, and long distance journeys on

foot with labored effort. Through the improved transportation system, the economic transactions in the community were also improved.

Electricity and water supplies in the urban centers were virtually foreign and new to the local people. However, there were other amenities, courtesy of the advent of Western civilization. This means that the local people had their own standard of civilization. Nonetheless, electricity and water improved the standard of living by means of achieving giant strides in other areas including the printing business, health care services and communication. The latter included mostly telegram and telephone that facilitated long distance communications. Radio transmissions were possible. A large population used the megaphone for news before the advent of the then modern radio and television sets. The construction and equipping of houses for both government business and workers was another tradition worthy of commendation. This and other benefits enhanced industry on the part of the workers who also had the financial capacity to erect their houses.

The government supplemented the services in the significant sectors of life in the community by means of annual financial grants. Such financial assistance was properly used for the common good. There was a good circulation of money when comparing to the current experience where it is in the pockets of privileged individuals.

When the current situation with each of the aforementioned sectors and any others is discussed later in the paper, the disparity between the reality in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods will be clear and may be shocking to many people, too. Let it suffice to say here that, at least, the standard of life prior to independence was relatively good given the circumstances of the time and what I have discussed already in

spite of some setbacks in the system. Even though I am a post-colonial person, I have not only learnt about but also witnessed some of the good effects of the colonial socio-economic system. The colonial socio-economic system created a good environment for training people, providing job opportunities, good education and health care services, reliable communication and electricity and water supplies, small but regular salaries, average transparency in governance, provision of roads and transportation, low cost housing, and bearable prices of food items in the market among other issues. All these are presently functioning below acceptable standards in the state, as we shall see later.

In spite of the relative success in the socio-economic aspects of Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria prior to independence, there were a number of economic blunders in addition to the slave trade as indicated earlier in this paper. Some of these blunders led to economic decline in Nigeria. Outstanding among them was the focus on exploiting and exporting of cultural artifacts and raw materials like tin, cocoa, rubber, timber, groundnuts, and palm oil among others to Europe with little or no compensation. The introduction of taxation on agricultural products by the colonial masters was new and discouraging to the farmers. It also made such goods more expensive and scarce due to reduced labor and cutbacks.

2.3 Natural and Economic Resources in Akwa Ibom State

The existence of abundant natural resources is not limited to the colonial period only. They had existed from time immemorial, including the pre-colonial era. Their gradual discovery, the realization of their economic significance and their actual

utilization along the years, particularly beginning from the late colonial period, created a renewed and more vigorous awareness of such blessing.

The survey conducted indicated that 80% of those who participated strongly agreed, while 20% agreed that the state is blessed with abundant natural economic resources. I will endeavor to indicate these abundant economic resources in several categories. The soil is rich in several resources. The state government confirms this:

Our soil is host to a number of mineral resources that can be commercially exploited. There are both metallic and non-metallic minerals which have been fairly distributed across the various local government areas of the state. A number of studies have been undertaken by the Federal Government-owned Raw Materials Research and Development Council, RMRDC, on their uses and application.⁴²

The state also asserts that among the metallic minerals are gold and silver nitrates, precious metals that constitute raw materials for the production of jewelry.⁴³ The non-metallic minerals include clay, silica, limestone, gravel and coal among others. We shall see later how these can help boost the economy and alleviate poverty in the state.

Nigeria is one of the world's leading producers of oil and gas. Akwa Ibom State is the fourth largest oil-producing state in Nigeria. It (Akwa Ibom) provides the operational base for Exxon-Mobil. This company is one of the largest oil companies in the world. It is currently investing in a massive expansion of its terminal facilities within the state and some gas utilization projects across the country. The economic benefits, including tax and voluntary financial assistance for numerous projects within the state, are amazingly huge. Related to this is the location of the state that makes it another source of economic blessings for the state:

⁴² *Solid Minerals*, available from <http://www.akwaibomstategov.com/solidminerals.html>; accessed 10 April 2007.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Akwa Ibom State is located within Nigeria's Niger Delta region. The Niger Delta basin is one of the most prolific hydrocarbon provinces in the world. The sedimentary basin occupies a total area of 75,000 km and is at least 12 km thick in its central part. Total recoverable hydrocarbon is estimated at more than 20 billion barrels of oil and 120 trillion cubic feet of gas, making the region one of the highest concentrations of petroleum per unit volume of basin-fill sediment.⁴⁴

This single blessing of location offers the state a series of investment opportunities that also attracts to the state a litany of companies across the globe. One can imagine the incredible income that comes into the state treasury from such opportunities.

The state also proudly confirms its natural blessings in the area of tourism:

Akwa Ibom State is a rich tourism destination offering unrivalled wealth of scenic landscape, long sandy coast, a wealth of wildlife and culture. Plus a warm and friendly people, known for their exceptional culinary skills. Solidly wedged in Nigeria's southeastern flank, the state is deeply religious and this shows not only in its name which translates into The Great God of Heaven, but also in the rich relics of its traditional religion which have preserved across the state. The local dances, songs, folklore, mythology, cult and traditional festivals provide engaging opportunities for those who seek naked excitement and unspoilt pleasure.⁴⁵

Besides, the wildlife parks at different locations within the state play host to various species of animals. The birds, most of which migrate from some parts of Europe via Spain and North Africa into the east African nations of Kenya and Tanzania, and making their way to Nigeria add to the wonders of nature and places of interest that bring a huge income to the state. The coastal areas within the state offer amazing relaxation comforts to the tourists who enjoy assorted seafood menus and traditional drinks tapped from the different tropical food trees including palms and raffia. Other tourist sites include Ibom Plaza, Uyo National Museum, Uyo Cenataph, and Eket Oil Field among others. "Tourism

⁴⁴ *Oil and Gas*, available from <http://www.akwaibomstategov.com/oilgas.html>; accessed 10 April 2007.

⁴⁵ *Tourism*, available from <http://www.akwaibomstategov.com/tourism.html>; accessed 10 April 2007.

is an activity of increasing social and economic importance, which involves the movement of people from one point to the other in search of pleasure, fun, business, adventure, cultural and political exchanges, etc.”⁴⁶ If all the tourist attractions located within the state are fully developed and run well, they have the potential of generating a significant amount of foreign exchange to enhance the state economy.

I have indicated earlier that the state is blessed with rich land mass and good weather. These provide and enhance a conducive environment for the planting, growth and production of various food and tree crops as well as livestock, as anyone would imagine.

The natural blessings of minerals, oil, gas, tourism sites, rich soil and clement weather have encouraged and enhanced multiple industries by both the state and federal governments. I have also indicated that the oil industry alone has international subsidiary and servicing companies within and outside the state. In addition, the federal government owns the Aluminum Smelter Company (ALSCON) at Ikot Abasi and Nigerian Newsprint Manufacturing Company (NNMC) at Oku Iboku. The companies or industries inherited from its mother state, Cross River, in 1987 are few and fairly functioning. These include among others Sunshine Batteries in Essien Udim, Peacock Paint in Etinan, Quality Ceramic in Itu, Qua Steal Products in Eket, Asbetonit in Oron, Plasto-Crown in Uyo, International Biscuit in Ikot Ekpene, Champion Breweries in Uyo and Pamil in Abak. Since its creation in 1987, Akwa Ibom has established on its own a few others, such as Ebughu Fishing Terminal in Mbo, Akwa Rubber Estate Limited in Itu, Akwa Feeds Limited in Uyo among others. One may be surprised why there is so much poverty in

⁴⁶ Ibid.

spite of all the industries and companies within the state. The answer to such surprise is found in the testimony by the economic office in the state department:

Most of the companies are ailing, becoming a drain on government. As part of the economic policies of the present Administration, these companies are to be revived and privatized. Government is diverting its interest in them in line with overall philosophy to focus on creating an enabling environment for private sector initiatives to flourish.⁴⁷

It is rather sad to learn here that the government of a state with such incredible resources would not, as a matter of moral obligation think of doing everything possible for its industries to function, as well as assisting the private sector to invest for the improvement of its economy and welfare of its citizens. To promise to encourage growth in the private sector is one thing, and to fulfill it is another. What I have described already is enough evidence of poverty. It also indicates that the state does so little regarding its moral and social responsibilities towards its citizens even with the establishment of Akwa Ibom State Investment and Industrial Promotion Council (AKIIPOC). The latter is best seen and known as a medium through which the political leadership in the state financially compensates or rewards some political gurus and campaign donors appointed to offices.

2.4 Present Lived Experience of Poverty within Akwa Ibom State

Though there are tremendous and abundant economic resources in Akwa Ibom State, it may sound contradictory or untrue to describe it as a poverty stricken one in a practical sense. It is rather a pity that it is a true picture of the experience. This accounts for why 95% of the participants in the survey strongly agreed that there is poverty in the state. Truly speaking, more than 85% of the citizens of the state are poor. Ninety percent

⁴⁷ *Economy*, available from <http://www.akwaibomstategov.com/theeconomy.html>; accessed 10 April 2007.

of the participants in the survey strongly agreed that the resources in the state are not properly utilized for the benefit of all. Hence, we can say that there are no middle class people in the state. There are only a few people who are rich and the majority who are poor and needy. And unfortunately there is a great disparity between the two groups within the same state. The Second Vatican Council captures and notes this unfortunate disparity very succinctly:

In the midst of huge numbers deprived of the absolute necessities of life there are some who live in riches and squander their wealth; and this happens in less developed areas as well. Luxury and misery exist side by side while a few individuals enjoy an almost unlimited opportunity to choose for themselves, the vast majority have no chance whatever of exercising personal initiative and responsibility, and quite often have to live and work in conditions unworthy of human beings.⁴⁸

With this type of experience and reality of the disparity between the few rich and the majority poor, one senses nothing but corruption on the part of the few who are rich and in positions of power and authority over socio-economic aspects of life in the state. Vatican II observes “. . . when economic groups could do so much to reduce social inequalities, it serves all too often only to aggravate them; in some places it even leads to a decline in the position of the underprivileged and contempt for the poor.”⁴⁹ This economic imbalance between the poor and the rich occurs because the services of those who should help the state reduce poverty become questionable with the experience of poverty and disparity witnessed in the state.

It may even sound untrue learning that no single aspect of life in the state reflects the huge economic abundance. The essential areas that should provide basic resources for a worthy living standard for human beings are worse hit. Poor Akwa Ibom State and its

⁴⁸ Austin Flannery, “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” no. 63, 969.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

citizens! The discussion on the major areas hit hard by poverty will certainly acquaint and enlighten more our knowledge of the concrete poverty situation and lived experience within Akwa Ibom State.

2.4 a. Education

The significance of good education to any person in particular and the government in general can never be emphasized enough nor ruled out. It is one of the earliest social services in the state provided by both colonial government and missionaries. It is the bedrock of any society and progress for both state and its citizens. It is a fundamental human right nobody should be denied. The US bishops note that education is an investment in the future that also provides one effective vehicle for people to lift themselves out of poverty.⁵⁰ The United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UNDHR) emphasizes more on this when it writes:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and the fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.⁵¹

One way of interpreting this is that education is a determinant of a successful life.

The Federal Constitution of Nigeria legislates that the government shall direct its policies towards (1) providing adequate education and equal opportunity at all levels, and (2) eradicating illiteracy by providing, when it is practicable, free, compulsory primary

⁵⁰ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, no. 204, 100.

⁵¹ United Nations, *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, 1948, Art. 26, available from <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>; accessed 12 April 2007.

education, free secondary education, free university education, and free adult education.⁵² In other words, proper and adequate access to good education should occupy the prime position in the agenda of any good government.

The above explanation on the importance of education contains expectations that are difficult to translate into practice within Akwa Ibom State. The government provides good education only on the pages of newspapers and over electronic media without translating them into reality for the benefit of its citizens. There is no doubt that the state can boast of one federal and three state tertiary institutions of learning. The number of high and elementary schools is enough by my own assessment. The quality of education is what makes them far from being learning centers. Ninety percent of those who participated in the survey strongly agreed that there is abject poverty in the educational system. Ten percent of them were not sure of what to say here.

Good education starts with the good training of teachers and the provision of a conducive environment with facility for teaching and learning. I am not ashamed to admit here and now that these are poorly provided in the state. I cannot pinpoint any school in the state that has average modern teaching and learning facilities. The teachers are poorly trained and paid. In the entire state, there is only one school for the formal training of teachers, and it is poorly equipped. This implies that the school always turns out graduates who are mediocre in their different fields of expertise. How could one be convinced that such teachers will transmit anything good to their students, especially when we know that “*nemo dat quod non habet*” (nobody gives what he/she does not have)?

⁵² *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, Chapter One, art. 3, section 2, available from <http://www.nigeria-law.org/ConstitutionOfTheFederalRepublicOfNigeria.htm>; accessed 12 April 2007.

There are no scholarships for the numerous bright but poor students who need such assistance due to the high cost of education. The financial requirement for a reasonable education is beyond the ability of most of the students, especially those from needy families. Even when there are scholarships, an abuse of such benefits by those who should make them available sets in. The children of the rich, who are not always in need of such scholarships, are considered first to the detriment of the poor and less privileged students, no matter their talents and potentials.

There are poor and out-dated facilities in more than 95% of the schools. These constitute a great setback to good education. There are schools where trees within the school premises provide shades that are used as classrooms for learning. Such classrooms become necessary because of the dilapidated buildings or no longer existing ones. Even where there are classrooms, they are often crowded with limited or no teaching and learning equipment including desks. The system is often plagued by civil strikes by the teachers due to welfare conditions. There are also cases of temporal closures due to activities by members of some unorthodox groups and secret cults in the schools who often threaten, murder people and loot property. These mostly happen in the secondary and tertiary institutions. Hence, a typical academic year is never a hitch-free one. It is epileptic, always punctuated by one or two unfortunate events that are crisis inducing. In many cases, the closure of the school for a long period interrupts the academic programs and calendar year.

There is no doubt that the fundamental cause of all these unfavorable conditions for good education is poor administration by the government through its education ministry. The latter has no good supervision of the schools. Nobody enforces the rules

and regulations of good education to the extent that the system becomes wild and uncontrollable.

In the face of these ills, the morale of the good teachers, parents and students is either low or battered. Many forms of malpractice and corruption including, illegal financial transactions, examination irregularities and mass promotion leading to half-baked graduates are some of the experiences within the school system. With this bizarre situation, it is not an exaggeration to conclude that more than 70 percent of teachers and students are not the teachers and students they claim to be. It is unfortunate that the present leadership knows this ugly situation but does not show much care. A good number of our leaders in the state had the privilege to be educated in the western world or in the good old days when education was relatively good and commendable. Unfortunately, they fail to bring their wealth of knowledge and experiences to implement in schools their home state. Many of them prefer to send most of their children to study abroad because of the poor education in the state. The leadership fails to acknowledge that everyone has the right to good education and it has the moral responsibility to provide it.

2.4 b. Health Care/Hospitals

The story in the health care is not different from the unpleasant one in the educational sector. Ninety-five percent of the participants in the survey strongly agreed that healthcare is major area poverty is experienced. Five percent of the participants in the survey were reluctant to indicate their views. This unfortunate saga in healthcare can be attributed to the poor administration in the health ministry in particular and the

government in general. The training of health care personnel and the provision of good healthcare facilities are the foundation of good health care services in any community. I would not boast of any of these significant aspects of healthcare services within the state. These lacks play an immense role in the litany of woes experienced in health care system.

The number of hospitals, health care centers and personnel is not adequate to take care of the growing population of the state. There are some local government areas (US county equivalent) without government-owned hospitals. Those who need health care services in these areas travel far distances to receive them. In areas where there are hospitals, some people may travel by means of trekking, bicycle, motorbike or public transport up to 10 miles to get there. As I indicated earlier within this paper, more than 85% of the hospitals within the state were established by the earliest missionaries. Unfortunately, the ownership and administration of these health care institutions were taken over by the government after independence. Most of hospital buildings are dilapidated due to lack of good maintenance. The equipment in them, which is mostly out-dated, is not functioning well.

There is an inadequate number of efficient health care administrators, physicians, nurses, etc. Many of the qualified medical personnel receive their training at other parts of the nation or abroad, after which they stay there to work due to lack of facilities and poor working conditions within the state among other problems. Consequently, the ratio of personnel on duty can be a physician, a nurse, or a nurse assistant to more than 20 patients per day. The output by any health care giver becomes poor when there is more than the number of patients to whom he or she can satisfactorily attend within the proper period.

Inadequate provision of drugs to the hospital for patients is traceable to the general experience of poor concern by the government and incompetence on the part of the hospital administrators. It is hard to believe that in most cases when physicians prescribe drugs, the patients have to go in search outside the hospital to buy them. A number of malpractices are associated with such unfortunate procedures and practice of treatment for drugs. There are high prices, and many fake and uncontrolled drugs.

The poor administration which gives rise to poor supervision of the health care system in the state also allows the health care providers, especially the physicians and nurses, to run privately licensed hospitals or unlicensed drug stores and clinics. These medical personnel often refer some patients from the government-owned health care institutions to the privately run ones. It is sad to note that in most of the privately run health care institutions, more than half of the health care providers are less qualified. These less qualified employees do often stand in for physicians and nurses to do the work in their absence. One can imagine the danger here. There are always an unprecedented number of casualties. Either people die or their health problems are made worse.

The above inadequacy that may even lead to a total collapse of the health care system has given rise to the re-emergence and increase in the practice of traditional medicine. The latter is mostly witnessed in the rural areas and patronized by the less privileged people. This is uncontrollable. The patients are always at the mercy of the traditional or quack doctors who depend on the claim of gift and experience in medicine. This does not negate the fact that most of them do a nice job and serve many lives. The bottom line here is that a vast majority of Akwaibomites die because of either poor health

care system or quack treatment and the inability to meet up with health care expenses since there are no guaranteed insurance schemes.

Many other essentials such as housing, balanced diet, supply of potable water and waste management associated with good health care are either non-existent or in jeopardy. Any such projects are always with a short life span due to lack of good maintenance. Their lack is a threat to both private and public hygiene, especially in highly populated urban centers. Those without houses are exposed to dangerous health situations. The imbalanced diet deteriorates health. Many diseases associated with poor water and waste management are and deadly, too. The limited success in health care is where international organization such as World Health Organization (WHO) gives assistance in inoculation or immunization against such diseases like tuberculosis (TB), spiral meningitis, polio, etc.

2.4 c. Roads and Transportation

One of the reasons a good road network and transportation are essential parts of human activity is that they form parts of the basis of all socio-economic transactions and growth. There may be no success in economic matters without an effective means of movement in any community. The transportation system in Akwa Ibom State includes the roads and waterways. There is neither a rail in the state nor an air transportation owned by the state. The only small airstrip in the state is owned by the oil companies for their private use.

The road is the most commonly used mode of transportation within and out of the state or interstate transportation. However, it is difficult to boast of any road within the

state that has the distance of 5 miles at a stretch without some hitches like portholes that make traveling difficult. In other words, there is neither a standard road nor a good road network within the state or even something close to any of them. The analysis of the responses to the survey shows that 90% of the participants strongly agreed that this area is hit by poverty.

The basic means of transportation are vehicles (car and buses), motor cycles and bicycles. Less than 30% of those who travel have their own means. The rest use the public buses or cars, and some prefer to take the motor cycle for their intra and inter urban centers traveling. Each of these means is not without some setbacks. None of them is reliable considering the number of mishaps that are caused by them. Ninety percent of the vehicles and the motor cycles are often not road worthy. Besides, the number of passengers is always beyond the limit. Non-compliance with the traffic rules and bad roads always result in fatal road accidents.

In a state rich in petroleum products, it is sad to learn there is a high cost of transportation due to the high cost of gas. One can only imagine what happens to other areas of the economy when transportation is hard hit by high gas prices. Water transportation includes the ocean, coastal and inland areas for some water-locked parts of the state. This also has its own setbacks including incessant accidents due to overloading of the boats among other things. However, traveling anytime by any means is risky due to insecurity of any forms. The general condition of poverty forces the hungry people to take to armed robbery. In addition to the inconvenience of the bad road network, poorly maintained vehicles, etc., and the unreliability of both the road and water ways, travelers always become their unfortunate victims. This situation becomes worse since it also

scares away the investors from doing business in the state. The only set of people who travel always without many qualms is the criminals, who are always engaged in all forms of trafficking and smuggling since the security network is highly corrupted.

2.4 d. Electricity and Water Supplies

Because of the advent of technology, electricity is fast becoming one of the necessities in addition to food. However, both electricity and water supply are also in bad condition. They seem to be regarded as luxuries and not necessities. The official name for electricity, which is “National Electric Power Authority” (NEPA), has been changed by consumers to the acronym “Never Expect Power Always” (NEPA). This is due to its epileptic supply at places the facilities have been provided. In other words, there are always power outages. However, less than 70% of the population benefit from the electricity supply when we know that it is the key to the functioning of many businesses. This is sad indeed. The survey shows that 90% of the participants strongly agreed on the poverty in this area.

Due to the inability on the part of the government to guarantee a steady and good supply of electricity, many people resort to private generating plants. In either case, we witness within the state accidents associated with poor connections, and overloading of a particular distribution line from privately generating plants among others.

The socio-economic importance of water resources cannot be overemphasized especially for domestic, agricultural, industrial and health care purposes. It may surprise many people that there is no pipe-borne water supply anywhere within the state right now. Many people depend on the private borehole by the rich individuals or community

and the stream for their water supply. This means that more than 85% have no access to potable (treated) water. Several efforts to supply pipe-borne water by the government are always grounded by corruption by its personnel. Either it is never started or uncompleted, or there is no supervision of such contracts. The consequences of the lack of potable water are numerous. They range from poor hygienic conditions within the state due to poor waste management to spread of water borne diseases due to untreated water source in the state.

2.4 e. Communication System

As a vital part of any state's infrastructure, the communication system in Akwa Ibom State is also poor. It can even be said to be a nightmare in the state. The socio-economic, political, and cultural development of any state depends largely on the efficiency of its communication system/network. The government units involved in communication within the state include Nigerian Telecommunications PLC (NITEL), and Nigerian Postal Services (NIPOST), as well as print and electronic media. The state has control of all these units. Private communication companies including courier firms have started to spring up in the state in recent times.

Nonetheless, 90% of the state has no regular phone service. Only about 5% of the homes have access to fax and internet services. I must not fail to acknowledge and commend private companies, who have done a great deal to improve communication through the provision of cell phone services. The answer will be a disaster if one asks if it is working well. However, when not all these essentials for comfort of life that can also boost the economy are functioning well, one can imagine the suffering of the citizens.

More than 70% live below poverty line in the state. The survey indicated 90% who strongly agreed that there is poverty in this area.

2.4 f. Industry and Employment

When I refer to too much suffering in Akwa Ibom State facing its citizens and residents, it is partly because of the lack of adequate and good functioning industries. This has given rise to joblessness, inadequate employment opportunities and underemployment even for qualified people. The consequences are scary. They range from unemployment to lack of financial ability to enable families to have the necessities including good education, proper health care, a decent home and nourishing food. The last two are worth giving more attention to since I have discussed the rest already.

I wish to reiterate here that poor or no housing and food are fundamentally caused by lack of gainful employment. The latter is one of the most important economic issues in the state. There is no doubt, there is a litany of functioning companies in the state, but 85% of them are either oil or related to the oil industry. The government is very much dependent on the oil industry due to the income that accrues from it. This unfortunately leaves out or suppresses due attention to agriculture that is or should be a great employer of a good percentage of the working population and a contributor to the economy of the state. Ali-Akpajiak and Pyke even note that this is a syndrome that the entire Nigerian nation has suffered since the discovery of oil and independence:

At the time of independence, the basis of the national economy was mainly agrarian. The government then took a policy decision to promote industrial production, which was made possible by the oil boom of the 1970s. The industrialization process resulted in a shift in focus away from the agricultural sector. The focus later shifted to oil, which became a major source of revenue. The economy became dangerously dependent on

the oil sector, which accounted for more than 98 per cent of export earnings in 1998⁵³

The above development has created a remarkable tension in the economy of the state, keeping people out of work by making agriculture less important. Akwaibomites are not committed to a large-scale agricultural work. They see it as a non-profitable and unsustainable venture. They prefer white color jobs in the cities and oil industry. The government has also paid less attention to investing in agricultural projects that can help produce food in large quantities. The few agricultural industries including the biscuit, palm oil, palm wine in the state are no more producing. They are closed down since the raw materials are no more supplied. The fundamental cause of this is corruption on the part of the management, and the government pays little or no attention to such atrocities. Poor Akwa Ibom State! Those who worked in these industries as well as others suffering the same fate are now unemployed. This has forced the state to be dependent on other parts of the nation for a good number of food items including the basic staples, and it can be difficult for imported food alone to take care of the population in the state. The survey showed that 90% of the participants agreed that there is poverty in this area.

2.4 g. Food and Housing

A good percentage of the citizens of Akwa Ibom State are starving because of inadequate food supply. This hunger kills more than tribal conflicts and cruelly too since it results in severe malnutrition and sickness that definitely lead to death. The children become skinny or terribly skeletal and dehydrated. Every good potential in them fades with the awful experience of hunger and fatigue. Their future is lost. Some even develop

⁵³ Sofo Ali-Akpajiak and Toni Pyke, *Measuring Poverty in Nigeria* (United Kingdom: Oxfam, 2003), 27.

mental retardation or perform low in any endeavor. With no balanced diet, the aged wane and slowly die. Poor food also takes a negative toll on the pregnant women and their unborn children. The health of the mother and breastfeeding that is highly recommended during pregnancy and nursing periods is badly hit. These in turn affect the normal growth of the children, including the physical appearance and behavior. It is not an exaggeration to say that more than half the population of the state is poorly fed and many fatalities are due to hunger-related causes. Ninety-five of those who participated in the survey agreed that there is poverty in this area.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ECONOMIC RIGHTS

3.1 Introduction

Having discussed some background information in previous chapters with concrete situation and lived experience regarding economic welfare in the Akwa Ibom State community, I undertake the discussion of economic rights in this chapter. This discussion on the economic rights is undertaken bearing in mind the aim of this thesis-project, namely creating a model for the Church's leadership to promote respect for economic rights as a means to poverty alleviation within Akwa Ibom State community.

Several sources have given various definitions to rights. However, in relation to this paper, rights are things to which an individual has a just claim, the power to which one is justly entitled, a privilege or condition of existence to which one has a natural claim of enjoyment or possession, a power vested in a person by the law to demand action.⁵⁴ Rights are understood as “. . . the things to which human beings are entitled in justice because they are created in the image and likeness and called to eternal life with God.”⁵⁵ They are personal moral claims to the means of reaching an end for which human beings are responsible.⁵⁶ When considered subjectively and personally, rights are founded upon the objective fact of human being's nature and end.⁵⁷

Several rights can be distinguished including civil and human rights. The rights that this thesis-project focuses on are human rights. “They are conceived of as universal applying to all human beings everywhere, and as fundamental, referring to essential or

⁵⁴ *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, (1993), s.v. “rights.”

⁵⁵ Gerald O'Collins and Edward Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 228.

⁵⁶ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. xii (1967), s.v. “right and rights.”

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

basic human needs.”⁵⁸ Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms to which every human person is entitled. Even though they are founded on legal and moral principles, human rights are natural to human beings and oblige reasonable enforcement and compliance. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights makes this explicitly clear in its preamble:

Now, therefore, The General Assembly proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under jurisdiction⁵⁹

There are various categories of human rights including rights to life, religion and speech among others. Since the focus of this paper is on economic rights, the importance of discussing them in this work is incontestably significant. In discussing them we become aware of their significance and implications in relation to any poverty alleviation programs and models. With this understanding, we can say categorically that a good knowledge of economic rights is a great contributor and an asset to accomplishing the ultimate course of alleviating poverty.

Economic or welfare rights are inalienable parts of rights conferred on human beings. By the virtue of their dignity, all human beings, the poor, the rich, men and women are included in these rights. These rights include among others the rights to the use of natural and material resources, education, health care, employment, living wage, private property, food, clothing, shelter, rest and security. The dignity of the human

⁵⁸*Encyclopedia Britannica* 2008 ed., s.v. “human rights.”

⁵⁹United Nations, *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, Art. 23.

person also calls for respect for these individual rights and the persons irrespective of their social status. According to the US bishops, respecting these economic rights is indispensable to the protection of human dignity. The denial of any of them harms person and wounds the human dignity. Their serious and sustained denial violates individuals and destroys solidarity among persons.⁶⁰ Having explained rights in the context of this paper, we shall now discuss economic rights.

3.2 The Right to the Use of Natural and Material Resources and Goods

The earth is blessed abundantly with natural and material goods. There is no part of the globe, including Akwa Ibom State, which does not share in these blessings. Material goods are means of satisfactory welfare given to humanity by the benevolent God and constitute the primary sources given for our use. Nwachukwu S. Iwe observes that nature with all its elements and products exists by divine design for the use of all persons and should therefore be available for use in common:

God, the Author of nature and material needs of man has not left him without the means for the satisfaction of these needs. This is the natural disposition of things by the Creator, material goods have been destined for the whole of humanity for meeting the fundamental needs of all.⁶¹

Vincent Mainelli makes the same observation when he points out that God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples under the guidance of justice and charity. He added that in using them people should regard the external things that he legitimately possesses not only as his own but also as belonging to

⁶⁰ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, no. 80, 42.

⁶¹ Nwachukwu Iwe, *The History and Contents of Human Rights: A Study of the History and Interpretation of Human Rights* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 301.

others as well.⁶² The Catechism of the Catholic Church lends its weight to this right when it explains that the goods of the earth are destined for the whole human race: “In the beginning God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them. . . . The goods of creation are destined for the whole of human race.”⁶³ In the light of these revelations about the right to natural resources, it is unjust for any persons to be deprived of their rightful use and allowed to remain in poverty.

Akwa Ibom State is privileged to have a share of these blessings in many ways, as I indicated in the thick description. These blessings of the resources are for the benefits of its citizens and others. Since the citizens and residents in the state as all others have the right to live, they definitely have the right to the use of these natural resources and material goods that should enable them to live well. Hence, the right to use all aforementioned goods are derived from their nature as a people. This right is universally and incontestably valid. It takes precedence over all other economic rights and material goods. It is the material basis for the development of human beings.⁶⁴

The benefits of the above right are very glaring. They encourage greater solidarity and cooperation among the citizens for the purpose of effective and equitable distribution of the goods of the earth for better welfare. They lead to a sound economy, peace and harmony among other things.

There are consequences that follow when this right is deprived the citizens. Some of them include revolution, stagnation of economic life, unprecedented poverty and other

⁶² Vincent P. Mainelli, ed., *Social Justice: The Catholic Position* (Washington, DC: Consortium Press, 1975), no. 648.

⁶³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday Books, 1995), no. 2402.

⁶⁴ Iwe, 304.

evils. These are obvious as they generate for both the government and citizens such difficulties as high taxes, lack of basic facilities and violent behavior, not only in Akwa Ibom State community but also in the entire Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

3.3 The Right to Work

The natural resources and the material goods do not come to human beings on their own accord. In addition to their gift, the Creator God has blessed human beings with the skills, intelligence, power, energy, time, love, etc., to reach out, extract, create and recreate for their own benefits what they need. The United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UNDHR) states: “Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment . . . to protection against unemployment.”⁶⁵ Rodger Charles observes that all these means are coordinated under the canopy of human work or labor:

If the end of economy is to satisfy the human need for the goods required for decent existence, the essential means to that end is labor. God gave the earth to all for their sustenance, but the earth does not yield its fruits and other products on a scale which satisfies their needs without human effort. It is through work, the use of intelligence, and freedom in developing the world, that man does this. Initially, man had no capital or complex tools, only the land and his capacity for work. All property originated in labor, and that is why labor has priority over property.⁶⁶

Work or labor is an activity of a human being to conserve and develop himself or herself. Leo XIII sees it as any human activity to “exert oneself for the sake of procuring what is necessary for the purpose of life, and most of all for self preservation.”⁶⁷ He sees

⁶⁵ United Nations, *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, Art. 23.

⁶⁶ Rodger Charles, *An Introduction to Catholic Social Teaching* (Oxford and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 62.

⁶⁷ Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of the Working Classes), no. 34, in *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 31.

it as a duty and responsibility human beings must not hesitate to carry out for their own good:

First of all, it is personal; for the exertion of individual power belongs to the individual who puts it forth, employing this power for that personal profit for what it was given. Secondly, a man's labor is necessary; for without the results of labor a man cannot live; and self conservation is a law of nature, which it is wrong to disobey.⁶⁸

There are spiritual and economic significances that are tied to work. Human beings share in God's creative activity and within the limits of their own human capabilities continue to develop that activity. They perfect it as they advance further and further in the discovery of the resources and values contained in the whole of creation.⁶⁹ Besides, it is an act of obedience to the divine command to "fill the earth and subdue it"⁷⁰ (Gen.1, 28 NAB). They convert primitive matter into materials for their own use, continuing or prolonging the Creator's work. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council referred to this spiritual significance in their support for the dignity of human labor:

This holds good also for our daily work. When men and women provide for themselves and their families in such a way as to be of service to the community as well, they can rightly look upon their work as a prolongation of the work of the creator, a service to their fellow men, and their personal contribution to the fulfillment in history of the divine plan⁷¹

Labor or work is something that was promoted by the example of Christ and the Apostles who earned their living from the sweat of their brow. Consequently, Vatican II rejected all social prejudices concerning labor and laborers. Labor therefore was accepted not only as a source of wealth but also as an obligation and practiced as a virtue.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work), no. 25, in *Catholic Social Thought*, 385.

⁷⁰ Gen. 1: 28 NAB (New American Bible).

⁷¹ Austin Flannery, ed., *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), no. 34, in *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, 934.

Hence, the right to work is natural to human beings. John Paul II sees and supports this right as a fundamental dimension of human beings' existence on earth.⁷² Work engages and permits people to earn their food in the sweat of their brow. It keeps people from idleness. It keeps people fully alive and actively involved. The Catholic Bishops of the United States see it as a veritable source that grants all the freedom to participate in the economic life of the society. This right, according to them, flows from the principle of justice and equity as its importance is evident in the fact that for most people employment is crucial to self-realization and essential for the fulfillment of material needs.⁷³

The right to work can be categorized into “the right of labor” (*ius laboris*) and “the right to work” (*ius ad laborem*). The first opines that people be given the opportunity to work when he or she is able and wants to work, if he is unfortunately unemployed. The second holds that every human being has the right not to be deprived nor hindered from work when he is in a position to work or while working.⁷⁴ This does not, however, mean or guarantee that any worker be assigned or subjected to labor that affects adversely his or her physical, spiritual, social cultural and moral integrity. Those who are able to work are given the opportunity to do so recognizing their dignity. Hence, children, women or any person incapable of particular jobs are to be assigned according to their strength and disposition.

The advantages of the right to work can never be over emphasized. It enhances freedom and economic welfare of the people as well as becoming a means to alleviate poverty. Therefore, through human work, a people provide a means of livelihood for

⁷² John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work), no. 4, in *Catholic Social Thought*, 355.

⁷³ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, no. 137, 69.

⁷⁴ Iwe, 311.

themselves and their dependants. Through it also, people associate with others, particularly in socio-economic matters. When this right is deprived, those affected come to feel that they are non-productive or even non-entities, and poverty dealing in their midst becomes a ruthless and tragic events.

The right to work also guarantees the employees or workers the permission to form and belong to a union. The latter facilitates working conditions and the employer-employee relationship. John Paul II describes it as a mouthpiece for the struggle for social justice, for the just working people in accordance with individual professions.⁷⁵ It should be noted, however, that the union is not a pressure group in the negative sense of the word. John Paul II warns that union's demands cannot be turned into a kind of group or class egoism.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the Church fully supports the labor union based on its good motives. The bishops of the United States see any denial of union as a grave violation of the dignity of labor and object to it in strong terms: "No one may deny the right to organize without attacking the human dignity itself. Therefore, we firmly oppose organized efforts, such as those regrettably now see . . . to break existing unions and prevent workers from organizing."⁷⁷

3.4 Right to Just and Living Remuneration:

In a natural and normal order, people's right to just and living remuneration flows from the work he or she does for his or her upkeep and those of his or her dependants, particularly members of his or her family. He is ordained to earn his wages through his

⁷⁵John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work), no. 20, in *Catholic Social Thought*, 380.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, no. 104, 53.

sweat: “By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat”⁷⁸ (Gen 3, 19 NAB). The UNDHR states: “Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.”⁷⁹ This right, according to Iwe, is a natural consequence of human labor. It is neither a concession nor an ordinary gift to man. This right does not come from outside of people, but who he or she is and what he or she does makes possible for him or her the right to the wage.⁸⁰ In addition to this right being natural to people, work has ethical value and dignity because they are people who work. As a subject of the work, the human being is not for the work but rather it is the work that is for him or her. Hence, the human being’s dignity makes or rather claims certain rights including a living wage necessary for him or her as the worker and family:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and his family, including food, clothing, and housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.⁸¹

Justice and equity are conditions that guide this right. The worker and the employer are to make free and reasonable agreements regarding the wages because of exigencies of personal and social character. John Paul II advises that the determining factor for worthy remuneration must not be arbitrarily fixed nor be exposed to economic principles. It is rather to be determined by the economic strength of productivity and the

⁷⁸ Gen. 3: 19 (NAB).

⁷⁹ United Nations, *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, Art. 23.

⁸⁰ Iwe, 319.

⁸¹ United Nations, *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, Art 25.

needs of the worker. The employer is to consider the labor, person and responsibility of the worker before arriving at wages.⁸²

There is always the tendency to emphasize only the responsibility the employer owes the employee without adequate consideration of the capital and income of the employer. Pius XI stresses that the rules of justice and equity hold that the employee must not stick to the living wage when it is crystal clear that there is not enough income for such. In like manner, the employer is bound to increase the remuneration when noticing any increase in profits that by implication happens because of the inputs from the worker. Such a gesture is always a show of gratitude.⁸³ The consequences of a non-living wage are obvious. It is a very big threat to the stability of the family through dereliction of the fundamental domestic duties like the good upbringing of children.

The employer-employee expected cordial relationship must not end in wage settlement. It should be extended to the quality of job that must be commensurate with and respectful of human dignity. Pius XI emphasizes that it is wrong to abuse the tender years of children or the weakness of woman.⁸⁴

3.5 Right to Private Ownership of Property:

On private ownership of property, the UNDHR states: “Everybody has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.”⁸⁵ Property is any created goods capable of or subject to personal proprietary control. It is distinguished into consumer and productive goods. The

⁸²John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher), no. 71, in *Catholic Social Thought*, 98.

⁸³Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* (On Reconstruction of the Social Order), no. 72, in *Catholic Social Thought*, 58.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, no. 71, 58.

⁸⁵United Nations, *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, Art 17.

first comprise the perishable goods. The second are goods that are means of production of wealth. Property can further be distinguished into material and non-material. The former would include land, house, capital, natural resources, etc. The other would comprise professional skills, creative ability, etc. Property in group one is acquired by means of occupation, labor, contracts and testament to mention a few. The ones that make the second group can be acquired through gifts and hard work.

Iwe distinguishes the right to property into “*ius proprietatis*” and “*ius ad proprietatem*.” He refers to the right of those in possession of things to continue to possess them with propriety rights. He refers the second to the abstract and potential right of those, not already in possession, to accede to actual propriety status.⁸⁶

The right to property is rooted in the Scriptures. We recall with gratitude that, in the Book of Genesis, God gave humanity dominion over the earth and all in it to serve it: “God blessed them, saying to them: ‘Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth. . . . See, I give you every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food. . . .’”⁸⁷(Gen 1, 28-30 NAB). John XXIII asserts that the right to private property is permanently valid.⁸⁸ In the Book of Psalms, the Psalmist, who represents humanity, salutes God for the right to control the earth: “You have made him little less than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him rules over the works of your hands, putting all things under his feet. All sheep and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fish in the sea and whatever swim the path of the sea”⁸⁹ (Ps. 8, 6-9 NAB). This right is equally rooted in the natural

⁸⁶ Iwe, 332.

⁸⁷ Gen. 1: 28-30 (NAB).

⁸⁸ John XXIII, *Mater et Magister* (Mother and Teacher), no. 109, in *Catholic Social Thought*, 101.

⁸⁹ Ps. 8: 6-9 (NAB).

exigency of human beings' existence. As rational and dynamic beings, people are very much aware that they live in both the present and future. They need to provide for themselves in these periods. No human beings would be able to accomplish this satisfactorily if they depend on external sources only. Neither would nature bear this unique responsibility in the way fitting for the human beings. With the endowment of reason, human beings arrive at the decision for private ownership of property. They work for remuneration as the surest way to it.

Ownership of property reduces poverty and promotes contribution to the common good. Pius XI stresses that "the right to private property has been given to man by nature or rather by the Creator Himself, not only in order that individuals may be able to provide for their own needs and those of their families, but also by means of it, the goods which the Creator has destined for the human race may truly serve this purpose."⁹⁰ It equally enhances dignity of labor, economic independence, expertise, security, social peace and sense of fulfillment on the part of the worker. It elicits personal responsibility and limits the gap that deeply divides the society into the powerful rich and the powerless poor. To deny human beings this right would be a great disservice and injustice, for human beings are to eat the fruit of labor.

⁹⁰ Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* (On Reconstruction of the Social Order), no. 45, in *Catholic Social Thought*, 52.

CHAPTER FOUR

MORAL OBLIGATIONS OF THE RIGHTS

4.1 Introduction

Economic rights have their corresponding duties and responsibilities which are by their very nature moral obligations on the state government, the private citizens and private sectors, the federal government, the international community, external corporate investments and the Church's leadership to create a society that guarantees welfare in all its ramifications within the state. The duties and responsibilities are moral obligations because each of the groups mentioned above is constrained by the necessity of making some performance.⁹¹

The primary moral obligation of all economic rights is the appreciation of all the economic resources. This means and entails valuing and holding them in trust and protection as gratitude to God for giving the resources to the state. It also means and entails ensuring that all the rights are protected. By deducing these moral obligations for all the groups concerned from the different economic rights treated in the third chapter of this work, poverty alleviation within the Akwa Ibom State community is not only a tasking responsibility but also a vocation in which all and sundry must participate. It is my opinion that the citizens and institutions within the Akwa Ibom State community should see poverty alleviation not only as an endeavor that is assigned but as a duty that ought to be executed.

⁹¹ Samuel Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law*, ed. James Tully, trans. Michael Silver-Throne (Port Chester, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 27.

4.2 On the State Government

The right to the use of the natural resources imposes on the state government the moral obligation for their proper management to provide for the needs of the citizens and residents in order to alleviate poverty and liberate them from undeserved suffering. The right demands that the state devise means and develop structures to tap the resources for the benefit of all. This becomes important because economic success depends on the tapping and proper management of the natural resources.

Chapter two described in reasonable detail the abundance of natural resources in the state. These range from crude oil and water with its aquatic livestock to rich land mass that harbors other resources. It is rather disheartening to note that at the present, the oil wells in the state are owned and controlled by either the Federal Government or foreign companies. Clement Ikpatt, in his article “Akwa Ibom State: Solutions for problems at hand,” expresses his annoyance and disappointment over this socio-economic injustice on the part of the federal and irresponsibility and backwardness on the part of the state government: “That the indigenous people of Akwa Ibom State have been deprived of human rights and fundamental freedoms by governments of Nigeria, resulting in the deprivation of land and sea areas, natural resources, needs, interests and fundamentals.”⁹² The federal government of Nigeria might have given Akwa Ibom State government the permission to build a refinery to refine the crude oil; there is yet to be one after more than two decades of its creation. Furthermore, when the state has an opportunity to share in the right to the use of these natural endowments through the federal allocation to it, it is difficult to say how the funds are used. Available sources

⁹² Clement Ikpatt, “Akwa Ibom State: Solutions for problem at hand”, available from http://www.nigerdeltacongress.com/articles/akwa_ibom_state_solutions_for_pr.htm 12 April 2007.

show that Akwa Ibom State receives the highest statutory allocation to Oil Producing States. In a presentation on “Resource Ownership, Human Development and Economic” a renowned Economist, Adeola Adenikinju gives credence to this when he states that three other states have federal allocation higher than 80% including Edo (86.6%), Rivers (82.6%), and Akwa Ibom (94.1%).⁹³ While the state may receive these funds from the federal government, the financial benefits by the state would only be seen when something tangible is done to show how these funds are used. Otherwise, it is difficult to exonerate the managers from the influences of corruption and mismanagement.

One major moral obligation the government is saddled with by the right to use of these resources is to build industries where the natural and material goods are converted into consumer or, at least, productive goods. The labor in such industries is recommended to be appropriately ensuring commendable output. When and if building industries so that the natural resources are converted are not realized, the material goods continue to remain such or are misused without the desired benefits to the citizens of the state. This would be described as economic sabotage.

I equally stated in my thick description with the rich land mass and the clement weather some tree crops as well as livestock grow and flourish in the state. The state has the responsibility to provide the facility for the citizens to utilize such blessings to grow arable, fruit, vegetable and cash crops. If, however, the state cannot provide this, it could encourage the private sector and individual citizens or at least farmers to embark on farming by giving loans and leasing to them lands, fertilizers and other necessities for such ventures. In this way, the citizens would fulfill their right to the use of the natural

⁹³ Adenikinju Adeola, “Resource Ownership, Human Development and Economic Growth,” available from <http://www.ippanigeria.org>; accessed 12 April 2007.

and material goods God provides. Recognizing that God has blessed the state with citizens and residents who are skillful, creative, intelligent and disposed to work, the government is to use them to invest in and manage these resources.

Proper use of this right includes also the proper distribution of goods according to needs. A situation in which the goods or what accrues from them are continually circulated around particular areas or end up in few tight hands even when it is not necessary is an abuse of the right to the use of resources by all citizens and residents of the state. The governments as well as the citizens, particularly the rich, must note that these goods are created for all and must not be uncharitably destined for use by selected few. Vatican II underscores this when it asserts: “God destined the earth and all it contains for all men and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity.”⁹⁴ The Conference of the United States Catholic Bishops, however, points out that the equitable distribution of wealth is to be governed by other considerations including economic, social and moral conditions. The bishops state:

Catholic social teaching does not require absolute equality in the distribution of income and wealth. Some degree of inequality not only is acceptable, but also may be considered desirable for economic and social reasons, such as the need for incentives and the provision of greater rewards for greater risks. However, unequal distribution should be evaluated in terms of several moral principles we have enunciated: the priority of meeting the basic needs of the poor and the importance of increasing the level of participation by all members of the society in the economic life of the nation.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Flannery, ed., *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), no. 69, in *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, 975.

⁹⁵ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, no. 185, 92.

Moral, social and economic activities could be embarked upon for selfish reasons rather than for the good of the masses. This thesis-project does not support activities embarked upon for these reasons. They are described as bad, evil, sabotaging, and therefore unacceptable.

The right to work imposes on the government of Akwa Ibom State the obligation to create employment opportunities for the citizens to work and to build and strengthen the economy for the benefit of the common good. “For, it is through employment that most individuals and families meet their material needs, exercise their talent, and have an opportunity to contribute to the large community.”⁹⁶ To realize this, the government is recommended to go beyond mere announcement and endorsement of economic ideas and ideals on print and electronic media to full practical commitment to concretize them. The citizens are tired of reading or listening to news concerning the giant economic programs by the government without fulfilling them.

The government has the obligation to build industries that provide jobs to its citizens and residents. Akwa Ibom State produces 35% of Nigeria’s oil. Regrettably, there is no oil refinery in the state. A refinery in the state has long been expected. The crude oil from the oil wells located in the state is transported through pipelines to other states or shipped in cargo tanker ships abroad to be refined. It is significant to note that among other things, because of this transaction, the state loses jobs, development, economic empowerment, and employment opportunities. What a shame! The expected oil industry (refinery) could provide jobs for, at least, 20% of the qualified school graduates. Even though many citizens from Akwa Ibom State are working in the oil industries, the number is discouraging compared to the percentage of foreign workers. Even more

⁹⁶ Ibid., no. 15, x.

discouraging is the fact that the percentage of the highly skilled workers from the state working in the industry is below average and expectation.

In the area of agriculture, I have pointed out the types of crops and other things with which the state is blessed. However, the production of palm oil alone could allow for downstream industries. Unfortunately, we have only one such in the state, which is now dilapidated with no production at this moment I am writing this paper. The growth of rubber and cocoa trees is made possible by the fertile land and favorable climate. The raw materials from the rubber trees can produce automobile tires, rubber buckets, bathroom slippers, etc. The cocoa products can be manufactured into beverages like chocolates and wine. These have no industries within the state to convert them. The raw materials, to the disappointment of no small number of people, are transported to industries at other places including abroad for the production of goods. We become alien to the finished products when they are brought and sold exorbitantly to us.

The economic potentials of the state are so many, but the government does not harness them to create job opportunities. The private sector or individuals that make effort to do so are discouraged by lofty policies like heavy taxes by the government itself, forgetting that a viable strategy for employment generation must assure that a large part of the solution will be with the private firms and small businesses.⁹⁷ This does not, however, negate the benefits of taxes. The government can always levy taxes that do not constitute any obstacles for the private sector to participate in building the economy of the state. The US bishops weigh in on these issues, advising, “Government must provide regulations and a system of taxation which encourages firms to preserve the environment,

⁹⁷ Ibid., no 154, 77-78.

employ disadvantaged workers and create jobs in depressed areas.”⁹⁸ This regulation, according to the bishops must be “. . . structured according to the principle of progressivity, so that those with relatively greater financial resources pay higher a rate of taxation.”⁹⁹

The alarming rate of unemployment and joblessness is high among those who receive little or no education. The right to work also obliges the government to provide strategies for learning professional and technical skills needed for dynamic and productive economy. It is recommended that such a worthy exercise should be a continuous process if the labor force is to meet up with the rapid pace of technological changes in our society today.¹⁰⁰ In addition to the basic training, continuing through workshops, seminars, etc., it is important for the workers to catch up with the rapid pace of technological development in the society. Furthermore, the state has the moral responsibility to revive the ailing industries and to run the existing ones properly to provide jobs for the population.

Flowing from the right to living wage is the obligation on the state and all employers to give remuneration capable of providing for the welfare and comfort of the workers. The United Nation gives recognition to this in its Declaration on Human Rights: “Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.”¹⁰¹ At present, the minimum monthly salary for graduates in the teaching service in Akwa Ibom State is about twenty thousand

⁹⁸ Ibid., no. 118, 59.

⁹⁹ Ibid., no. 202, 99.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., no. 159, 79.

¹⁰¹ United Nations, *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, Art. 23.

naira (\$200 equivalent) now. This is grossly inadequate. One can imagine what those below the rank of a graduate receive. It is unbelievably and economically impoverishing. There are no opportunities to implement the required demands of the right to a just and living wage. One reason is that many of those in the position of control and power in the government misappropriate resources for their personal benefits. One way of doing this is to allocate what is not stipulated for themselves. For instance, a lawmaker or any top officials in the state go home every month with not less than a minimum salary that ranges between three to five hundred thousand naira (\$3000 to \$5000 equivalent). Note that allowances and entitlements are not included in these minimum wages. What a difference! This one injustice, among others, has made the minimum wage cause maximum problems in a state that is so blessed. The right to worthy remuneration demands that the government enact legislation that sets the minimum wage rates according to the nature of the labor and the conditions of the workers. Furthermore, compensation and any token of gratitude are praise-worthy when the needs arise. John Paul II broadened this observation when he wrote:

Besides wages, various social benefits intended to ensure the life and health of workers and their families play a part here. The expenses involved in health care, especially in the case of accident at work, demand that medical assistance should be easily available for workers and that as far as possible it should be cheap or even free of charge.¹⁰²

The right to private ownership of property also imposes on the government respect, support and security for the possessions of others. It grants the government the moral authority and permission to make laws that guarantee their security and determine

¹⁰² John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work), no. 19, in *Catholic Social Thought*, 379.

what is permitted and not permitted to owners in the use of their property.¹⁰³ However, the government needs to provide employment that is a sure means to private ownership of property.

It is also a moral obligation on the part of the government to ensure that the citizens are well informed about economic rights, making them and other employers well aware of the significance of each of them. Carol Devine, Carol Hansan and Ralph Wilde see this as an important role that should be a part of the culture of economic affairs of any community. People should be aware of their rights, and the language of the rights should become part of their way of life.¹⁰⁴ The government is to ensure the enforcement and compliance to these obligations. When and if necessary, the government can provide an agency to ensure it.

4.3 On the Private Citizens and Private Sectors in Akwa Ibom State

The right to the use of material goods challenges all citizens and people of the Akwa Ibom State community to wake up from their slumber, get committed and with action in order to transform our present poor condition into a better and worthwhile living situation. Those who wait for the governments help or from elsewhere become tired and lazy. They meet with frustration and despair at the end.

Looking at the agricultural endowments of the state, the right to work obliges nobody to wait for the government. In my own opinion, the government is to be seen as a support institution. Even at that, the citizens and people should not bank their hope

¹⁰³ Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* (On Reconstruction of the social Order), no. 49, in *Catholic Social Thought*, 52.

¹⁰⁴ Carol Devine, Carol Hansan and Ralph Wilde, *Human Rights: The Essential Reference* (Phoenix, Arizona: Oryx Press, 1999), 74.

absolutely on such support. Those who have no jobs could begin some kind of self-help projects in the form of small-scale industries. The citizens and residents of Akwa Ibom State community are to realize and understand that the task of alleviating poverty within the state is a kind of vocation that is to be embraced by all. They do not need to wait or look on some other(s) to perform the job without their collaboration. Even if that will work, it may not at this time, and we may not be beneficiaries of such benevolence from such people.

In its stance on the economic potentials of the state, the government stated that yam and cassava are processed into edible powder and chips and industrial starch. Maize can be processed into edible powder food and animal feeds. Citrus fruits and pineapples that grow easily are processed into canned juice and confectionary products. Banana and plantain can be processed into chips and used for pharmaceuticals.¹⁰⁵ Any of these food crops can be grown on a small scale and the products sold as raw materials to companies or industries that use them for further production.

The love by private individuals to invest in agriculture is a great contribution to the economy of the state. It supports whatever the government does to boost adequate food production. Incidentally and unfortunately too, not many citizens from Akwa Ibom State are interested in such ventures largely due to the labor involved. They want the easiest way out. They want to eat without working for the food. They prefer other persons to prepare the food for them. A story is told of a citizen from Akwa Ibom State who was once asked: "Do you eat?" He answered in the positive, "Yes." Next, he was asked: "Could you go to the farm to harvest the crop, prepare it, make the fire for cooking and

¹⁰⁵ *Agriculture*, available from <http://www.akwaibomstategov.com/agriculture.html>; accessed 10April 2007.

do the dishes after eating?” He answered in the negative, “No.” I personally agree with and support St. Paul when in his message to the Thessalonians he urged that people who do not work should not eat.¹⁰⁶ My understanding of Paul is that those who have the ability to work but refuse to work when there is work should not be given food. This is not an uncharitable or unjust decision but one that can motivate a lazy person to work.

The right to private ownership of property has a complementary personal and social obligatory relationship that cannot be divorced. It imposes on its owner the duty and responsibility of making his property to serve both his individual (private) and public (societal) needs. The same nature that guarantees this right commands it to share with others, especially those in needs. Pius XI echoes this when he writes: “It follows from the twofold character of ownership, which we have termed individual and social, that men must take into account in this matter not only their own advantage but also the common good.”¹⁰⁷ John XXIII emphasizes this when he opines that by means of private property, the goods of the earth that the Creator has destined for the human race is truly served to all.¹⁰⁸ John Paul II reiterates this when he insists on the extension of this right in practice to all classes of people.¹⁰⁹ The reverse practice of the above demands would be according to Leo XII an abuse of the nature of private property.¹¹⁰ The above few views or emphases representing many other different papal emphases call for the right and charitable use of private property. Vatican II urges that “. . . everyone should look upon his neighbor (without exception) as another self, bearing in mind above all his life and

¹⁰⁶ 2Thess. 3: 9 (NAB).

¹⁰⁷ Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* (On Reconstruction of the Social Order), no. 49, in *Catholic Social Thought*, 53.

¹⁰⁸ John XXIII, *Mater et Magister* (Mother and Teacher), no. 113, in *Catholic Social Thought*, 102.

¹⁰⁹ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work), no. 19, in *Catholic Social Thought*, 378.

¹¹⁰ Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition the Working Classes), no. 19 in *Catholic Social Thought*, 22.

means necessary for living it in a dignified way lest he follow the example of the rich man who ignored Lazarus the poor man.”¹¹¹ Vatican II sees any reverse of that as a great harm to the common good when people hoard their resources unproductively or deprive their community of much needed material assistance.¹¹² Hence, the Council Fathers stressed the responsibility of all toward all, calling all citizens to be good neighbors to every man and woman, no matter who the he or she might be, and if we meet any person, to always come his or her aid in a positive way as much as we can.¹¹³

These demands also extend to the right use of one’s just and living wage. This will entail using one’s money to provide the necessities for oneself and the family. These would include a good home, food, health care, education, clothing, and reasonable means of transportation among others. Going after what is not basic for the reason of acting like a rich person is an abuse that also ridicules the right use of wage.

The poor in the society also have the moral obligation “. . . to work together as individuals and families to build up their communities by acts of social solidarity and justice.”¹¹⁴ The poor should not think of themselves as people who are incapable of helping to improve the socio-economic situation and thereby staying away from the problem. Since, we are all interdependent creatures; the contributions of the poor also count in the issue of poverty alleviation.

The private sector within the state also shares in the moral obligation imposed by economic rights. The US bishops note that to expand employment opportunities requires

¹¹¹ Flannery, ed., *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), no. 27, 928.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, no. 65, 971.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, no. 27, 928.

¹¹⁴ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, no. 119, 60.

significant steps in the private and public sectors, as well as partnership between them.¹¹⁵ Hence, economic policies by the government should be structured in ways that boost the involvement of the private sector.

4.4 On the Federal Government, International community, Wealthy Nations and External Corporate Investments

We cannot deliberate on poverty alleviation within the Akwa Ibom State community without due reference to external bodies including the federal government, international community, wealthy nations and external corporate investments. These institutions have a tremendous and positive impact on the economy of the state. The impact of these external bodies is very much present and felt within the state, at least, with the presence of so many foreigners and companies. These experiences are due to the strategic location of the state along the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, which provides waterways for the exploration and exportation of the natural resources. Such transactions are significant to the global economy. One would think that considering this tremendous presence indicated above, the state should be a bed of roses for the citizens in terms of socio-economic welfare. Unfortunately, the contrary is the experience.

These external bodies have the moral responsibility to exert some influence on the state to see if it measures up in terms of socio-economic wellbeing, considering what it profits from their business transactions. They are bound to offer any help when necessary especially to the poor that have the desire to succeed but just need some assistance. Vatican II emphasizes on the need and importance of such endeavors:

¹¹⁵ Ibid., no. 154, 77.

Always before their eyes, they must keep the pressing needs of underdeveloped countries and areas. In fiscal matters, they must be careful not to do harm to their own country or to any other. Care must be taken that economically weak countries do not unjustly suffer loss from a change of value of money.¹¹⁶

The US bishops reiterate this appeal and understanding, saying that personal decisions, policies of private and public bodies, and power relationships must be evaluated by their efforts on those who lack the minimum necessities of nutrition, housing, education, and health care.¹¹⁷

The federal government, through its officials in the socio-economic and financial industries linked with the state's economy, has a special responsibility in the poverty alleviation apostolate. The US bishops emphasize this reality in their pastoral letter:

Persons in management face many hard choices each day, choices on which the well-being of many others depend. Commitment to the public good and not simply the private good of their firms is at the heart of what it means to call their work a vocation and not simply a career or a job.¹¹⁸

The Federal Constitution of Nigeria stipulates the role of the federal government in relation to economic matters when it states:

The State shall, within the context of the ideals and objectives for which provisions are made in this Constitution. (a) harness the resources of the nation and promote national prosperity and an efficient, a dynamic and self-reliant economy; (b) control the national economy in such a manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity; (c) without prejudice to its right to operate or participate in areas of the economy within the major sector of the economy, protect the right of every citizen to engage in any economic activities outside the major sector of the economy. The State shall direct its policy towards ensuring: (a) the promotion of a planned and balanced economic development; (b) that the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good; (c) that the economic system is not

¹¹⁶ Flannery, ed., *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), no. 70, in *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, 977.

¹¹⁷ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, no. 90, 47.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 111, 56.

operated in such a manner as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or of a group; and (d) that suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens.¹¹⁹

To what extent the federal government is faithful to its constitution regarding the poverty situation in Akwa Ibom State remains questionable. The federal government is morally obliged to be exemplary in its leadership in economic activities to encourage the state make prudent use of the resources. I have never heard about the federal government calling to question the activities of the state government regarding poverty in spite of the economic potentials and possibilities with which the state is blessed. Such an attitude clearly indicates that the federal government has not only failed in its moral obligation but may also be unwilling to do it without any intervention from the international community.

Economic rights also impose some moral obligations on the international community. Vatican II refers to these moral obligations when we read:

. . . it is now a necessity for the community of nations to organize itself in a manner suited to its present responsibilities, with special reference to its obligations towards the many areas of the world where intolerable want still prevails. To reach this goal, organizations of the international community, for their part, should set themselves to provide for the different needs of men; this will involve the sphere of social life to which belong questions of food, hygiene, education, employment, and certain particular situations arising here and there, as for example a general need to promote the welfare of developing countries, to alleviate the miseries of refugees dispersed throughout the world, and to assist migrants and their families.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chapter 2, Art. 16, sections 1-2.

¹²⁰ Flannery, ed., *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World), no. 84, in *Vatican II: Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, 993-994.

Here, Vatican II advocates for greater international cooperation and assistance in economic matters, notwithstanding the independence of any nation in need.¹²¹

The international community is often represented by some unique groups like the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) to mention a few. These unique groups offer international assistance in several ways to nations and people in need. Some of such assistance includes training personnel, loans and proper supervision of any economic projects to boost the local economy. If any of such assistance has been offered to Akwa Ibom State, it is difficult to point to any proof within the state. If nothing has been offered, then, the economic rights oblige the international community to do so. Vatican II is very persuasive in this appeal to the international community to carry out its moral obligation toward poor states and its people:

It is up to the international community to coordinate and stimulate development, but in such a way as to distribute with the maximum fairness and efficacy the resources set aside for this purpose. It is also its task to organize economic affairs on a worldwide scale, without transgressing the principle of subsidiarity, so that business will be conducted according to the norms of justice. Organizations should be set up to promote and regulate international commerce, especially with less developed nations, in order to compensate for losses resulting from excessive inequality of power between nations.¹²²

Vatican II indicated the moral obligations economic rights impose on wealthy nations:

The most important task of the affluent nations is to help developing nations to fulfill these commitments. Accordingly, they should undertake within their own confines the spiritual and material adjustments which are needed for the establishment of world-wide cooperation. They should look to the welfare of the weaker and poorer nations in business dealings with them, for the revenues the latter make from the sale of home-produced goods are needed for their own support.¹²³

¹²¹ Ibid, no. 85, 994.

¹²² Ibid., no. 86, 995.

¹²³ Ibid.

The US bishops reiterated the message of Vatican II in November 1998. They wrote: “We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers and sisters’ keepers (cf. Gen. 4: 9). In a linked and limited world, our responsibilities to one another cross national and other boundaries.”¹²⁴

The call by Vatican II and US bishops also imply that the wealthy nations have the moral obligation to avoid policies that can prevent the poor nations and people from attending their economic potentials. Such policies would include any that facilitates unnecessary “. . . profiteering, nationalistic ambitions, greed for political domination, schemes of military strategy, and intrigues for spreading and imposing ideologies.”¹²⁵ Uzukwu weighs in on the responsibility of international community in his comment on the African bishops’ call for cancellation of Africa’s debts, saying, “. . . it is morally wrong to deprive a nation of means to meet the basic needs of its people in order to repay debt, the needs of the poor take precedence over the wants of the rich.”¹²⁶

The moral obligations from economic rights are also extended to external corporate investments. The corporate investments stand a chance to render services in poverty alleviation apostolate in some worse affected areas within the Akwa Ibom State community. In the educational sector, the external corporate investments can provide scholarships to bright promising students. They can also provide schools with teaching

¹²⁴ Catholic Conference of United States Bishops, *A Century of Social Teaching: A Pastoral Message on the 100th Anniversary of Rerum Novarum* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1990), 1.

¹²⁵ Flannery, ed., *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World), no. 85, in *Vatican II: Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, 994.

¹²⁶ Uzukwu, 84.

and learning equipment that is much needed to keep pace with the fast growing society. The Oprah Winfrey Foundation receives credit in this area. This foundation believes as many others do that education is the door to freedom and a brighter future, and has single-handedly established an affordable school in South Africa for the education of women.

External corporate investment is equally morally obliged to render services in health care sector. Such services may include projects to help train medical personnel, support to improve health programs within the state, support of research to develop ways of preventing or treating diseases, and providing health equipments and drugs for the disproportionately affected areas in the state. The “Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation” is excellent in this area. Through the foundation, many non-profit organizations have offered affordable and effective medical assistance to poor communities.

Another area the external corporate investments have moral obligation in is the training of people to have better chances of competing for jobs in the labor market. Employment for a good number of the citizens is an immense help to poverty alleviation within the state.

4.5 On the Church

The point of understanding of the Church that is used in this thesis-project is an ecumenical perspective. This understanding accepts only the churches that invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Savior, and corporate groups which have heard the Gospel.¹²⁷ All the Christian denominations that fall within the above

¹²⁷ Flannery, ed., *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism), no. 1 in *Vatican II: Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, 452.

ecumenical category form one Church body with a common integral mission. Each of them plays a vital role in unity with the rest for the realization of the mission. Hence, economic rights impose some moral obligations on the Christian churches as one entity or body as follows: Firstly, economic rights impose “an option for the poor.” The basis for such an option, according to the United States bishops, is not any ideology but the biblical teachings and deeds of Jesus Christ in favor of the poor people, which pose a number of challenges on the contemporary Church including being a voice to the voiceless, a defender to the defenseless.¹²⁸ Even though this paper is not specifically on the option for the poor, suffice it to say that the concept dates back to 1878, when the Church remarkably started to respond to the plight of the working class people, particularly the poor. The concept became commonly used in the 1970s in the post-Vatican II Council’s stances on social issues including poverty, injustice and oppression in society.¹²⁹ In the context of this work, Dorr has this to say about the duty of opting for the poor:

An option for the poor. . . means a series of choices, personal or communal, made by individuals, by communities, or even by corporate entities such as a religious congregation, a diocese, or a Church (as represented by its central administration, and, in varying degrees, by its ordinary members).. It is the choice to disentangle themselves from serving the interests of those at the ‘top’ of society and to begin instead to come into solidarity with those at or near the bottom. Such solidarity means commitment to working and living within structures and agencies that promote the interests of the less favored sectors of society. These would include those who are economically poor . . . peoples that have been culturally silenced or oppressed, and those who have been religiously disinherited or deprived.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, no 52, 28-29.

¹²⁹ Donald Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Catholic Social Teaching*. rev.ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 2.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

Economic rights also impose on the Church the moral duty to have reasonable knowledge about economic rights, how the government should uphold to them and how best it can encourage the government to apply them for the benefit of the common good. This calls for a responsible participation in partisan politics or governance of the state by the Church. This can be done through elected politicians who are practicing Christians. It encourages the Church never to shy away from the affairs that touch on the lives of its citizens, particularly the poor and suffering masses. It obliges the Church to abandon its aloof attitude towards the menaces of socio-economic issues caused by some policies or any institutions within the state or diocese. In other words, the Church within the state must discontinue thinking, teaching and believing that participating in partisan politics or exercise of power within the state in any reasonable form regarding socio-economic issues is bad. Uzukwu observes that theology and ethics can no longer pretend that questions of development, economy, and ecology are not primary concerns.¹³¹ Robert Lithicum sees the non-active involvement in politics that affect the economic life of the people as a gross misunderstanding and terrible mentality by the Church that traces to abuse of power within the Church when he writes:

So Christian leaders see power as inconsistent with behavior that is loving, gentle and mild. They have come to that conclusion because they have experienced the abuse of power in their own ministries as it has been used to manage people, control situations, gain the desired responses and dominate the Church.¹³²

Having the willingness and the mindset of absolute refusal by the Church to be pastorally involved in the exercise of power and politics within the state could create difficulty in making any meaningful impact or impression on the political system or government's

¹³¹ Uzukwu, 85.

¹³² Robert Lithicum, *Transforming Power: Biblical Strategies for making a Difference in your Community* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2003), 11-12.

decision on issues affecting the poor. Lithium is right when he observes that Jesus understood power and politics positively when he ministered on earth. According to him, Jesus used power and politics to oppose the wrong exercise of power by the elites of his time. This enabled him to build a just community.¹³³ David Beckmann and Arthur Simon remind us that Jesus criticized and disobeyed laws when they got in the way of helping those in need of help. He healed the sick on the Sabbath even though the law prohibited it.¹³⁴

The willingness and readiness to participate responsibly in partisan politics and the exercise of power in the state by the Church pave way for a good investigation into and knowledge of the inconsistencies in the socio-economic structure that gives rise to poverty. Since the Church learns little or nothing about poverty through any of its direct and purely spiritual exercises, including the administration of the sacraments, prayer, fasting, economic rights oblige it to show concern in social justice. Although sacraments and other spiritual exercises do help, they remain in the context of poverty alleviation only signs that may not change the structure of the reality poverty in Akwa Ibom State without a practical push for social justice by the Church. Social justice occupies a prominent place in the social teaching of the Church and is fundamental to poverty alleviation. Weber agrees with this position when he writes:

A ministry of social justice . . . is always a change. It is about changing structures to make them more accessible to people, changing situations to allow people more freedom, changing systems so that people can participate more fully in shaping the forces that influence their lives and changing institutions so that they become more person focused. Help for

¹³³ Ibid., 12.

¹³⁴ David Beckmann and Arthur Simon, *Grace at the Table: Ending Hunger in God's World* (New York and Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1999), 13.

people often comes indirectly rather than hands-on, but the overall effect can be tremendous.¹³⁵

He argues further that social justice picks up where charity leaves off. When and where people are quick to respond positively to genuine cases of poverty by providing funds or food for the hungry, justice asks questions about why there is hunger or poverty and what needs to be changed to ameliorate the sad situation.¹³⁶ He even believes and preaches that effective social justice can help change the internal organization of the Church from inside out: “At the same time, social justice brings about change in those who work for it. They are transformed . . . as they start to see new possibilities. Often their lifestyles change as they witness more closely the injustices that others suffer.”¹³⁷ This enhances better ministry toward poverty alleviation.

Closely and intimately related to what I have discussed already on the moral obligations of economic rights on the Church is the duty for it to acquaint itself and be keen with the issues of poverty in the Scriptures by the Church. This entails having a profound insight into the issues of poverty in both the Old and New Testaments. In a nutshell, the images of a shepherd and a prophet on the part of God, the prophets, and Jesus and the earliest apostles in their relationship with the suffering poor are glaring in the Scriptures. These two important images are natural to the Church everywhere including Akwa Ibom State by the virtue of its mission. Jon Sobrino reminds us: “Mission is an activity performed for the purpose of changing reality.”¹³⁸ The Church should not fail in living out or being very truthful to the Shepherd-prophetic image. These

¹³⁵ Herbert Weber, *Working to undo Injustices*, Florida Catholic, 20-26 April 2007, sec. A, p. 12.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Jon Sobrino, “Spirituality and the Following of Jesus” in *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology*, eds. Jon Sobrino and Ignatio Ellauria (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 245.

images among others in the Scripture will definitely encourage the Church and make it focus on this important mission of alleviating poverty in Akwa Ibom State.

In the Old Testament, God offered an unprecedented protection and concern for the poor by his special blessing. He commanded that the poor be assisted in any community they lived in: “If one of your kinsmen in any community is in need of in the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor close your hand to him in need. Instead, you shall open your hand to him and freely lend him enough to meet his need”¹³⁹ (Deut. 10: 7-8 NAB). He also pronounced special blessings on those who assisted the poor people in any forms: “The kindly man will be blessed, for he gives of his sustenance to the poor”¹⁴⁰ (Proverbs 22: 9; 19: 17 NAB). The several curses for any people who do not serve the poor people were also indication of God’s love and concern for them in the Old Testament: “Woe to those who enact unjust statutes and who write oppressive decrees, depriving the needy of judgment and robbing my people’s poor of their rights, making widows their plunder, and orphans their prey”¹⁴¹ (Isaiah 10: 1-2; Ezekiel 22: 29-31 NAB). To ensure that all got it right, God indicated what should be the right attitude towards the poor people: “You shall not wrong a widow or orphan . . . If you lend money to one of your poor neighbors among my people, you shall not act like an extortioner toward him by demanding interest from him”¹⁴² (Exodus 22: 21-24; 23: 6 NAB).

In the New Testament, Jesus identified with the poor in several instances. The circumstance of Jesus’ birth is undoubtedly a clear starting point of these instances. Even

¹³⁹ Deut. 10: 7-8 (NAB).

¹⁴⁰ Proverbs 22: 9; 19: 17 (NAB).

¹⁴¹ Is. 1: 1-2; Ezekiel 22: 29-31 (NAB).

¹⁴² Exodus 22: 21-24; 23: 6 (NAB).

though a special King, he was born poor and lived that way in terms of material consideration. Concern for the poor occupied top priority in his ministry. He did not allow the hungry crowd of thousands of people to starve to death. He fed them to their fill: “They all ate and were satisfied Those who ate were about five thousand men, not counting women and children”¹⁴³ (Matthew 14:20-21 NAB). In the parable of the Sheep and Goats,¹⁴⁴ Jesus teaches us the Christian attitude toward the poor. We equally learn rewards for any good or bad deeds to poor.

The early Church continued the poverty apostolate after Jesus. The Book of Acts of the Apostles records such ministry under the direction of the apostles: “There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need”¹⁴⁵ (Acts 4: 34 NAB). All these demonstrate the shepherd-prophetic image that is worthy of emulation by the Church in the Akwa Ibom State community. Such emulation is an integral part of the model for poverty alleviation to be proposed in the final chapter in this work.

Economic rights oblige the Church in Akwa Ibom State to be a shepherd and a prophet within the state community regarding socio-economic issues. This entails that the Church is to offer protection and to speak on behalf of the poor masses when necessary. Through the mouthpiece of the prophets, God protected the poor. Through many acts of goodwill, Jesus Christ and the earliest apostles showed great concern for the poor. The Church in Akwa Ibom State is to be the medium through which God protects the poor. It is also to be God’s voice that does not hesitate to call on the government to serve as it

¹⁴³ Matt. 14: 20-21 (NAB).

¹⁴⁴ Matt. 25: 31-46 (NAB).

¹⁴⁵ Acts 4: 34 (NAB).

should for the benefit of the common good. It is to be a voice that persuasively compels the government to listen to the cry and misery of its citizens especially the poor among them. It is to be a voice that does not keep silent over malpractices by the leadership, no matter the threats on her until the hardships experienced by the people are reasonably addressed and reduced.

The Church in other places has reasonably lived up to these expectations. The leadership of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador in such a mission is still fresh in our minds in such mission. He led the Church to stand up against the government of the day on behalf of the poor. Recalling his good deeds, Brian J. Pierce writes in an article: “He is to be remembered as a shepherd who knew his sheep, especially the most abandoned and forgotten. He is celebrated as a martyr for the cause of the poor and oppressed—one who laid down his life for his flock.”¹⁴⁶ Sobrino would see the Church ably represented by Romero as an institution for the poor. He writes:

The place of the Church is with the wounded one lying in the ditch along the roadside, whether or not this victim is to be found physically and geographically within intra-ecclesial space. The place of the Church is with the other and with the most radical otherness of that other his suffering—especially—when that suffering is massive, cruel, and unjust.¹⁴⁷

Uzukwu makes a similar observation that the Church, whether on a local, national or international level, does not exist for herself. She is there to bear witness to the Reign of God, to manifest the transformation of the world.¹⁴⁸

The Church’s leadership within Akwa Ibom State is not and should not be exempt from such venerable and invaluable roles. It is capable of doing it provided it loves and

¹⁴⁶ Brian Pierce, “The Heart of Being Neighbor: Oscar Romero, Preacher”, *Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico*, 3.

¹⁴⁷ Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross*, 21.

¹⁴⁸ Uzukwu, 72.

wants to. If the Church does not aggressively address the problem of poverty following the shepherd-prophetic image and mission, it makes little or no impression on the community. With such experience, Pierce holds that the Gospel of Christ and the pastoral ministry of the Church are not reflected in the lived reality of the poor and oppressed within the state.¹⁴⁹ This experience also gives the impression that the Church has not acted as the “light” that leads and “salt” that gives taste to the poor in Akwa Ibom State community. Sobrino insists that the poor are the locus of evangelization by the virtue of their positive values. Such values would include their simplicity, vulnerability, desire, hope, faith, gospel to preach, gifts to be cherished, treasure to keep safe poor.¹⁵⁰

There are some possible reasons why the Church’s leadership refuses to properly translate into action its shepherd-prophetic image regarding poverty alleviation ministry. The Church’s leadership thinks that if it points out the evil practices by the government, the government can tighten its grip on power and put heavier burden on the poor. Such a tough decision by the government can cause unprecedented crisis in the society. What a sad stand and approach to the preaching of the Gospel by the Church’s leadership! Scott Wright wonders at such view by the Church on its mission: “A Church that doesn’t provoke any crises, a Gospel that doesn’t unsettle, a Word of God that doesn’t get under any one’s skin, a Word of God that doesn’t touch the real sin of the society in which it is proclaimed, what Gospel is that?”¹⁵¹ The pastoral ministry by the Church would be much felt if it does not shy away from speaking on these issues.

There is also the disappointing notion by the Church’s leadership that an aggressive call on the government and other institutions that perpetuate poverty or should

¹⁴⁹ Pierce, 3.

¹⁵⁰ Sobrino, “Spirituality and the Following of Jesus,” in *Systematic Theology*, 244.

¹⁵¹ Wright, 2.

help alleviate it may lead to the loss of financial favors and what it thinks to be respect from such groups. In doing this, the Church fails to realize that it becomes the loser at the end since the voiceless masses it should speak for and protect get disappointed and despair. According to Wright, the Church's leadership also fails to keep the prophetic tradition of the Gospel by defending the cause of the poor, who are victims of poor leadership. The Church's leadership forgets the fact that by speaking against the ill policies of the government that do not enhance poverty alleviation, it gains the freedom to live the Gospel more faithfully.¹⁵² Wright also points out that the individual members of the leadership may be afraid of being harassed, dismissed or singled out for persecution by the government. In doing this, they fail to discover the joy of the Gospel and give hope to the hopeless and voice to the voiceless.¹⁵³ The Church's leadership is not to be afraid of being a sign of contradiction just as Jesus was if that will bring the desired love and peace for the poor whose hearts have been broken due to their lived reality of poverty. Simeon and Anna pointed this out about Jesus at the latter's presentation, but it turned out to be very positive for the entire community.

There is this seeming notion of complacency on the part of the Church. In the face of this reality of complacency, the social aspect of the Church's ministry within the Akwa Ibom State community faces the biggest concern on how to effect some changes for the better. Even though this concern appears simple, it remains very important. This paper aims at offering suggestions that provide some practical solutions: namely, a model for Church's leadership in promoting respect for economic rights as a means to poverty alleviation within Akwa Ibom State.

¹⁵² Ibid., 2.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 2.

In the thoughts of Oscar Romero, repentance and conversion on the part of the Church are the primary things that are to happen. These involve sincere soul searching or self-examination, humility to admit one's failures and the fact that her best in this aspect of ministry is not good enough. They also involve the readiness and willingness to take steps no matter how difficult these might be, to effect some changes in her organization, especially its approach to social issues in favor of poverty alleviation. In all, it entails a formidable model that recognizes and respects economic rights by the Church's leadership in promoting respect for economic rights as a means for poverty alleviation in Akwa Ibom State.

CHAPTER FIVE

PEOPLE ACTING TOGETHER FOR COMMUNITY (PACT) AS A MODEL FOR CHURCH ACTING TOGETHER FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION (CATPA) IN AKWA IBOM STATE

5.1 Introduction

According to James Polling and Donald Miller, because recognizing the fact that modern pluralism in a democratic society cannot allow domination by an interest group with a narrow tradition, practical theology has moved from the insight of the Church and its tradition into the larger society in order to enrich and transform the society. Hence, a Church that refuses to move that way deserves to be irrelevant and ignored.¹⁵⁴ With this in mind, this work could relate not only to practical theology, but also to the ideas promoted by Polling and Miller. The relevance of this section of the thesis-project, aiming at creating a model for poverty alleviation, relates to yet another idea expressed by these authors in these words:

The strength of this type of practical theology is the sincere desire to bring the best quality of care to persons who are suffering and the willingness to use whatever strategies are available in order to accomplish this. This type is based on a theology of openness on the wisdom of society and the courage to appropriate this wisdom even when it seems to challenge the traditional understanding of the Church about its task and identity.¹⁵⁵

One of the things that Polling and Miller present for our understanding is that practical theology has enriched itself with the tremendous lessons from other branches of knowledge. As a result, practical theology has made some giant strides in the society. It is with this understanding and conviction that in this thesis-project I decided to reach out

¹⁵⁴ James Polling and Donald Miller, *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon, 1985), 45.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

beyond its contexts of practical theology and Akwa Ibom State to learn from other branches of knowledge and places about several models of poverty alleviation programs. In reaching out for these models, the thesis-project paid attention to the diversity that exists within the Akwa Ibom State community, especially with reference to languages, Christian denominations, cultures and socio-economic issues among others. Some of the models found included Catholic Charities, Amor en Acción and People Acting Together for Community (PACT) to mention a few. A study of these models indicated that each of them has its unique modus operandi and has done a tremendous work in alleviating poverty in areas where it operates. Unlike PACT that intervenes and persuades the government and elected officials on social concerns in the community, Catholic Charities and Amor en Acción do not. Rather, they generally canvas for help and deal directly with the poor and communities in need. Although I admire all the models, this thesis-project made a more in-depth study of PACT and its operations with the view to constructing its own model for poverty alleviation for the Church's leadership in Akwa Ibom State.

5.2 PACT as an Organization

PACT stands for "People Acting Together for Community." It is a non-profit, non-partisan and non-denominational coalition organization. It comprises more than forty Christian denominations, congregations, synagogues, schools, and community groups. Located in Miami Dade County, South Florida, PACT was founded 20 years ago this year. According to the immediate past president, Helen Stankiewicz, PACT originated from Interfaith Ministers from Christian Churches who met occasionally to discuss problems facing communities in South Florida. According to Stankiewicz, PACT is the

brainchild of the late Monsignor LaCerra, who also became its founding Lead Organizer.¹⁵⁶ At the present, PACT is the largest grassroots organization, representing approximately 2 million poor voiceless individuals in South Florida. PACT is a member of the “Direct Action and Research Training” (DART) network.¹⁵⁷ The latter is a congregation-based community organization with partnership with over 20 similar statewide organizations throughout Florida and United States. “Through DART, PACT is able to offer leaders in-depth training on a variety of issues including leadership, relationship building and networking every year.”¹⁵⁸

PACT unites, organizes and trains leaders from diverse congregations, schools and community groups to build a powerful community voice. This forges together a sturdy base of committed individuals and groups who hold the elected and other officials and decision makers for the common good accountable to promote fairness, justice and true democracy in Miami Dade County.¹⁵⁹ To realize its goals on justice, PACT has a sub-committee, namely, “Rethinking Justice Workshop” (RJW). This committee organizes workshops on Justice.¹⁶⁰ In the 2005 Annual Report, Priscilla Whitehead reflected on justice thus:

God’s persistent call for all people to seek justice, which was so exemplified in the life of the Jesus Whom we seek to follow, cannot be set aside as something to be pursued only when convenient or close to home. We realize that as long as there are those in our community who suffer or are deprived of equal access to the best education, or health care, or housing, for example, then not one of us can claim that ‘this does not affect me or my life.’ We are all connected and interdependent.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Helen Stankiewicz of PACT, interview by author, 18 June 2008, Miami, tape recording, People Acting for Community Together, Miami, Florida.

¹⁵⁷ People Acting for Community Together, “PACT 2005 Annual Report” (Miami, Florida: PACT, 2005, photocopied), 1.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

RJW explores the different teachings, mandates on justice in religions and governments, and translates them into PACT's programs for the common good.

Although PACT does not see itself as a religious organization nor likes to be addressed as a religious group, it has some value statements that are held as guiding principles. Some of these value statements which are rooted in religious belief include

- (a) We put God first and seek divine guidance for all actions,
- (b) We believe that human beings are created in the image of God and therefore deserve to be treated with fairness, dignity and respect,
- (c) We believe the members of all segments of the community should be heard and valued,
- (d) We believe that people themselves have the power to determine their future and have a responsibility to speak up and demand justice for all,
- (f) We display the high level of integrity in all of our activities and actions,
- (g) We uphold moral and ethical standards in our congregations and in public life and
- (h) We value the diversity of our multi-lingual, multi-cultural community.¹⁶²

PACT has several officers and volunteers to serve in different positions. Elections into executive offices are done in such a way that the member denominations, congregations and groups are reasonably represented in the cabinet. This cabinet oversees the common and general operations of the organization. PACT also has an experienced staff of only five full-time organizers and extensively mobilizes volunteers from its congregations. Voluntary lay leaders are centrally involved in all aspects of the organization including issue development, fund raising and growth.¹⁶³ PACT also has a Lead Organizer Officer. He is the unique point man for field operations. Some of the special assignments for the Lead Organizer include: (a) Relationship Building and Engaging/Recruiting Leaders, (b) Training, Challenging, and Developing Leaders, (c)

¹⁶² People Acting for Community Together, "PACT Strategy Plan Summary" (Miami, Florida: PACT, 2005), 1.

¹⁶³ Joseph Nicholas of PACT, interview by author, 12 June 2008, Miami, tape recording, People Acting for Community Together, Miami.

Articulating Mission and Focus of the Organization, (d) Organizational Sustainability and Money, (e) Issue Research and Action, (f) Planning and Administration and (g) DART Network and Related Activities.¹⁶⁴ There is also a board constituted by two representatives from each member congregation. Seven elected officers also serve on the board, which meets on monthly basis. The PACT's board is very diverse, comprising 47 members. There are 3 men and 2 women who are Caucasians, 20 black men and 10 black women who are non-Hispanics, 5 men and 6 women who are Hispanics, and 1 Asian lady.¹⁶⁵

PACT is predominantly an organization that plays an intercessory role between the government and its citizens, especially the poor. It deals with social issues including poverty, justice, employment, housing, food, crimes, transportation, healthcare, and education among others. PACT is a powerful instrument of change that is able to awaken the prophetic call of Church to engage in socioeconomic issues in South Florida. It is an effective voice for the voiceless that fights for justice for all, especially those who are suffering in South Florida.

Funds are important for a successful running of any organization. Since it does not benefit from any financial assistance from the government, PACT has its unique ways of raising money for its operations. Some of these ways include (a) membership dues from the participating congregations that bring in 5% of revenue, (b) investments/donations from individuals, local corporations, and small business that net it 15% of revenue, and (c) grants from a variety of private foundations and denominational

¹⁶⁴ People Acting for Community Together, "Job Tasks for Lead organizer Position" (Miami, Florida: PACT, 2005), 1.

¹⁶⁵ People Acting for Community Together, "Diverse Institution Working Together for Fairness and Justice" (Miami, Florida: PACT, 2005), 1.

funding sources that net 75% of PACT revenue.¹⁶⁶ PACT stresses the importance of membership dues as the surest source of funds in spite of their meager nature: “Although membership dues do not account for a large percentage of the organization’s budget, they are the most important revenue source. Payment of membership dues shows commitment on the part of the member congregations and helps attract corporation and foundation funding.”¹⁶⁷ PACT reports on its meeting with big time donors:

Each year, PACT leaders meet with CEO’s and other key leaders of many South Florida companies in order to explore areas of common self-interest and develop positive partnerships that improve the quality of life in Miami-Dade County. These relationships are a vital link in the community, helping business leaders and community leaders effectively address common problems¹⁶⁸

Although membership dues are the surest finances for PACT, Stankiewicz stresses that donations from grant writing for special purposes like education are always the largest. She stated that the sums of \$33,000 and \$100,000 as donations came from the Catholic Bishops and the Haitian Foundation respectively in the recent past.¹⁶⁹ She also reported that individual members of the organization make personal efforts to get financial donations from friends and well wishers who are interested in the course of their apostolate.¹⁷⁰ She indicated the annual budget in recent years as follows: 2008-\$800,000, 2007-\$720,000 2006-\$620,000 2005-\$520,000 and 2004-\$425,000.¹⁷¹ The difference in the budget from one year to another reflects the needs in the community that PACT operates. With regard to budget deficit, Stankiewicz made it obvious that as a non-profit organization, PACT does not spend beyond its budget. She, however, indicated that they

¹⁶⁶ People Acting for Community Together, “PACT 2005 Annual Report,” 14.

¹⁶⁷ People Acting for Community Together, “Diverse Institution Working Together,” 4.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Stankiewicz, interview.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

have a reserve for emergencies which they had to fall on this year. PACT's finances, according to Stankiewicz, are audited by professionals to meet with the 501C3 Tax Exempt Status.¹⁷²

5.3 Projects and Achievements of PACT

As a non-profit and non-partisan coalition organization with the aim to speak on behalf of the poor masses, PACT pursues many socio-economic projects and programs that directly benefit them. The success of such projects begins with how PACT becomes aware of such socio-economic concerns in the community and selects those to work on. According to Joseph Nicholas, PACT learns about these socio-economic concerns through a listening process by its members, who hold meetings in their respective communities to learn about their problems and report them back in the full house meeting.¹⁷³ This grassroots meeting is always a facts-finding mission. In its annual report, PACT describes the meeting or fact-finding mission thus:

One-on-one visits are the basis of all community organizing. Building relationships and identifying people's self-interest is central to how PACT identifies the issues it works on and builds power. When a congregation, school or community group implements a one-on-one process, ties among their members become stronger and often result in growth as people use their personal networks to involve their friends and family.¹⁷⁴

According to Stankiewicz, it is always amazing to hear the number and kinds of issues many people have to deal with at different parts of South Florida.¹⁷⁵

The high points of the meetings are always the presentation and deliberation on the previous assigned issues and the ones yet to be assigned, which come from the

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Joseph, interview.

¹⁷⁴ People acting for community Together, "PACT 2005 Annual Report," 6.

¹⁷⁵ Stankiewicz, interview.

business of the day. Voting on the most urgent issues of concern to work on follows immediately after the deliberations.

The meetings, which are rotated among the member congregations and groups of the PACT, are always conducted in English language but translated into Spanish and Creole, the two other major languages spoken in South Florida. This is done to ensure a fair participation and satisfaction by a simple majority. PACT also holds direct action meetings with both the public and the government officials on social concerns. Stankiewicz indicated that in any event of failure at first attempt, PACT always explores other alternatives to succeed. She gave an example with the School Superintendent whom PACT approached for the Reading Instruction (RI) program in schools. When he showed no encouraging concern, PACT had to resort to the board members who intervened and had the project on the menu for schools to choose.¹⁷⁶ It also holds such meetings with private citizens, who also help in the concerns presented on behalf of the community. “Once PACT members achieve victory on a campaign, leaders put in place a series of checks and measures to ensure that progress is continuing to be made, and ensuring that officials remain accountable even after the original objective has been fulfilled.”¹⁷⁷

Education is one of the urgent and perennial projects PACT has been working on. In its campaign program on education, “PACT believes that all children can achieve at high levels and that, as a community, we have a responsibility to ensure that they are given the opportunity to do so.”¹⁷⁸ The PACT educational project focuses on the following:

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ People Acting for Community Together, “Diverse Institution Working Together,” 1.

¹⁷⁸ People Acting for Community Together, “PACT 2005 Annual Report,” 11.

(a)improving student achievement in reading through placing a special emphasis on supporting and expanding the Direct Instruction program; (b) improving the quality of after school programs and improving access to those quality programs; (c) carrying out other action as necessary to achieve the goal of improved quality of education in Miami-Dade County Public Schools – for example researching new issues such as improving teacher quality and increasing financial resources available for public education; and (d) expanding the overall power and influence of PACT in order to have more impact on education issues.¹⁷⁹

It is worthy of note that PACT successfully influenced the Miami-Dade County Public Schools to implement a phonics-based reading program that impacted on more than 20,000 student at 26 of the poorest elementary schools. PACT also secured \$7.25 million in state funding for Direct Instruction (DI) during the 2000 legislative session.¹⁸⁰ PACT also intervenes on behalf of bright students who cannot keep up with their financial responsibilities in school for scholarships.

PACT also works on healthcare issues. It “. . . recognizes that improving access to health care is a complex issue and that there is no one overarching solution to this problem.”¹⁸¹ PACT’s project on health care focuses on the following:

(a) expanding coverage for the uninsured through advocacy and community organizing; (b) educating PACT’s constituency and the wider community about how to access health care; and (c) building the capacity of individual leaders and of PACT as an organization in order to hold officials accountable and act as strong and informed health advocates; (d) partner with other organizations throughout Florida and nationally, as appropriate, to avoid for improved access to health care at the state and federal levels.¹⁸²

PACT has a sub-committee with a specific assignment called the “School-Based Health Clinics” (SBHC). This committee organizes health care campaigns and needs for children in Miami-Dade County. It identifies health care priorities and facilitates relationship

¹⁷⁹ People Acting for Community Together, “Diverse Institution Working Together,” 3.

¹⁸⁰ People Acting for Community Together, “PACT’s Track Record of success,” 1.

¹⁸¹ People Acting for Community Together, “Diverse Institute Working Together,” 3.

¹⁸² Ibid.

building between health care organizations, providers and beneficiaries in the community. PACT tags as a “School Connect Program” (SCP) any events that SBHC focuses on schools. This program identified in one school year that,

(a) Nearly 90% of Miami-Dade’s 331 public schools have no nurse nor clinic, (b) There is no system of care or coordination of service across schools, (c) One of every five Miami-Dade children does not have health insurance, (d) Lack of preventive health services leads to higher health care costs and inappropriate use of emergency rooms and (e) Poor health and lack of care leads to higher numbers of days missed from school and poor educational performance.¹⁸³

Steps taken to address these issues included among others meeting with the chief officer of the County, Mayor Alvarez and his Commissioners for support.¹⁸⁴

Realizing that its constituency is predominantly composed of immigrants, PACT embarks to push for immigration reforms. This becomes urgent due to the hardships that hundreds undocumented young people faced including inability to attend college or have employment. Through its sub-committee, “Fair Immigration Reform Movement” (FIRM), PACT focuses on the “Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors” (DREAM). FIRM aims at (a) passing the DREAM Act enabling immigrant students who have graduated with their peers from high school to go to college and eventually become permanent residents; and (b) improve the treatment of immigrants at the Krome Detention Center and secure equal treatment for Haitians.¹⁸⁵

PACT has also made some achievements in other areas of operations. “In 1992, PACT helped to convince the county to create the Homeless Trust and to provide more county resources to help the homeless.”¹⁸⁶ In addition to this, PACT also negotiated in

¹⁸³ People Acting for Community Together, “PACT 2005 Annual Report,” 12.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 13.

¹⁸⁶ People Acting for Community Together, “PACT’S Track Record of Success,” 1.

1994 an agreement with two local banks that provided \$38 million for low-income affordable housing programs and enabled hundreds of people to realize the dream of owning their own home.¹⁸⁷

A great achievement has also been made in the transportation department by PACT. Through PACT intervention, the government has increased the number of buses in Miami-Dade County. This has also reduced the problems of overcrowding, frequent breakdowns and delay in the transportation system.¹⁸⁸ PACT continues to oversee the proper functioning of this project.

It is important to indicate that even though PACT, with its tools and strategies, discovers and uncovers many social problems worthy of attention, it does not attend to all of them at the same time, and neither does it try to solve all of them. It limits itself to its capacity and ability. PACT calls this “Issue Cutting.” The 2005 Annual Report explains this further:

Once PACT decided to work on neighborhood problems, leaders from member congregations had to learn how to narrow down and find an achievable solution for their problem. That’s what issue cutting is all about. Leaders participated in a training that showed them how to take the problems surfaced during the one-on-one process and transform them into specific, local, unifying issues.¹⁸⁹

In spite of the commendable works and achievements by PACT, this thesis-project came across some limitations. PACT as a model is only one voice that speaks to the government and any institutions about the concerns of the poor. However, PACT only indicates to the government and other concerned institutions any wrong practices and places in the community that promote poverty. One such practice and place is the use of

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ People Acting for Community Together, “PACT 2005 Annual Report,” 8.

drugs and ground and facilities for selling them. Joseph Nicholas, however, indicates that PACT does not deal with corruption among the government officials. PACT does get involved neither directly nor indirectly in partisan politics to elect officials who can listen to its requests. Hence, PACT does not prosecute any government officials or agencies that fail in its responsibility.¹⁹⁰ PACT also does not run any training programs to educate and empower the poor in the community. It does not establish any projects like small-scale businesses that can offer employment opportunities for any number of the poor in the community. The absence of these training programs and projects has made PACT an organization lacking in exemplary leadership to demonstrate and promote economic rights as a vital means for poverty alleviation. It is because of these limitations that this thesis-project proposes, in line with the “praxis-theory-praxis” method, the creation of a new model in the next sub-section.

5.4 Proposed CATPA Organization as a Model

In this thesis-project, I am proposing as the praxis II application, a non-profit, non-partisan and non-denominational organization that takes after PACT in many ways. The organization’s name will be “Churches Acting Together for Poverty Alleviation” (CATPA). This is to be a model for the Church’s leadership in promoting respect for economic rights as a means for poverty alleviation in Akwa Ibom State. Membership of CATPA will be open to all Christian denominations or congregations within Akwa Ibom State who will be willing and ready to work together for the benefit of the common good, especially the poor. As a non-denominational organization, CATPA will not engage in any doctrinal and theological issues that are unique to each member denomination or

¹⁹⁰ Joseph, interview.

congregation. It will be fundamentally guided by God's work and Christ's mission for the poor in the Old and New Testament respectively.

The open membership into CATPA to all Christian denominations and congregations underscores the ecumenical belief about this organization, namely, “. . . communions engage in that more intensive cooperation in carrying out any duties for the common good of humanity which are demanded by very Christian conscience.”¹⁹¹ Ecumenism enables us to understand that we have the common goal of doing God's will, and that we can work in unison to achieve that goal.

Since our faith and mission challenge all of us Christians to reach out in love to those in need, we face as one body, special responsibilities for the socio-economic welfare of the poor. This obliges us to transcend all doctrinal and theological differences we may have to duly answer the call to cooperate in solidarity and justice with the citizens, especially the poor in Akwa Ibom State community. Although the US bishops had Catholics as their principal members of the audience, they emphasized cooperation and the relationship between our faith and economic matters:

Economic life raises important social and moral questions for each of us and for society as a whole. Like family life, economic life is one of the chief areas where we live our faith, love our neighbor, confront temptation, fulfill God's creative design, and achieve our holiness. Our economic activity in factory, field, office, or shop feeds our families-or feeds our anxieties. It exercises our talents-or wastes them. It raises our hopes-or crushes them. It brings us into cooperation with others-or sets us at odds.¹⁹²

The implication of the relationship between our Christian faith and economic life for Christians in the context of Akwa Ibom State is that no single denomination or

¹⁹¹ Flannery, ed., *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism), no. 4 in *Vatican II: Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, 457.

¹⁹² National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, no. 6, vii.

congregation can be an alone and be able to accomplish the mission of Christ. This is the philosophy as well as the mission that CATPA believes in and supports. We all need to harness and integrate our resources and work together as CATPA. The Christian denominations and congregations, more than any secular institutions, have every reason to cooperate and speak for and defend the rights and dignity of every human person including the less privileged in Akwa Ibom State.

Beckmann and Simon narrate the cooperation that exists among Christian Churches toward poverty alleviation under the umbrella of “Bread for the World” in some developing nations:

Each year Bread for the World asks churches and other groups to take part in a nationwide Offering of Letters. Churches ask their members to learn about a specific hunger issue and then consider writing a letter to congress. The annual Offering of Letters mobilizes as many as 100 thousand letters to Congress to get action on hunger legislation. Bread for the World’s membership spans the spectrum of Catholics, evangelical and mainland Protestants and Orthodox Christians. It also includes people of other faiths and people who profess no particular faith but are drawn by the importance of its work.¹⁹³

Cooperation among the Christian denominations, congregations, and people who are interested is important because poverty and its ugly consequences cut across religious and socio-cultural lines.¹⁹⁴ It is not limited to any particular areas or groups. Hence, it needs positive responses from all and sundry. Nevertheless, Christian people have a special call in this respect being part of their Christian faith. We need to build religious bridges of collaboration to enable us reach one another for the common purpose of fighting for the common good. Uzukwu opines that there should not only be interchurch

¹⁹³ Beckmann and Simon, 5.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

links but also all organizations that make up the church must endeavor to agree in any program of networking in matters of poverty alleviation.¹⁹⁵

The collaboration that CATPA calls for does not affect the autonomy of the member denominations or congregations. Even though each Church is unique and autonomous, Uzukwu maintains that there is an intimate relationship or communion among all when it comes to services to alleviate poverty in any society like the Akwa Ibom State community.¹⁹⁶ The different churches must not fail to realize that failure on their part to join hands and reach out to the Akwa Ibom people that are hurting and in need is lack of solidarity with one another. The churches can work together effectively on practical programs for the poor, even though there may be differences among them. Hence, there is a greater need in the Akwa Ibom State community that the different churches harness their charitable resources and services to help remedy the poverty situation within the state. It is my opinion that the churches will create more impact in poverty alleviation apostolate if they go about it as a group and not as individual denominations or congregations.

However, the membership into CATPA may be opened to the public depending on the progress that may be made and the signs of the time. This is because there are many anonymous good Christians with goodwill who do not and may not want to identify with any formal and institutionalized denomination, congregation and/or religion. Putting this message of collaboration in another way is that different churches and people of goodwill within the state should work together effectively on practical programs for the poor, even though they may have differences among them.

¹⁹⁵ Uzukwu, 76.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

CATPA as an organization will be proposed to the leadership of all Christian denominations and congregations within the state that meet the ecumenical criteria for Christian Church earlier indicated in this work. The stories of different models at other places, particularly PACT, will be shared with them. Sharing such stories will dispose and encourage them to embrace CATPA. With the permission of the different leadership, there will be a meeting with the proposed member denominations and congregations about CATPA. Such meetings will be held at different Churches to create awareness at the grassroots through question and answer sessions.

As an organization, CATPA will have different individuals and groups of people to run its affairs. There will be executive members and sub-committees as may be necessary. The membership of such groups will reflect the diversity of the organization's membership. Volunteers and experts in different fields of endeavor who will help CATPA's operations at no cost will be highly welcome. Beside the location of the secretariat which will take how central it is within the state into consideration, the venues for the quarterly meetings to be proposed will be rotated among the member denominations and congregations.

There will be several ways of raising money to fund CATPA and its operations. These will include donations and grants from individuals, corporations and businesses within and outside the state. Annual dues from member denominations and congregations will be another source of income for CATPA. I intend to propose to the board members a request to the leadership of member denominations and congregations for a mandatory collection, at least, one Sunday within a year for CATPA. Although CATPA will apply for tax exempt status from the government, it will not seek any financial assistance from

the government. This is to avoid any intervention by the government in CATPA's operations.

5.5 Proposed Programs and Projects of CATPA Organization as a Model and Conclusion

CATPA as a model that also represents the Church's leadership will engage in several programs and projects to demonstrate and promote respect for economic rights by the Church's leadership as a means toward poverty alleviation in the Akwa Ibom State community. The first will be to create awareness about poverty, economic rights and potentials for economic progress in the state. This will be accomplished through education of all the citizens and government. This education is fundamental because many citizens and the government of Akwa Ibom State may not realize the real causes and dire consequences of poverty in the state. From experience, there are so many of them who accept the status quo about socio-economic issues. This is a gross ignorance about what is going on in other places and what should be in the state. They do not realize or understand that poverty, as the US bishops would agree, is not merely the lack of financial or material resources. It also entails a more profound kind of deprivation, a denial of full participation in the socio-economic life in the society. It includes inability to influence decisions that affect one's life and powerlessness in a way that assaults not only one's pocketbook but also one's fundamental human dignity.¹⁹⁷ Many also limit poverty to lack of sumptuous meals without minding if what they eat contains the essential nutrients for good nourishment. They limit poverty to lack of schools and hospitals, excluding the means in the form of financial assistance to attend these

¹⁹⁷ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, no. 188, 93.

institutions. With regard to the sources of poverty, they limit them to unemployment and lack of qualifications, excluding underemployment, laziness on their part, inability to realize their self-worth, lack of assertiveness and means for qualification in the form of training that should be provided by the government. Although I have discussed them earlier, many of the citizens and government officials may also lack proper knowledge and understanding of the consequences of poverty, economic rights, their moral obligations and the potentials within themselves and the state for economic progress. All these are expressions of the ignorance that prevails and the importance of education that CATPA is determined to pursue.

Education to create reasonable awareness of the aforementioned issues will be carried out in several means. Some of the major means include pulpit preaching (sermons and homilies), workshops, seminars, conferences and village hall/square meetings. These means will give the people at the grassroots level an ample opportunity to have a dialogue with either the Church's leadership or experts in socio-economic matters.

The second program or project by CATPA will be the empowerment of the poor. This program will be greatly enhanced by education. Empowerment in the context of this paper entails enabling the poor in Akwa Ibom State to recognize their self-worth, dignity and potentials in succeeding in socio-economic endeavors. It is encouraging them to have positive and optimistic attitudes and approaches toward life. It is enlightening them to see themselves as achievers and not as losers. It is advising them to realize that failure can be temporal and/or a necessary step toward success. It is leading them to have a change of their feeling of inferiority and the attitude of always being at the receiving end. It is encouraging them to understand that they can succeed as other people have succeeded.

Furthermore, empowerment is supporting the poor not only to have access but also morale boosting to work and make proper use of the economic resources at their disposal. It means allowing the poor to participate in decisions on socio-economic issues that affect them. The US bishops stress this aspect of empowerment:

Poor people must be empowered to take charge of their own futures and become responsible for their own economic advancement. Personal motivation and initiative, combined with social reform, are necessary elements to assist individuals escaping poverty. By taking advantage of opportunities for education, employment and training, and by working together for change, the poor can help themselves to be full participants in our economic, social, and political life.¹⁹⁸

McKenna argues that the right of participation in decision making is what basic justice demands. The denial of such right can amount to social sin.¹⁹⁹ The US bishops add that human dignity of all is realized when people gain power to work together to improve their lives and that basic justice calls for more than providing help to the poor and other vulnerable members of the society.²⁰⁰ Vatican II weighs in here, saying that the “. . . decisions concerning economic and social conditions are made not so much within the business itself but by institutions at a higher level, and since it is on these that the future of the workers and their children depends, the latter ought to have a say in decision making either in person or through their representative.”²⁰¹

Dorr does not disagree with the bishops' nor Vatican's notions of empowerment. He supports granting the poor the rights and conditions to develop a way forward for themselves when he argues that the key agents in bringing about such change must be the poor, oppressed and the marginalized themselves. Hence, he advocates commitment to

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., no. 201, 99.

¹⁹⁹ McKenna, 49.

²⁰⁰ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, no. 91, 47.

²⁰¹ Flannery, ed., *Gaudium ed Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), no. 68 in *Vatican II: Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, 974.

work from below.²⁰² This enhances and broadens economic power, makes economic decisions more accountable to the common good. It increases active participation in economic life by those who are presently excluded or vulnerable in a high social priority.²⁰³

CATPA will collaborate with and show strong solidarity to the good programs and projects by the government and any other institutions, private or public, to alleviate poverty. Collaboration among the different Christian denominations and congregations as Christian bodies under CATPA gives the Church's leadership an added advantage for success in promoting respect for economic rights as a veritable means for poverty alleviation. CATPA promises the same collaboration with the government since it may not succeed alone without the government and the Church's leadership. Hence, CATPA needs to join force with respect for one another and work for the common good. Uzukwu supports this collaboration when he writes:

When the network is firmly established at these levels, and issues are discussed and considerations for advocacy proposed without prejudice to local autonomy, then one may hope to arrive at concrete realizations which are aimed at the changing of the face of the earth. It is, in my view, the clearest way of showing the pertinence of the Church in the world today. It is a war to stop all wars, to stop all bloodshed, to put an end to misery and begging.²⁰⁴

CATPA will encourage the Church's leadership to demonstrate strong solidarity to and with the government and other individual institutions within the state. Solidarity makes enhances zealotness for the cause of the poor and the oppressed. It drives the comfortable and secure to take risk for the less privilege. It calls those who are strong to care for those who are weak and vulnerable across the spectrum of human life. It opens

²⁰² Dorr, 2.

²⁰³ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, no. 91, 47.

²⁰⁴ Uzukwu, 76.

homes and hearts to those in need.²⁰⁵ Ricardo Antoncich stresses that solidarity among the Christians is needed in any circumstances of social injustice, social degradation of the subject of work, exploitation, growing percentage of poverty and even hunger.²⁰⁶ In the words of John Paul II, solidarity here means “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good.”²⁰⁷ It calls for unity that goes beyond simple self-interest. This is because self-interest becomes abusive of the rights of others.²⁰⁸ CATPA advocates the significance of solidarity among the Church’s leadership and the government on behalf of the poor. Gustavo Gutiérrez elaborates on the meaning and significance of such solidarity thus:

Solidarity with the poor means taking stock of the injustice on which this order is built, and of the countless means it employs to maintain itself. It also means understanding that one cannot be for the poor and oppressed if one is not against all that gives rise to man’s exploitation of man. For this same reason, solidarity cannot limit itself to just saying no to the ways things are arranged. It must be more than that. It must be an effort to forge a society in which the worker is not subordinated to the owner of the means of production, a society in which the assumption of social responsibility for political affairs will include social responsibility for real liberty and will lead to the emergence of a new social consciousness.²⁰⁹

There are several ways that CATPA will demonstrate its solidarity. Firstly, it will play an advisory role, letting the government’s officials know that the government is part of God’s providence for the welfare of its citizens.²¹⁰ Hence, it will remind the government and other institutions of the moral obligations economic rights impose on

²⁰⁵ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Called to Global Solidarity: International Challenges for U.S. Parishes* (Washington, D.C: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), 4.

²⁰⁶ Ricardo Antoncich, *Christian in the Face of Injustice: A Latin American Reading of Social Teaching*, translated by Matthew O’Connel (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987), 77.

²⁰⁷ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Sociallis* (On Social Concern), no. 38 in *Catholic Social Thought*, 421.

²⁰⁸ Charles, 25.

²⁰⁹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Liberation, Theology and Proclamation” in *The Pope Revolution: John Paul II Confronts Liberation Theology*, with a forward by Richard Neuhaus, ed. Quentin Quade (Washington, D.C: Ethics and Policy center, 1982), 20.

²¹⁰ Beckmann and Simon, 13.

them. Such advice will in a persuasive manner obliges proper action. Larry Snyeler indicates the language of such role when he writes:

We are urging Congress and administrators – through policy decision and budget actions – to protect and expand programs that provide needed health care, affordable housing, nutrition assistance, and economic security for the poor and vulnerable. And we intend to hold elected officials accountable on how their actions support these goals.²¹¹

In any event of failure with advice, CATPA will explore other options including dialogue with the officers concerned.

CATPA will also engage in initiating and promoting any reforms that hold out hope of transforming the bad state of economic arrangements within the state into a fuller systematic realization of its moral vision. It will also be ready and willing to challenge when necessary policies and structures that impede poverty alleviation programs.²¹²

Gutiérrez considers this as solidarity when he writes: “Solidarity with the poor implies the transformation of the existing social order. It implies a liberating social praxis: that is, a transforming activity directed towards the creation of a just, free society.”²¹³

In addition to collaboration and solidarity with other institutions including the government, CATPA will encourage individual member denominations and congregations to be involved in public economic issues as shareholders and investors. Such involvement will provide a platform for them to make decisions that reflect the Gospel value and CATPA’s mission. McKenna extends such involvement to all in the Church:

Individual Christians and those responsible within the Church institutions who are shareholders must see to it that the invested funds are used

²¹¹ Larry Snyeler, “America’s Growing Poverty Crises must become a Priority,” *Florida Catholic*, Feb 2-8 2007.

²¹² National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, no. 129, 66.

²¹³ Gutiérrez, “Liberation, Theology and Proclamation”, in *The Pope and Revolution*, 20.

responsibly. As part owners, they must cooperate in shaping policies through dialogue with management, voting at corporate meetings, introduction of resolutions, and participation in investment decisions.²¹⁴

As a representative of the Church's leadership, CATPA intends to be exemplary, establishing low scale projects to provide job opportunities to the poor especially in less developed areas. Mitchel Prothero reports on how a 75-year-old Archbishop Boulos Boulos leads, providing projects in his Syrian community where there is “. . . absence of a sustainable economic future . . . an insufficient water supply, a lack of modern agricultural equipment and a limited choice of crops that thrive in the region's lush volcanic soil but harsh climate.”²¹⁵ Boulos, according to Pothero, with the assistance of benefactors has developed farming, sunk wells, embarked on irrigation for the crops, and provided some farming equipment and financial assistance to farmers as means to stimulate the economy.²¹⁶

CATPA will also encourage the member denominations and congregations to be exemplary in the way they treat any workers under them, to encourage any other institutions to emulate it. It will also run programs like Alcoholics Anonymous that will offer the poor who take to practices like drugs and alcohols alternatives to their addiction to restore their lives.

However, I must not fail to acknowledge the efforts that some Christian churches have made individually to facilitate poverty alleviation. I indicated earlier that the different Christian denominations contributed a great deal to the relatively good socio-economic life experienced during the colonial and missionary years. They provided

²¹⁴ Kevin Mckenna, *A Concise Guide to Catholic Social Teaching* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria, 2002), 52.

²¹⁵ Mitchel Prothero, “From Dust to Life: One Man's Attempt to Revitalize a Community” *Florida Catholic*, 1 March 2008, 34.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

facilities for education and health care services that also provided jobs for many people. One of the first printing presses in the state was owned and run by the Catholic Church. There were other centers for the training of young people for trades like sowing and a bakery to mention a few. At present, there are a few centers run by the Catholic Diocese of Ikot Ekpene for the benefits of the children from poor families. Some of these centers include the HIFA Wood Work Center and the Candle Factory. The first trains young boys for carpentry services, and the second trains young girls in candle production. Other centers include rehabilitation centers for the physically handicapped and mentally retarded to learn some trades and become economically useful for themselves. These opportunities also help them in their spiritual, emotional and psychological issues. Knowing the importance of good education, the Catholic Church has established a few new schools and is still negotiating for the return of those ones taken over by the government in the 1970s. However, it is difficult to say how these schools will benefit the children from poor families with the present general economic hardship faced by the citizens and residents of the Akw Ibom State community. Other Christian bodies have their specific programs and projects including schools and hospital to facilitate poverty alleviation. None of these is as prominent as those of the Catholic Church.

However, it is my belief that a coalition of all the Christian churches with good programs and projects will be more formidable and benefiting to the poor in the Akwa Ibom State community. This will also give the churches an opportunity to concretize their mission as one body, for words alone from the pulpit do not feed the poor, do not provide the much needed homes for families, do not run health insurance companies, create jobs or provide education, water and electricity. Sobrino indicates: “Words, signs, and praxis,

then, are the concrete form that Jesus' mission takes. . . . Thereby they enunciate, by making it concrete, the fundamental principle of Christian life: love."²¹⁷ CATPA is to be a model through which the leadership of the Churches can work together to promote respect for economic rights with the view to alleviating poverty within the Akwa Ibom State community. Uzuoku observes that if the Church remains silent and inactive over the present socio-economic situation in the state, it may appear to be a coward or an accomplice rather than a champion of justice.²¹⁸ This observation by Uzuoku is a call for all Christians to be involved in the apostolate of poverty alleviation. Julie McCarty makes this call more solemn and compelling when she writes:

If sometimes our poor people have had to die of starvation, it is not because God didn't care for them, but because you and I didn't give, were not instruments of love in the hands of God, to give them that bread, to give them the clothing; because we did not recognize him, when once more Christ came in distressing disguise - in the hungry man, in the lonely man, in the homeless child, and seeking for shelter.²¹⁹

It is this compelling call that CATPA also advocates. In doing so, the organization will seek to participate in poverty alleviation among the communities in Akwa Ibom State. Hence, CATPA will not only achieve its goal but it will also make its mission relevant to practical theology.

²¹⁷ Sobrino, "Spirituality and the Following of Jesus," in *Systematic Theology*, 245.

²¹⁸ Uzuoku, 84.

²¹⁹ Julie McCarty, "Almsgiving: Discovering Christ's Presence in those who Suffer", *Florida Catholic*, 23 February – 1 March 2008, 15.

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