

The Report of the 2021 Nigerian Catholic Economic Summit: Populorum Progressio, The Catholic Economic Alternative as an Elixir for the Nigerian Economic Crisis.

Introduction

In my proposal for the Nigerian Catholic Economic Summit, and the first socialization attempt of my economic policy proposal with Pulte Institute for Global Development at the University of Notre Dame, I noted that Nigeria is chaotic and has betrayed all levels of violence; by omission, repression, and alienation. I mentioned that the Nigerian crisis is a global humanitarian problem; a disruptor of the fragile stability of the West African region and, by extension, Africa and the world. To deescalate the Nigerian crisis demands a three-step process:

1. to know and understand the problem,
2. to facilitate and socialize intelligent dialogue, and
3. to craft policies birthed from thoughtful dialogue.

By facilitating intelligent dialogue, I envisaged a change in the Nigerian public narrative. I have noted in many fora that a particular narrative fan the Nigerian violence and becloud its public space with a culture of death. To change the prevailing narrative, there is the need to intelligently challenge it and provide an alternative. My academic project has been to provide an alternative narrative through the Catholic intellectual tradition.

With the technical support and grant funding from the Pulte Institute for Global Development — as well as the intellectual support of Prof. Diane Desierto, Dr. Peter Casarella, and Prof. Joseph Kaboski — I began the process of providing an alternative narrative for the Nigerian public space on June 28-30, and July 19-22, 2021.

Stage 1: Preparing the Team of Facilitators (June 28-30)

In October 2020 (until Easter of 2021), I began a virtual group discussion session on some aspects of the Catholic intellectual tradition (CIT). Participants were mainly from Nigeria. The context of the participants enabled the translations of some of the thoughts in CIT into the Nigerian context. We looked at *Rerum Novarum*, St. Augustine's *City of God*, and St. John Paul II's notion of the person. I reconvened the group from June 28-30 to introduce them to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and prepare some of them as group discussion facilitators for the summit in July. The total number of participants was 28 on the first day and 21 on the third day. I selected five persons from those who showed more interest and disposition as facilitators. They were two men and three ladies.

Within those three days, I discussed the four major principles of the CST: the person, the common good, solidarity, and subsidiarity. Since the summit would discuss the Nigerian economy from the perspective of *Populorum Progressio*, I introduce them to the text. Considering the inadequacy of the short preparatory time to help facilitators grasp the details of the principles of CST, I provided them with a summary of the CST principles by Brian Benestad.

I look forward to continuing the group discussion with the group of facilitators and the larger group from which I recruited them. I also hope to expand both groups. I shared the souvenirs (leatherback Jotter and page marker) from de Nicola with 20 persons that completed the first stage.

Stage 2: Hybrid Seminar on the Principles of the CST (July 19-20)

I traveled to Nigeria on July 4th to firm up the structures and plans for the economic summit. As part of the summit, I conducted a two-day seminar on the principles of CST and the thoughts of *Populorum Progressio*. The in-person part of the seminar was held at the Ondo Diocesan pastoral Institute, *Domus Pacis Pastoral Institute*, Akure, Ondo State. The virtual aspect was managed by Heather Asiala of Pulte Institute and the media team in Nigeria. To synchronize virtual and in-person events needed some technicalities; as such, I employed the services of the media company of Eftinzz Events, Nigeria. The seminar was necessary to introduce more Catholics to the thoughts of the CST before the panel discussions on economic policies and the CST on the 21st and 22nd of July. Since I have the expertise in CST principles, and to cut down the budget on stipend for speakers, I conducted the seminar.

On the first day of the seminar, I introduced participants to an abridged history of CST and the principles of CST. I began with some background information on *Rerum Novarum*, some of its thoughts, the development of the audience of CST, and the principles of CST. I scheduled a two-hour event, but each seminar exceeded the two hours duration. I gave two 30 minute lectures, followed by a group discussion facilitated by a group of facilitators I recruited in stage 1.

On the second day of the seminar, I introduced participants to the history and the narrative of *Populorum Progressio*. Just like the first day, I gave two 30 minutes lectures and a group discussion facilitated by the group of facilitators I recruited followed each of the lectures. 54 and 66 persons (in-person and virtual) attended the first and second seminars, respectively. The seminar confirmed my suspicion and expectation on the ignorance of Nigerian Catholics about the CST and their disposition to the thoughts of CST when introduced to them. There were demands for more of such seminars.

Stage 3: Panel Discussion on Catholic Economic thoughts in Conversation with Liberal Economic Thoughts and Nigerian Economic Policies (July 21st and 22nd)

I felt a little confident after the seminars on CST that some Catholic attendees of the panel discussion would be familiar with some concepts that would be freely used by some of the panelists. I also felt that some of the attendees would be better disposed to engage some of the panelists and raise essential questions. It was important to me and to the intention of the summit that local people engage the panelists. The panelists were carefully selected to reflect the Nigerian diversity, the international dimension of the Nigerian crisis and to promote dialogue between the Catholic, liberal, and policy narratives of the Nigerian economy.

The first panel discussion had three panelists: Fr. (Prof.) Anthony Akinwale (a theologian, Nigerian), Prof. Olalekan Yinusa (a Nigerian economist, policymaker), Prof Diane Desierto (Prof. of Law, Notre Dame). I moderated the discussion. The local ordinary of Ondo Diocese, Bishop Jude Arogundade, who had the diaconate ordination of ten seminarians on the day, was

represented by Fr. Valentine Koledoye, Ph.D., (Episcopal Vicar, Diocese of Basel, Switzerland). There were key interventions from Canon Benedict Koledoye, Ph.D., Dr. Hilary Okeagbua, Prof. Ajani Garba.

Fr. Akinwale highlighted the four principles of the CST and the structural obstacles posed by the Nigerian constitution and government against the triumph of the common good and the person. Prof. Yinusa noted that human flourishing of individuals would be possible when the Nigerian nation is restructured correctly in a way that the federating units have reasonable autonomy. Prof. Desierto highlighted the obligation of the Nigerian state to the universal economic and cultural rights of persons. Questions and comments from participants intensified intelligent and respectful debate among panelists. One hundred thirty-six people attended (virtual and in-person) the first-panel discussion.

The second-panel discussion on the 22nd of July had four panelists: Prof. Pat. Utomi (Nigerian/economist), Mr. Ben Akabueze (Nigerian director of Budget), Prof. Joseph Kaboski (Notre Dame Economist, de Nicola faculty fellow), Dr. Peter Casarella (Theologian, Duke University). I moderated the session. The Bishop of Ondo was present as the host of the summit. The bishop met with the panelists before the event commenced. Also, the Governor of Ondo state was represented by his Commissioner for Multilateral, Public and inter-government relations, Ms. Bunmi Ademosu.

In his presentation, Dr. Casarella highlighted the relationship between Catholic economic principles and the culture of life. He also traced the history of the Catholic economic narrative from Pope Leo XIII to Pope Francis. Prof. kaboski, on the other hand, highlighted the relationship between liberal economic theories and the CST. He also provided examples of the practicability of the Catholic economic theories. Prof. Utomi highlighted the history of the Nigerian economic policies and its negative impacts on the Nigerian economy and people. Mr. Akabueze, on the other hand, provided perspective on the challenges of the economic plans of the Nigerian government. The dialogue was deepened with questions, concerns, and comments from participants. Most commentators expressed concerns about the economic plans of the Nigerian government and the Nigerian economic situation.

Conclusion

While the summit is my first attempt to socialize the economic policy proposal I prepared for the Pulte Institute, it is also, by my understanding, the first Catholic intervention in the public debate on the Nigerian economy. The intensity of the dialogue confirmed my thought that the Nigerian and, by extension, African crisis can be salvaged through people's participation in intelligent public dialogue. The Nigerian space is starved of such dialogue, especially of that which appeals to the universalism of the Catholic intellectual tradition on the culture of life, the person, and the common good. To build a constructive public thinking, more of such dialogue is needed. It was clear at the end of the summit that the people were hungry for such dialogue and interested in building their capacity for such dialogue to enable informed political participation.

Considering the incubation stage of such public intellectual dialogue, the low or non-existent consciousness of the Catholic perspective on such dialogue, it is my intention to consolidate on the gains of the summit. I plan to do this in four ways:

1. **E-magazine:** This continues to provide information, opinions to the educated demography of the Nigerian public on the economic thoughts of the Catholic intellectual tradition. The e-magazine will publish bimonthly.
2. **Short Video on CST:** With social media, many people have become more comfortable with learning through short video/visuals than through texts. As such, I intend to invest in a 4/5 minutes -video once a month on the various documents of the CST. This would be more of a crash course on CST, designed for the social media space and the youths, most of whom depend on the social media for information.
3. **Quarterly virtual Panel:** I realized that bringing the Catholic intellectual narrative in conversation with policymakers and the liberal intellectual is crucial to providing an alternative Catholic narrative. My opinion is that the objectivity of the Catholic narrative should dialogue and debate, if need be, with a contrary opinion to show Catholic objectivity and public relevance. As such, I intend to organize a virtual panel discussion between the Catholic narrative, the liberal, and the narrative of the Nigerian policymakers.
4. **Yearly Economic Summit:** The outcome of the economic summit shows that there is a lot to talk about in the Nigerian space. I suspect that until those thoughts are exhausted or publicly expressed, agitations within the Nigerian space will persist. As such, public dialogue is an important alternative to violent activism. Moreover, it offers the Nigerian people the civic training and the opportunity to engage political actors. It is also an important political process. As someone invested in the Catholic intellectual tradition, it is important to me that the process is enabled through the universalism of the Catholic intellectual tradition. Continuing the Nigerian Catholic economic summit will enable the Nigerian church midwife and facilitate a dialogue process in the nascent Nigerian democracy. For me, this is one of the pastoral duties of the Nigerian/ African Church.

While I hope for future collaboration with Pulte Institute to bring to life an economic narrative that guarantees the economic right of every Nigerian through the means listed above, I am grateful to the Pulte Institute for funding the first project. I am also grateful to my preceptor, Prof. Diane Desierto who supervised my policy proposal. I thank Ed Jurkovic and Heather Asiala, without whose efforts and support the summit would not have been possible.

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