

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL DOCTRINE

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INTRODUCTION

It will be like the proverbial Carmel passing through the eye of a needle for the Church not to involve herself in the variegated political, economic and social issues. Often times one hears such questions like: why should the Church poke nose into political affairs? Why not the Church limits herself to the preaching of the word and the administration of sacraments? Does the Church have any biblical standpoint to support her struggle for social issues?

The Church's reflection on human socialization and development can be traced back to the beginning of creation when the royal "we" agreed to "...make man in our own image and likeness"(Gen. 1: 26). It was then that social life was born.

With advancements recorded in science and technology, the church has no option than to keep on reviewing, renewing and reiterating her teachings and responses to new problems, challenges and solutions. In realizing this objective, this paper shall first seek to clarify the meaning of 'church' and 'social doctrine'. It shall then discuss in detail, the biblical foundation of the church's social doctrine and its theological basis.

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

The term "Church" as used in this article refers primarily to a community of Christ's faithful, the people of God. The word 'Church', a derivative from the Greek adjective Κυριακος means belonging to the Lord. Secondly, it would refer to the official gathering of the people of God.

The phrase 'Social Doctrine' is a technical term in Catholic Theology referring to the body of papal, conciliar, and synodal teachings, which began from pope Leo XXIII's *Rerum Novarum*. The Church's Social Doctrine is then defined as a constantly updated doctrinal corpus, which is drawn from Sacred Scripture, Tradition and natural law, adapting and applying them to the social problems of our times. It is therefore; an elastic doctrine of the Church on socio-economic, political and other related world developmental matters. In reference to this phrase, John Paul II would give a whole range arsenal of semi-equivalent expression such as: Social morality, social thought of the Church Social and humanitarian teaching, the doctrine or directives of the encyclicals, doctrinal inheritance, Social Teaching of the Apostolic See or social doctrine of the Pope.

There is no doubt that the multiplication of these semi-equivalent terms does not mean a division. It is rather an expression of one reality.

Furthermore, the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church represents the Church's resolve to challenge the current trends of a changing world, the problem and harsh effects arising from the grave social and economic backlash as a result of modernism, science and technology.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

The Biblical foundation covers the Old Testament and the New Testament

Old Testament

Basically, the Old Testament is a curriculum on the divinity of man as "created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1.26). Before the Divine Law given through Moses, the natural law was within man already, "telling him to do good and avoid evil.

Synderesis the fathers of the Vatican II Council reflected that: Deep within his conscience, Man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself, but which he must obey.. It is a voice calling him to love and do what is good, and to avoid evil, tells him at the right moment, do this, shun that. For man in his heart has a law inscribed by God his dignity lies in observing this law...¹

With the establishment of the law through Moses, God revealed Himself as the all-powerful God who hates oppression and social neglect. Hence, He Yahweh who condemns Pharaoh and frees Israel from bondage in Egypt Ex. 14 15 ff.

He is a God of Justice and his laws are founded on Justice. Therefore, the Pentateuch stipulates neither molestation nor oppression of the stranger. (Ex. 22: 20-27, 23 10) Neither also shall the stranger be despised. (Deut. 23. 8) Based on God's rejection of oppression, exploitation was also abominable in his sight. (Deut. 24. 14) The defenseless members of the society shall not be "perverted nor treated unjustly. Love of these and the stranger is a command. (Lev. 13-34)

The teachings of the Church on social issues and Theology of development did not just start from nowhere! The origins of her teachings are authentically scriptural and biblical. We accept the basis of their teachings to be by divine revelation (i.e. sacred scripture and tradition). God himself is the defender of the weak, widows and the poor. When they cry to him for vengeance, He shall listen and avenge. (Ex. 22: 22-23).

The Prophets and the prophetic books are also very vocal on social issues and justice. Isaiah cries out, Is not this the fast that God wants? To loose bonds of wickedness, to loosen the bonds of the yoke, is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house, when you see the makeup, to cover him (Is. 58. 6-7).

Their prophecies were directed at "those who crush and grind the face of the poor. (Is. 3. 15) and "those who do not grant liberty to slaves (Jer. 34. 17) those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth Amos. 2:7 they buy up the poor for money and the needy for a pair of sandals. (Amos. 8)

In place of burnt offerings, God prefer "Justice to roll down like water and

righteousness like an ever flowing stream" (Amos. 5. 21-24). The Old Testament Condemn; those who perpetuate structures of sin, keeping the poor in perpetual poverty shall face the wrath of God. (Is. 5)

For Prophet Micah, "You have been told O man what is good and what Yahweh requires of you, to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly by with your God. (Micah. 6:) He shall restore the Kingdom of Yahweh, which shall be in favor of the poor. He will bring forth justice to the Nations. (cf. Mal. 3: 1-2; 4. 22-24)

In the wake of this social crimes, Amos decried let justice "mispat" roll down like waters and righteousness "sedeqah" like an over flowing stream (Amos 5:24).

It was also against the abuse of judicial and political power in Israel that prophet Micah prophesied. In the sphere of justice, Micah outrightly denounced the oppression of the poor (Mic. 2:1-2), lying (Mic. 6:12, and stealing (Mic 6:11).

The foregoing is central to the teaching of the Old Testament. The prophesies as a whole are one of the chief sources of the Church's Social Doctrine revealed through the spoken word of the prophets.

However, it is in the New Testament that a repertoire foundation of the Church's Social Doctrine would come to the fore with a compendium of Jesus' teaching on social, economic and political issues.

New Testament

The ministry of Jesus narrated in the gospel comes alive as evangelization with hope. It is not only for the life to come but also for the present human condition as a primary focus

In Jesus' time the Palestinian society was made up mainly of peasants and artisans with the former in the majority. The peasants were often under severe economic pressure. The Herods seriously devastated the economy. Herod the great turned a large part of Palestine revenue over to Rome and sought to perpetuate his name with heavy building programs inside and outside Palestine. The peasants paid for all these programs with a lot of financial burdens.² Jewish peasants resorted more and more to daily labour (Mtt20: 1-6), and to tenant farming for absentee landlords (Mk 12:1-9)

The gospel points to three social levels in this Palestinian society of Jesus' time, namely, the rich who benefited from taxation or at least escaped it; the hard working power who were kept on subsistence level by taxation; and the destitute who had given up the struggle and lived under the level of subsistence. They were laborers who could not rise above the mediocre position of a day wage of one Roman Denarius (Mt 20:2). Pinchas Lapide described this situation beautifully:

The much-touted Pax Romana was the tyrannical rule of Roman occupational force that threatened to break the people down by its arrogant arbitrariness, shameless corruption, and brutal violation of law...³

What then was Jesus' attitude to these issues of marginalized people of Palestine? It is

clear that the primary focus of Jesus to this society will be understood more when he began his preaching with these statements:

The Spirit of the lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to announce release to the captive and restoration of sight to the blind, to set free the down trodden and to proclaim the year of the lord's favour (Lk 4:18-19).

There is no gainsaying the fact that Jesus' announcement set in motion the arrival of the eschatological age. St Paul's statement in Gal 3:28, Rm. 10:12; Col 3:11 lend credence: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female for you are all one in Christ Jesus". He welcomed the outcasts, and the marginalized in society. He identified with the hungry, the thirsty, the naked and those imprisoned. Indeed, those basic rights in the society were denied (c.f. Mt 25:40, 45).

In his preaching and action he revealed an uncompromising attitude towards the political status quo. He preached against oppressive exercise of authority. Herod Antipas certainly came under the criticism. His execution of John the Baptist testifies to the oppressive nature of his regime. Jesus could therefore, call him a fox (Lk 13:32). It was against this image of a kingdom with oppressive authority, which was evident in Galilee and Judea, that Jesus preached a kingdom where the order of relationship would be a reversal of the contemporary situation.

He also attacked Jewish religio-political authorities who were not just colonialists. In a sense, they posed a more serious problem than the Romans. For while the Romans were outsiders and did not know the intricacies of the Jewish internal religious matters, they were insiders. As traitors they posed a more serious danger to the people. In this instance, Jesus denounced their evil deeds. He attacked the Pharisees for their oppressive exercise of their authority whereby they imposed heavy burden which themselves could not carry (Mt 23:4). He also attacked the scribes for seeking places of honour at banquets, loving public greetings at market squares, devouring the properties of widows (Mk 12:38-40). These religio-political leaders actions were real fool hardy for Jesus Christ. This made him give a denunciation of these their actions.

All this goes to show that while Jesus was not an early Messiah, he was a social and political critic. One who never spare the socio-political sphere in the proclamation of the Goodness. This means that according to the example of Jesus, the Church has in concrete terms a mission and a challenge. A mission of participating in an extension of Jesus mission. "As the father has sent me, so I am sending you" (Jn 20:21).

From the above foregoings, it becomes increasingly clear that the Church's Social Doctrine didn't originate from a vacuum. Biblical evidence suggests that the Church has a mandate focused on the situation of the poor and the oppressed in society.

THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL DOCTRINE

There are basic expressions of human dignity in the Sacred Scriptures. These are no doubt the theological motivation of the Catholic Social Doctrine. We shall classify into these divisions, namely:

The creation of man and woman in the image of God; the incarnation of God for humanity; and the coming of the kingdom of God as the consummation history.⁴

In discussing about mankind as *Imago Dei* the Church's Doctrine of creation assert that man as an inner dignity and freedom. This has to be promoted and respected beyond every human community and state organization.

The incarnation and the consummation of history is best understood as the act of God endearment to humanity. In this vein the inviolable implication of incarnation is expressed thus:

The incarnation is the revelation of the true value of man. Christ by becoming man is a deification of man and also a clear statement that the truth about man belongs to Christ who ascends to heaven with a glorified body. Hence, the mystery of man is tied to the mystery of God in Jesus Christ.⁵

The foregoing makes it unavoidably clear that the incarnation of Jesus points to his liberative message for man. The coming of the kingdom of God as the consummation of history points to Jesus mission. This mission is soteriological in perspective. It reveals the fact that; Christ has come for all men and women without distinction.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) exhaustively gives us a promotion of human dignity. It states in the document *Gaudium et Spes*:

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followed of Christ as well... that is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history.⁶

This Document begins its theological reflection by referring overtly to the existential human situation of joy and anguish. It situates the reflection in that context. It points to a non-negligible fact that theology should just stand aloof existential human situation. It breaks the scholastic straitjacketed approach to theology by confronting existential issues that affects the dignity of mankind. In this sense, theology is no longer absolute and perennial as classical theology claimed to be, but contextual and changeable. It no longer concerns itself only with the spiritual salvation of the soul, but also with the human situation of the individual and with societal structures.

In the document of the 1971 Bishops' Synod in Rome "Justice in the World",

we find the following statement:

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or in other word, of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive structure.⁷

This document also based on the promotion of human dignity, calls for the Bible to be read for societal transformation. This radical transformation includes all parts of human existence. Therefore, the biblical and theological perspective of the promotion of human dignity is indeed the spinal cord of the Church's social doctrine. In fact, these theological bases also buttress the significant aspect of Christian mission of social teaching.

EVALUATION

The Church following Jesus Christ example, through the Magisterium has not failed to state with her spiritual and intellectual muscles the conditions of an "ideal" capable of ensuring the dignity of each person in the society. The "ideal" for achieving political, economic and social order. No wonder, over the past centuries Popes have consistently drawn attention to social issues in various exhortations. These exhortations and teachings form a special and incomparable contribution of the spirit led church to always search for free, just and prosperous world of community. It is in the light of this that John Paul II says:

As far as the Church is concerned, the social message of the gospel must not be considered a theory, but above all else a basis and a motivation for action... Today, more than ever, the Church is aware that her social message will gain credibility more immediately from the witness of action...⁸

In this light, one cannot but call for Church authorities to take more action in witnessing to Christ mission. There is no gain saying that witnessing should go beyond ordinary pronouncements of communiqués. In this way, communiqués of Bishop conferences should be supported by the Christian faithful to implement justice agenda. In this perspective the catholic Bishops' conference of Nigeria (CBCN) should do more in her sincere effort to see that justice is enthroned in Nigeria. Nigeria as society has become more like ever a society of man being wolf to man. We were all witnesses to how the last democratic elections of April 2003 were done based on Machiavellian principles and philosophy of democracy. How individuals were slaughtered like animals leaving their loved ones orphaned. There is no doubt that there exists a flagrant injustice in the distribution of the nation wealth. There is corruption and insincerity from the quarters of our leaders. The situation has an ugly face however, all must remember the ideal philosophy of life which says 'I am because you are, and you are because we are to truncate this ideal is to become insipid.

CONCLUSION

Christian revelation has a very lofty social and historic value. The Church's right to speak on public matters arises from the fact that we live in a pluralistic and human world.

Above all, "It should be noted that social teaching is a valid instrument of evangelization. "Therefore, this doctrine is not an "appendage" or adjunct to the gospel matter, it forms an integral part of the Church's vision of life. It is the application of the word of God to peoples lives and the life of the society".

From the foregoing, we conclude that, the Catholic Social Teaching is "rootly" planted in scripture and antecedence, "Sacred scriptures continually speaks to us of an active commitment to our neighbor and demands of us, a shared responsibility for all of humanity." The Church Social Doctrine is not only a teaching; it's a way of life.

ENDNOTES

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THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE

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INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Social Doctrine is that aspect of the teachings of the Catholic Church that deals on social issues; such as the dignity of the human person, human rights, the rights of workers, the responsibilities of property ownership, politics, economics, a commitment to peace-making, solidarity, justice, and regard for the common good etc. The Church is able to propound Her own social doctrine because She "has the right and duty to teach all truth necessary for salvation, whether it was made known by divine revelation, (*as in the Old and New Testaments*), or was discovered by human reason."¹ The need for the Church to develop Her own social doctrine arose as a result of the fact that:

- i. the Church as teacher must explain and apply the moral law of God.
- ii. the Church as Mother must be interested in the total well-being of Her children for the needs of the body necessarily have some connection with the health of the soul.
- iii. the goal of God's children is not merely heavenly bliss but also happiness here on earth.

This intellectual piece set out to x-ray the development of Catholic Social Doctrine over the centuries to what we have today.

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE TERM: "SOCIAL DOCTRINE"

The expression *Social Doctrine* appeared for the first time in a Roman document in 1929, in a letter addressed by the congregation for the Council to the young Bishop; Lienart of Lille, France, who was being attacked by some employers for his defense of trade unions.²

Pope Pius XII first employed it in his discourse commemorating the 50th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* in 1941. For him, Catholic Social Doctrine sprang from *Rerum Novarum*.

Christian Philosophy was used by Pope Leo XIII to mean what is today known as Social Doctrine, while Pius XI preferred Social Philosophy in his *Quadragesimo Anno*. He came close to his successor when he spoke about the doctrine regarding the social and economic question.

The expression "Social doctrine of the Church" witnessed a strong and stable affirmation during the brief but prolific pontificate of John XXIII (1958-1963). He sued it and also insisted that it is ever up to date. In his *Mater et Magistra*, he asserts:

The teaching office of the Church has made clear, with the cooperation of enlightened priests and laymen, especially during the last century, a social doctrine which points out with clarity the sure way to reconstruct the social relationships according to universal criteria based on human nature ... and

hence acceptable to all. We reaffirm strongly that the Christian social doctrine is an integral part of the Christian conception of life.³

The Second Vatican Council made use of the term Social doctrine, notably in its document *Gaudium et Spes*. The Council states: "The Church must be allowed always and everywhere to preach the faith with true freedom, teach her social doctrine, carry out her task among men unhampered, and pass moral judgment even on matters concerning politics when fundamental rights or the salvation of souls require it."⁴

The concept is also present in other Conciliar texts under slightly different nuances. For examples, "the Church's moral and social teaching" in *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (# 31); "the Christian teaching on human society" in *Gaudium et Spes*, (#23); "the social teaching of the Church" in *Inter Mirifica*, (# 110); "the Church's social teaching and activity" in *Unitatis Redintegratio*, (# 6); "the principles of justice and equity demanded by reason for individual and social life worked out by the Church" in *Gaudium et Spes*, (# 63); the application of gospel principles to social life" in *Unitatis Redintegratio*, (# 12); and "the doctrine of the Church on the human person, on his liberty... " in *Christus Dominus*, (# 12).

After the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI opted for "the social teaching of the Church." This option is evident in his encyclical letter, *Populorum Progressio*, (# 2); Apostolic letter, *Octagesima Adveniens*, (# 4 & 42), and Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, (# 38). Some scholars are of the opinion that the change in expression from 'social doctrine' to 'social teaching' is due to the awareness of the ideological character of the social doctrine, which upon serious reflection of the social question new interpretation of the social question founded especially on the notion of the "signs of the times." Others do not like the term "social doctrine" because of the confusion of the term "doctrine" with "dogma," for dogma is a definitive and an infallible doctrine. However, it worth noting that Pope John Paul II has adopted and continues to use the expression "social doctrine of the Church" alongside "social teaching," "social thought," 'social magisterium,' and similar terms. For the Congregation for Catholic Education, the terms "Social doctrine" and "social teaching" are used interchangeably. It went further to say that "doctrine" stresses more the theoretical aspect of the question, and "teaching," the historical aspect, but both stand for the same reality. Thus, in line with Pope John Paul II, this piece uses the term Social Doctrine and Social Teaching interchangeably. It will examine such issues as the proper terminology Social Teaching or Social Doctrine, Origin, Sources and Aim of the Catholic Social Doctrine. The Church's competence in the Social Doctrine will be examined and how and when Catholic Social Doctrine became a systematized corpus. Special attention will be paid to some Papal Encyclicals before we look Vatican II and Post-Vatican II on Catholic Social Doctrine.

THE ORIGIN OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE

Catholic social doctrine as a 'corpus' as we have it today has not always been. However, the origin of the Catholic social teaching can be traced back to the very

beginning of Christianity. It has always been part of the Church's proclamation of the Good News of salvation to all nations. The Church in her condemnation of social evils, right from the beginning has always made reference to prophet Amos of old and our Lord Jesus Christ. Early Christian writers were not left out in this enterprise. For instance, in his letter to the Romans, St. Paul reflected upon the relationship between Christians and the State (*Rom. 13:1-7*). The Fathers of the Church, such as: St. Ambrose of Milan, St. Augustine of Hippo, Basil the Great, Clement of Alexandria and many others contributed immensely to the maturing of a social doctrine inspired by the Gospel. They showed their concern about social issues especially in the area of the morality of warfare and the ownership of property.

SOURCES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE

The Catholic Church derives her social doctrine from three basic sources, viz., the Sacred Scripture, Tradition, and the Natural Law.

a. The Sacred Scripture

The Church's norms of behaviour are drawn from the Scriptures. These norms she applies to the social, political and economic life. For example, the biblical teaching on charity, universal solidarity, the freedom of God's children, personal dignity and so on. The Church appropriates and explains fundamental principles (or objective norms), and in this way shows the harmony between revealed truth and right reason, which should govern human acts both in the political and socio-economic life.

b. Tradition

The term *tradition* refers to those beliefs, teachings, and practices, which the Church *hands on* from one generation to the other. In the words of Vatican II, it states: "Now, what was handed down on by the apostles includes everything which contributes to the holiness of life, and the increase of faith of the people of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life, and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes"⁵ From this too the Church draws her norms of behaviour.

c. Natural Law

This is that unwritten law which tells us to do good and avoid evil, to which St. Paul alluded in *Rom. 2:14ff*. The Conciliar Fathers also observed: "Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and do what is good and to avoid evil, tells him at the right moment: do this; shun that. For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. His dignity lies in observing this law...."⁶

AIM OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE

Writing from his wealth of knowledge and experience, Ojakaminor asserts convincingly that:

"The aim of the Church's social doctrine is to interpret the

complex human realities in society, determining their conformity with, or divergence from, the lives of the gospel teaching on man and his vocation, a vocation which is at once earthly and transcendent; its aim is thus to guide Christian behaviour.”⁷

REASONS FOR THE CHURCH'S COMPETENCE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

There have been objections from within and outside the Catholic fold to the Church's right and competence on social issues. Some scholars are of the view that the Church “goes beyond its area of competence when it claims that it has something to say in the socio-economic field, which is not of a religious and cultic nature... but belongs exclusively to the competence of civil society and the State.”⁸ In spite of this objection and others, the Church's right and competence in social matters is affirmed by the following reasons:

i. **The Church's Evangelizing Mission**

The Church derives its competence from the fact that Jesus Christ entrusted her with the mission of proclaiming the message of salvation to all people with authority. This evangelizing mission of the Church is *raison d'être* of the Church since the Church came from mission and exists solely for the purpose of carrying out mission. This message is “concerned with man in the totality of his being and action; it concerns both his private and public life and his relationship with others, and therefore, his life and behaviour. It concerns society, i.e., the institutions and social structures which man establishes with others.”⁹ By the fact of her mission, she has been empowered to intervene in temporal questions with which the daily life of man and society are interwoven.

ii. **To Direct and Guide the Human Person Ethically**

Another reason for the Church's right and competence in social matters is derived from the fact that social and economic problems on which she makes her pronouncements necessarily have a moral aspect. Even though the social life, politics and the economy have their own proper laws according to which they function, they are not independent of the moral law. The Church strongly believes that it is part of her mission to explain, interpret, proclaim and defend the moral law.

iii. **Our Pluralistic Society**

In pointing out the reasons for the Church's right and competence in social issues, Ojakaminor states emphatically:

The Church's right to speak on public matters arises also from the fact that we live in a pluralistic society. It would no longer be appropriate to speak of a pluralist society if any sector of that society, such as the Church, were to be excluded from the process of

molding public opinion. Thus the church provides society with ethical guidance needed for a well-ordered and peaceful society. The service which she offers to the society through the social doctrine is to present the gospel; the light which illuminates the road of a social progress worthy of man, in which every human person is recognized as a living image of God.¹⁰

CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

The Canon Law and the *summae* of the theologians of the medieval times showed that social teaching has always been part of the Church's mission. For instance, "the doctrine of the just price, the prohibition of usury (*understood in the sense of taking interest on non-productive loans*), the safeguards against monopoly, the rules for apprentices, and the codes of the master craftsmen."¹¹ All these reflected the primacy of morals in economic life. Although not belonging to the medieval period, the works of Bartolomé de Las Casas and Francisco Vitoria of the sixteenth century are worth mentioning. Both were Spanish Dominicans. They wrote vigorously about the problems of colonization and the treatment of the indigenous population in the territories newly conquered by Spain.¹² Therefore, it is obvious that the both saints and scholars have addressed the social problems encountered by the Church at the period in history.

Prior to the time when social teaching became a detailed and systematized doctrine in the Church, social problems were addressed under moral theology. In other words, there was no clear distinction between moral and social issues. Then, the question is, how and when did social doctrine become a *corpus* of its own?

CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE AS A SYSTEMATIZED CORPUS

There are three great developments that led the Church to officially formulate her Social Doctrine detached and differentiated from moral theology. These events include:

- i. the Industrial Revolution
- ii. the rise of a free market economy (*in which values are determined solely by the law of demand and supply*), and
- iii. the birth of Economics as an independent Science all occurring toward the end of the 18th century.

The first official expression of the Church's social doctrine was exposed by the Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (On the condition of the working classes, 15 May 1891). This was the document that laid the foundations for a just solution to the serious problems of human life, which go under the name of the 'social question'.¹³ This encyclical is considered the *magna charta* of Christian social activity. It came as a response to the social evils of the industrial revolution of the 19th century. It centers on the condition of the working classes. *Rerum Novarum* is not just the first of the modern social encyclicals but the first social encyclical because Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) was the first bishop of Rome to address himself to the

socio-economic issues and formulated principles and guidelines for a just solution in an official document in the form of an encyclical. It, therefore, constitutes a dynamic reference point of the Church's doctrine and social action in the modern world.

Rerum Novarum was followed by Pope Pius XI's encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931 (The Reconstruction of the Social Order), published on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. Pope Pius XI's social encyclical was born out of a felt need by the Church, in order "to promote a greater awareness, a more precise interpretation, and an urgent application of the moral law governing human relations, with the intention of overcoming the conflict between classes, and arriving at a new social order based on justice and charity."¹⁴ The document addressed the issue of social injustice, reaffirmed the right and duty of the Church to address social issues. It condemned *capitalism* for its unregulated competition and *communism* for its promotion of class struggle. It pointed out the positive role of the governments in promoting the economic good of all people in the society. A cursory look at the historical antecedents *Rerum Novarum* is ad rem here.

THE ENCYCLICAL-*RERUM NOVARUM*

The historical event that gave birth to Pope Leo XIII's social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* in May, 1891 was the Industrial Revolutions, which defined and marked the era of the encyclical. The Industrial Revolution brought in its wake a situation of abject poverty for the poor masses. There was a tiny group of extravagantly rich men and a great multitude of non-propertied workers whose situations were little better than slavery itself. In responding to this dehumanizing situation, the socialists proposed common ownership of goods; In other words, a classless society where all would be equal. A situation that would promote class struggles and in the end eliminates private ownership of property. Also the guild of artisans which in the 18th century protected the interest of the workers had been abolished. The workers were thus left at the mercy of their employers. It was in this *sitz-em-leben* that Pope Leo XIII wrote *Rerum Novarum*.

The principle focus of the encyclical is to be seen in its very title, on the condition of workers. The Pope notes at the beginning of his work that the great upheavals occurring in his time encompassed both political and economic domain. For him the unfavourable conditions of the workers and the socialist solution were important signs of his time. Added to this was the strong Catholic Social Movement "from below" calling for a Christian solution to stop the excesses of industrialization and the threat of socialism. All these prompted the Pope a prophetic stand through his historic encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. The document made an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic situation of its day. Pope Leo XIII stood alongside the proletariat, seeing in them human beings created in God's image, and as such supposed to be respected.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF POPE PIUS XI

Pope Pius XI's seventeen years pontificate (Feb., 1922 Feb., 1939) did not pass by without any social encyclical. The famous encyclical was *Quadragesimo*

Anno, (*The Social Order*, May 15, 1931), which was considered as the second great social encyclical. It was written to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*.¹⁵ *Quadragesimo Anno*, a worthy successor to *Rerum Novarum*, came at a time when the developments of industrial society had already led to an enormous and ever-growing concentration of strength and power in the socio-economic spheres. As a living witness to this dehumanizing situation of his time, Pius XI felt the duty and responsibility to set out a new social order.

His *Quadragesimo Anno* has the same sense of moral outrage at the suffering of the poor as found in *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII. The new social encyclical sets out to vindicate and develop the teaching of *Rerum Novarum*. Pius XI like Leo XIII (his predecessor) rejects *communism* and *socialism*.¹⁶ He gave an overall view of industrial society and production of his time, he stressed on the need for both *capital* and *labour* to contribute to production and economic organization. The encyclical sets up the conditions for the re-establishment of the social order. It favours the principles of solidarity and collaboration inspired by the attempts made to overcome social antinomies through the cooperative system. It warns that the failure to respect freedom of association and action could compromise its desired goal. In summary, the aim of the encyclical was that of overcoming the conflict between classes and then arrive at a new social order based on justice and charity.

THE SOCIAL ACTION OF POPE PIUS XII

Although throughout his papacy (1939-1958), Pope Pius XII did not write any social encyclical, however, he did intervene authoritatively in the social problems of his time with a wide series of discourses. Among these, his Radio Messages (1941 and 1942) are particularly important. In these messages, he outlined the just international order necessary for global peace. He encouraged the cooperation, which resulted in the institution of the United Nations. His vision accounts for the long-standing support given to the United Nations by the Church's social teaching.¹⁷

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF POPE JOHN XXIII

After Pope Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno*, it took the Church 30 years to issue another social encyclical. It was issued by Pope John XXIII. His social encyclical, *Mater et Magistra*, 1961 (Christianity and Social Progress) and *Pacem in Terris*, 1963 (Peace on Earth) were prompted by the new social problems faced by the Church after the second World War. These problems, which involved all classes and countries, motivated the international society to beckon on the Church to proffer some solutions. Therefore, the "problems of the modern era" became the object of the Church's reflection and pastoral action of Her social magisterium.

In the above two social encyclicals, Pope John XXIII set forth a number of principles to guide both Christians and policy makers in addressing the gap between the rich and the poor nations and the threats to the world peace. He called on committed Christians and all people of good will, to work together to create local, national and global institutions, which would both respect human dignity and promote justice and peace.

VATICAN II AND CATHOLIC SOCIAL DOCTRINE

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), convoked by Pope John XXIII undoubtedly constitutes the greatest reform operation ever carried out in the Church in recent times. This is not only because of the number of Council Fathers, and the unanimity of the voting, which often exceeded all previous records, but above all because of the vast scope of the subjects treated. It is quite interesting to note that just nine days after the Council began, the Council Fathers issued a short but significant "Message to Humanity". In it they noted two issues of special urgency which they saw facing them *peace* and *social justice*;¹⁸ and these issues were eventually treated in *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), and *Dignitatis Humanae* (DH).

One important contribution of Vatican II to socio-political questions is the attempt to offer a solid theological basis for its practical directives. Among the more successful instances of this are the Council's statements on religious liberty (DH), on peace (GS, # 78), on human work (GS, # 33-39, 67), on the nature of, and the need for human authority (GS, # 74), and on the relationship of the Church to the world (GS, # 40-44). The document *Gaudium et Spes* looks at the outside world and the social questions therein. In fact, the opening statement of the document expresses the position of the Church. The Church declares in #1 "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish ... are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ." In this document, the Church looks at the Social question of the modern world and expresses solicitude for the less privileged.

Gaudium et Spes on Peace and Justice

1. Peace does not just happen, though in one sense, a God-given gift to society. Still, it has to be brought about by human commitment and effort, (GS, # 78).
2. Peace is not attained once for all but has to be constantly defended, renewed, and brought near to the ideal, (GS, 3 78).
3. Peace is firmly linked to justice; also, it is the passionate desire (*thirst*) for justice that motivates people to work for peace.

Moreso, the document does not speak of justice simply as putting right of "political" grievances. It extends to the whole economic order. Its' paragraph "83-87" goes on to treat of international cooperation in the economic field. The document helps to make it clear that there are not two distinct international questions, one about peace and the other about economic. The two are the same question. The document affirms the teaching of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church on the need to liberate the poor (GS, # 69).

The Political Community and The Church

This section of *Gaudium et Spes* brings out what may be considered as the most important step of Vatican II towards the adoption of a prophetic role on matters of social justice. On the relationship between the Church and political authorities, the Council Fathers state:

The Church ... does not rest its hopes on privileges offered to it by civil authorities; indeed it will even give up the exercise of certain

legitimately acquired rights in situations where it has been established that their use calls in to question the sincerity of its witness or where new circumstances require a different arrangement.¹⁹

It is the principles enunciated in the document *Gaudium et Spes* *inter alia* that prompted the Latin American Church to adopt a very different posture on social matters that of disengaging itself from embracing the privileged elites and to challenge structural injustice. In other words, it was *Gaudium et Spes* that provided the foundation on which was built the Latin American Church's formal commitment to taking "an option for the poor".²⁰

SOCIAL DOCTRINE IN THE POST VATICAN II CHURCH

Since Vatican II, the Popes and the bishops have recognized that the Church has neither immediate nor universally valid solutions to all the complex and pressing problems of the society. However, three documents have contributed to the Church's present understanding of its new responsibilities. The documents are as follows:

- i. Pope Paul VI's encyclical letter, *Populorum Progressio*, 1967" (The Development of Peoples).
- ii. Pope Paul VI's apostolic letter, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 1971" (A Call to Action).
- iii. Synod of Bishops' document, *Iustia in Mundo*, 1971" (Justice in the World).

Populorum Progressio was a response to the cries of the world's poor and hungry. The document addressed the structural dimensions of global injustice. During this time, Paul VI set a Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace for the promotion of the right of all to integral human development. This was an act that has given birth to what is today known as Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) in almost all the dioceses in Nigeria; an organ through which the Catholic Church in Nigeria confronts in the face different forms of injustices.

Octogesima Adveniens was written on the eightieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. In it, Paul VI pointed out the roles of the local Christian communities in meeting the responsibility of establishing a just social order. While in *Iustia in Mundo*, the Bishops assert, thus:

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.²¹

CONCLUSION

From the historical survey given above, one can see that history itself has really contributed so much to the development of the Catholic social doctrine. Yet, this work would be incomplete without mentioning the contributions of our present Pontiff, Pope John Paul II. In his *Dives Misericordia*, 1980" (Rich in Mercy), he presented

mercy as a social love, and demonstrated its close link to justice. Also, in his *Laborem Exercens*, 1981, (On Human Works), he criticized an "economism" which would reduce humans to mere instruments of production. Thus, the Catholic Social Doctrine just like any other science has grown and developed over the years as reading other signs of the times, the Church speaks on contemporary issues in the evil society.

Conclusively, seeing the importance and the needs to study and teach the Church's social doctrine, the Congregation for Catholic Education issued in 1988, the "Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests." This goes a long way to show the importance that the Church attach to Her social doctrine in the modern world, which keeps presenting different kinds of social problems to the Church.

Endnotes

1. Masse, L. Benjamin, Justice for All An Introduction to Social Teaching of the Catholic Church. The Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, 1964, 13.
- 2 Cf. R. Etchegaray "Esiste Una 'Dottrina Sociale' della Chiesa?" in Messaggio Sociale nell Insegnamento Sociale di Giovanni Paolo II, (Milano: Scuola Di Dottrina, 1988), Vol. 8, 46.
3. *Mater et Magistra*, # 58-59.
- 4 *Gaudium et Spes*, # 76.
- 5 *Dei Verbum*, # 8
- 6 *Gaudium et Spes*, # 16.
- 7 Ojakamonor, Catholic Social Doctrine, 27.
- 8 Ojakaminor, E., Catholic Social Doctrine An Introductory Manual, Paulines Publications Africa, 1996, 55.
- 9 Ojakamonor, 67.
- 10 Ojakaminor, 73.
- 11 Masses, , L. Benjamin, Justice for All An Introduction to Social Teaching of the Catholic Church. The Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, 1964, 13.
- 12 Ojakaminor, E., Catholic Social Doctrine An Introductory Manual, Paulines Publications Africa, 1996, 22.
- 13 Ojakaminor, *Ibid.*, 23.
- 14 Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests. Congregation for Catholic Education, Rome, 1988, 24.
- 15 Dorr, Donal. Option for the Poor, Orbis Books, New York, 1983, 57.
- 16 *Quadragesimo Anno*, # 112, 117-120.
- 17 Henriat J, and Others, Catholic Social Teaching, Orbis Books, New York, 1987, 8.
- 18 Dorr, Donal. Option for the Poor, Orbis Books, New York, 1983, 117.
- 19 *Gaudium et Spes*, # 76.5
- 20 Door, Donal, Option for the Poor, Orbis Books, New York, 1983, 138.
- 21 Synod Document *Iustitia in Mundo* #6.