

YOU AND THE COMMON GOOD



PASTORAL LETTER 2007

OF

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YOU AND THE COMMON GOOD

1. INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE

With gratitude To God and to the great Onitsha Archdiocesan Family, I recall some events of last year 2006 which marked the Silver Jubilee of my ordination to the sacred priesthood. The way the Archdiocese celebrated the sacerdotal silver jubilee for my classmates, and for myself in particular with great sacrifices and prayers calls for gratitude, humility, greater commitment and renewed dedication on our part. It is at the same time a challenge and an encouragement. May the blessings of the Jubilee abide with our great Archdiocese, now and always, through Christ Our Lord.

In grateful acknowledgement, I remember the enthusiasm with which the priests, the men and women of consecrated life and members of Christ's lay faithful have followed our recent pastoral initiatives. There is greater involvement in the Cathedralicum, the youth programs, the youth hostels, and many more.

Many young priests have volunteered their services for the more difficult areas of the archdiocese and as Fidei Donum to other dioceses. May God be gracious to you.

Let me thank all of you for the warm reception given to the Acta and the pastoral exhortations from our first Archdiocesan Synod as well as my last year's pastoral letter on Faith.

The extensive use of the pastoral letter, "If only you have faith", in parishes and institutions has encouraged me to share my meditation and thoughts on another very vital topic, namely, "The common good"

2. CHOICE OF THEME:

The challenges and hope of the year 2007 – as a year of elections – in our country, Nigeria, call for sober reflections on our civic duties towards our country, our state and our communities.

God has blessed our country with great human and natural resources. But the present social atmosphere of rampant corruption, deteriorating material conditions, declining sense of responsibility towards the society, poor attitude towards the cherished values, wealth and legacies of the society,

growing culture of selfishness, violence and lawlessness seem to be dragging our society backward.

Many patriotic and good willed citizens are disturbed by the discouraging trend of events. Our political terrain seems to be the worst hit. The Catholic Bishops of Nigeria have observed as follows:

“Our nation continues to drift from one avoidable crisis to another. The specter of economic stagnation, political disintegration and social unrest stares us in the face. Warnings from many angles, seem to be falling on deaf ears. Those who have volunteered to rule us are still to prove to the nation that they have vision, will and moral credentials to do what needs to be done. The people are paying the high price of poverty, misery, disease, anxiety and despair. In the name of God, let the nation find its way quickly back to the sure course of meaningful democratic good government.”! (cf CBCN, save the family and save the nation, 1994, P1)

Many conversations today center on the seemingly hopeless situation of our country and our state in particular. Some of such discussions end up in despair. But despair, apathy or mere criticisms cannot be a solution to the problem.

Consequently, we need to examine our attitude towards the society itself, towards those things the society owns together, and reflect on our God given responsibility towards these, and towards the betterment of all. The above informs our choice of topic and the urgency of this pastoral letter.

This write up will limit itself to the definition of common good, the foundation of Common Good, our attitude to the common good and how to promote the common good. These will be followed by concluding remarks and prayer.

3. EXPLANATION OF TERMS:

The Concept of good and Common Good.

The good as a concept is a very general term with many meanings. With respect to human desire, St. Thomas Aquinas defines the good as what everybody desires. While with reference to being, Aristotle and scholastic philosophers see good as a transcendental property of being. That is, good is a quality which the existence of everything presupposes. It means that whatever is, is good. Being is generally good, while evil is a defect in being. What is good is desirable, praiseworthy, durable, peaceful... and attractive.

Different types of good:

There are varieties or different types of good. Good can be spiritual or material; It can be intellectual or corporeal; habitual or occasional, intrinsic and non-intrinsic, earthly or celestial; private or public.

Spiritual good: These are goods pertaining to the spirit, like piety, faith, hope and love.

Material good: This refers to matter or tangible goods, like most of the things we see and touch for example cars, house, computer etc.

Intellectual good: This concerns the human mind and the valuable products of the human intellect, for example reflection, study, meditation.

Corporal good: This refers to the good of the body especially the human body, for example, health, longevity, fitness, beauty.

Habitual good; The tendency to do good things repeatedly and effortlessly. It is called virtue.

Occasional good: Good deeds done by chance or as an accident.

Intrinsic and Non-intrinsic good: An intrinsic good is something valuable in and of itself while a non-intrinsic good is something valuable by virtue of its relationship to an intrinsic good. For example, if health is considered an intrinsic, good then medicine and surgery would be non-intrinsic or instrumental goods.

Earthly and Celestial good: Earthly good pertains to this world only, while celestial good refers to or is understood in reference to the hereafter, for example eternal salvation, heavenly beatitude etc.

Moral good: The different types of good become truly useful to man only when they are translated into moral good. Moral good is also called ethical good,

Ethics distinguishes between three types of good:

- a. Perfective or moral good
- b. Delectable or pleasurable good
- c. Useful or physical good

Perfective good: This is that object of desire which makes man more a man. Such acts perfect man's substance, faculties and skills. Good habit is an example. Perfective good makes the human person a good man, not merely clever, intelligent, capable or skilled. It makes man entirely good as it perfects the whole being.

Delectable or pleasurable good: This is the pleasure or satisfaction which one experiences upon the fulfillment of a want or the exercise of a faculty. This is merely to induce us to seek our proper perfective goods. Pleasure sought for the sake of pleasure is unreasonable.

Physical or Useful good: Useful good is only a means to a perfective good or pleasure. Useful good and delectable good become moral good when they are sought in subordination to perfective good. Useful good and pleasure should not be made the sole end of a man's action. Useful and pleasurable good are meant to assist man attain perfective or moral goodness.

4. THE COMMON GOOD:

In all, Good can be broadly divided into common good and individual good. Common refers to the generality of the members of a group, a community, a village, a town, a profession, a country, a continent, the whole world. Commonality is relative to the sense in which one speaks. Here our sense of common good embraces all, depending on the specific area that is spoken of. The school system as a common good, for example, has immediate reference to our children, but then by extension to our community, our country and eventually to the whole world. St. Paul tells us that the life and death of each one of us has its influence on others. Common good here means aspects of the good which is not strictly individual. Those things which in common understanding belong to the community as a whole and not to the individual can rightly be called common good. For example, a teacher's salary is at his or her disposal as an individual, but the money to equip the school laboratory belongs to the sphere of the common good. The monthly emolument of a political leader is his (or hers), but the budget of the state of assembly or ministry is for him to administer for the good of all not for his own benefit alone.

The fathers of the Second Vatican Council defined common good as "The sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily" (GS no. 26)

Common good involves rights and obligations on the part of individuals and groups. Every group must take into account the needs and legitimate aspirations of every other group, and still more of the human family as a whole. (Ibid)

The idea of the common good is based on the intrinsic dignity of the human person created in the image of God and the social nature of man who is always part of a society, beginning with the family of birth to the larger society

like his neighbourhood, town, state, country and the entire world. The true nature of the human person as a member of a society who builds and expands social organizations, facilities and institutions for the satisfaction and fulfillment of man imposes an obligation in justice for men to respect the private goods of other individuals and their common good.

According to the Venerable Fathers of the Vatican Council II, the role of the common good brings about “ a growing awareness of the sublime dignity of the human person, who stands above all things and whose rights and duties are universal and inviolable. Man ought, therefore, to have ready access to all that is necessary for living a genuinely human life: for example, food, clothing, housing, the right freely to choose his state of life and set up a family, the right to education, work, to his good name, to respect, to proper knowledge, the right to act according to the dictates of conscience and to safeguard his privacy and rightful freedom even in matters of religion” (GS no.26)

From the on-going we can say in very simple terms that common good refers to those values and concerns which belong to a community and not to a specific individual. They are values which contribute to the welfare of the community while at the same time taking care of the needs of the individual. The cardinal point of this teaching, Pope John XXIII explains, “is that individual men are necessarily the foundation, cause, and end of all social institutions” (John XXIII, Mater et Magisteria no. 219). This principle is based on human beings, in so far as they are social by nature, and raised to an order of existence that transcends and subdues nature through the redemptive work of Christ,

When closely examined, common good has three essential elements namely: Respect for the person and his dignity, Social well-being and social development of human communities, and peace among men based on truth, justice, charity and freedom.

5. BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF COMMON GOOD

The concept of the common good shines brightly from biblical foundations. It echoes from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4:32-36) which reflects apostolic practice at its best and articulates the finest point of the community life of the early Christians - namely "From one and all according to their ability to one and all according to their needs".

Here the sacred author reminds us that the group of believers was one in mind and heart. None of them said that any of their belongings were their

own, but they all shared with one another everything they had... and God poured rich blessings on them all. There was no one in the group who was in need. Those who owned fields or houses would sell them... and the money distributed according to the needs of the people. (cf Acts 4:32ff)

The above has no prejudice to ownership of private property which encourages hard work and responsibility. It only goes to say that the goods of this earth are for the use of all.

The account of creation in the book of Genesis gives us a very clear picture of the creator's purpose and intentions. After creation, God saw all that he made, and found them very good (Gen. 1:31). The creator God, a trusting God and a benign master handed over his creation to his creatures (man and woman) to take care of. Hence, He made such statements like; "Be fruitful and multiply", "Fill the earth and conquer it". Again, in giving our first parents duty of naming the animals (cf Gen, 1:28; 1:26; 2:19), He delegated authority to them. In all these, it is clear that God wanted man to be the Lord of creation, to subject the world to God's purpose, not to destroy the world but to increase the goodness with which God has created the world. God entrusted to man the duty to lead the world and everything in it to the overall good of man and to the glory of God. Hence, man was given the injunction to replenish the earth, subdue it and have dominion over everything in it.

Consequently, the good of the world belongs to God. Man is the trustee, a caretaker, a messenger. Therefore, man must give account of his stewardship. Sometimes man forgets and behaves as the master or he behaves like that servant in the parable who thinks his master is long in coming and then goes on to misuse his responsibility (Mtt. 24:48)

The common purpose of created goods is evident from the bible. God's creation, the world, is intended for the well-being and benefit of all. It is not for the use of one person alone or that of a group of individuals. Thus, there is need for order and regulation in our natural desire for the good. Commenting on this, the great Pontiff Pope John Paul II says that the world's resources are enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed, God's love for his children is equal, he has no favorites as he pours out his spirit on Jews and Gentiles alike (cf Acts 10:44). Thus, God does not intend that all the good things he created should belong to or be monopolized by one person or only a few persons.

The community of God's children precludes the idea of excessive acquisition of goods by some and extreme deprivation of others. We are all members of the same family. God is the father of all, we are thus like members of a

nuclear family with God as our father. God's family does not cease to be a family with expansion. We all, therefore, are like branches grafted in God, "I am the vine you are the branches" (Jn. 15:5). Thus, the good of the world is intricately communal by God's intention. Hence, only an unjust order will permit a few to wallow in plenty while the rest die of hunger. Every man of good will understands this. There are things that by their nature must be used privately, but there are many other things which are ordained for the benefit of the whole family of God.

The importance of the common good hinges on the fact that the world is intended to enable human beings fulfill their ultimate end according to God's plans. It is not meant for some with the exclusion of others

In the gospels, the Holy writ makes it clear that the divine master was solicitous for the overall well-being of the human person.

Hence, he came that we may have life in abundance (Jn; 10:10). He saw himself as the one whom the spirit of the Lord had anointed not only to bring good news to the poor but also to proclaim freedom to captives, to recover sight to the blind; to set the oppressed free... (Lk 4:18-20).

Pope John XXIII tells us that the teaching of Christ joins, as it were, earth with heaven, in that it embraces the whole man, namely, his soul and body, intellect and will ... (Mater et Magistra, no.2). Christ refers primarily to man's eternal salvation when he says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; (Jn 14:6) and elsewhere "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8:12). However, on other occasions, seeing the hungry crowd, He was moved to exclaim sorrowfully, "I have compassion on the crowd, (Mk 8:2), thereby indicating that he was also concerned about the earthly needs of mankind. The divine Redeemer shows this care not only by his words but also by the actions of his life, as when 10 alleviate the hunger of the crowds, he more than once miraculously multiplied bread (Mater et Magistra, no. 4).

It is good to note that the divine Lord and Master worked his first miracle at a wedding feast at Cana in Galilee (Jn 2:3-9). He provided the guests with wine, saved the host from shame and demonstrated his concern for the well-being of the people.

6. COMMON GOOD IN THE TEACHINGS AND LIFE OF THE CHURCH:

Though the Holy Church has the special task of sanctifying souls and of making them sharers of heavenly blessings, she is also solicitous for the requirements of men in their daily lives, not only those relating to food and sustenance, but also to their comfort and advancement in various kinds of

goods and in varying circumstances of time. (MM, no.3). The church following the teachings and life of her divine founder has continued to provide not only spiritual needs but social and material goods as well.

The church from her earliest beginning showed a deep understanding of the responsibility God has given to man, to protect, nurture and spread the common good for the benefit of all. In the Acts of the Apostles as we have already mentioned, the followers of Christ were united with one heart and one mind. One obvious sign of this was their common sharing of all material belongings, so that each received as he needed and contributed as he could. The fact that there were some problems even at this early stage, for example the case of Ananias and Saphira, (Acts 5:1-5) and the complaint of the Gentiles is a warning to all of us that the natural desire for what is good could become inordinate and lead to greed, lies and covetousness.

In spite of difficulties, the Church has never relented in promoting the consciousness of our responsibility to foster the common good.

In the words of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, “The church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the state. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. The church has to play her part and reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper. (Deus caritas est, no.28).

The church has continued to do the work of promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good. This is shown in her various teachings and pastoral actions more loudly articulated in various papal encyclicals on social issues. These Encyclicals include:

Rerum Novarum of Leo XIII (1891)

Quadragesimo Anno of Pius XI (1931)

Mater et Magistra of John XXIII (1961)

Pacem in Terris of John XXIII (1963)

Populorum Progressio of Paul VI (1967)

Octogesima Adveniens of Paul VI (1971) (An Apostolic letter)

Laborem Exercens of John Paul II (1981)

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis of John Paul II (1987)

Centesimus Annus of John Paul II (1991)

Moreover, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries many religious orders were founded in the Church to combat poverty, disease, and address the need for better education. The Fathers of the Vatican Council II echoed the teachings of the Church on social questions especially in their document on The Church in the modern world, published in 1966. The Pontiff Paul VI set up a Pontifical commission in the church's central administration, charged with encouraging social justice among nations and offering to less developed nations the means whereby they can further their own progress. In the year 2004, the Pontifical council Justice and Peace published a compendium of the social Doctrine of the Church while in the year 2006, Pope Benedict XVI published his brilliant Encyclical, *Deus caritas est*, part of which addressed the social question.

In all these teachings and pastoral actions, the Church tries to shed the light of the gospel on the social problems of the time.

True to the teaching and example of her divine founder who cited the preaching of the gospel to the poor as a sign of his mission (Lk 7:22), the church has fostered the human progress of nations. Through her missionaries the church has built not only churches but also hostels, hospitals, schools and Universities (cf. *Populorum Progressio*, no.12).

Rerum Novarum;

Through the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* the Church addressed the question of workers' condition and tried to resolve the problem in conformity with Christian principles. Pope Leo re-asserted the intrinsic dignity of man and called for a flexible and expanded range of concerns on the part of the Government. It was so well written that seventy years later, Pope John XXIII said that the memories of this document will never fall into oblivion. As a result, the plight of workers changed not only in Italy but throughout Europe.

Quadragesimo Anno:

To commemorate the fortieth year of *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Pius XI wrote the above Encyclical reaffirming the teachings contained in *Rerum Novarum* which by then had long become the Magna Charta for the reconstruction of economic and social order and has contributed to the establishment of a new section of legal science known as labour law.

Here Pope Pius XI called for a redefinition of the norms of the common good.

Mater et Magistra And Pacem In Terris

In these two Encyclicals among other points, the Pope insists that a human person has intrinsic and inviolable rights based on human dignity. The human person transcends and takes priority over every political association. It is not contingent on political or economic systems.

The Pope further insists that the common good evolves with economic prosperity. Common good is not static. Distributive justice calls for a share by all of the economic bonus. The norms of the common good he says must have regard for the individual person.

Populorum Progressio:

Pope Paul VI summarized the Church's concern for the common good in this great encyclical *On The Development of Peoples*. Here, the Pope notes that "The progressive development of people is an object of deep interest and concern to the church. This is particularly true in the case of those people who are trying to escape the ravages of hunger, poverty, endemic disease and ignorance, of those who are seeking a larger share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities, of those who are consciously striving for fuller growth" (*Populorum Progressio*, no. 1)

In this document the Pope condemned what he called the scandal of glaring inequalities in the enjoyment of possessions and more in the exercise of power. He further stated that exclusive pursuit of possessions is an obstacle to individual fulfillment and to man's true greatness since both for nations and individuals, avarice is the most evident form of moral underdevelopment.

He finally concluded by calling for a New Humanism where such higher values of love, friendship, prayer and contemplation would be enthroned.

6. VATICAN II AND THE COMMON GOOD

From the time of the Vatican Council II, the Council Fathers and the Popes have led the Church and the entire human family in the pursuit of new humanism. They have proposed a world where justice would be the norm, where human rights would be respected, human dignity affirmed and the common good proportionately shared. The church has become more deeply aware of the social responsibility which the gospel of Christ imposed on her.

In the words of the great Pontiff, Pope John Paul II, "The Church by reason of her role and competence, is not identified with any political community nor

bound by ties to any political system. Yet at the same time, it is important that all work in the general interest and for the common good. The political community and the Church each serve the personal and social vocation of the same human beings. This service will redound the more effectively to the welfare of all insofar as both institutions practice better co-operation" (John Paul II, Address to the Bishops Conference of France, no 3).

The Church makes it clear to the human family that the common good of a single political community can no longer be achieved in isolation from the rest.

Hence since the Vatican Council II, the church has not relented in fulfilling her social responsibilities. Nevertheless, she makes it clear that she is not a political party rather what animates her social duties is love which is her deepest nature which she expresses in her ministry of Charity.

According to Pope Benedict XVI, the charitable mission of the church is informed by her belief that human and divine love are inseparable. This is why believers and nonbelievers can come together to fight poverty and injustice. The church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the administration of the sacraments and proclamation of the word. (cf. *Deus caritas est* no.22)

7. COMMON GOOD: FOUNDATION IN IGBO TRADITION

Like the Church, the traditional Igbo believes in common brotherhood. Though individualistic in attitude, they understand that man is not an island, and that the world is not there only for the benefit of those who can conquer others. Thus, even in the case of war, the Igbo never practiced predatory occupation and exploitation of conquered people. In their communities, there was high level of public spiritedness; what belonged to all was preserved, developed and shared to all. Land was given to those who needed it. People came together to work for somebody who needed helping hands in his farmland. Streams and roads were cleared by able bodied men and women for the common good. In Igbo republicanism, every adult had a say in the affairs of the community. Public offices attracted no salary at all, and it was considered an honour to work selflessly for the benefit of the community at large.

This is an aspect of life where we can still learn a great deal from our traditional culture. The basis for the attitude the traditional Igbo developed and imbibed was belongingness to the same ancestors, to the same arch-patriarchs, and the same leaders of clan. There is in their attitude a

recognition that rapaciousness with regard to what is desirable is not beneficial to the community and not to the individual. This attitude is very much akin to Christianity which succeeded in universalizing it.

Christianity has of course a higher message and reason namely that we are all one family under God.

8. GOVERNMENT AS THE CUSTODIAN OF COMMON GOOD

Government has been defined as "This concrete system through which the common good of the state is attained. (cf New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol 6). Thus the provision of common good is an essential part of any Government. Though good governance and the promotion of the common good are not the exclusive responsibility of government since other actors such as individuals, families, private sector and the church are involved (cf *Bishop Lucius I. Ugorji, Good Governance, 2006, pg 13), the Holy Father reminds us that "the just ordering of society and the state is a central responsibility of politics" (Deus caritas est, no 28) Further, quoting St. Augustine, the Pope Benedict XVI states that "a state which is not governed according to justice would be just a bunch of thieves" (Ibid). Giving more details he explains that justice is both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics. Politics is more than a mere mechanism for defining the rules of public life; its origin and its goal are found in justice, which by its very nature has to do with ethics. The state must face the question of how justice can be achieved here and now (Deus caritas est, no.28)

It follows that the true test of the success of any Government is its ability to maintain a just society and provide common good to its citizens.

The state operates through the system or structure called government. In a democratic setting the government has three arms namely the legislative, the judiciary and the executive. These work together to shape and implement public policies for the interest of the common good. When the executive or any other arm of the government acts recklessly without regard for the people and their common good as they sometimes do in Nigeria, then they do not deserve the name government.

In order words, government can be described as a process through which the people seek to achieve and maximize their common good which enables them solve common problems that inevitably arise in the course of social living. Thus, the sole aim of government is to help human beings achieve a more fulfilling life both individuals and as a group.

The inability of government to play her proper role in the provision of common good has resulted in untold hardship for the people especially in developing countries.

In many states of Nigeria, the inability of the state and federal governments to provide good health-care-delivery, potable water, constant electricity supply, good roads, functional telecommunications system, affordable standard educational system... and many more have more than reduced the quality of life of the people.

In essence and function government remains the custodian of the common good.

9. INDIVIDUAL OBLIGATION TOWARDS THE COMMON GOOD

The human person by nature is an individual-in-society. Every man is a member of the human society starting from the family community into which he is born to the larger community to which he lives and works. Justice demands that we respect the private goods of individuals and their common good.

As members of the larger society, the demands of justice compel each one to contribute his due share to the common good as determined by law of God and man and each one is entitled to a proportionate share in the social advantages. One is to prefer the common good to his individual good except when there is danger of losing the Supreme good- which is God himself

Social justice demands that each one contributes to the welfare of the society, to further the development of the society and safeguard the common good. Belonging to the community brings both benefits and obligations. Sharing in both is part of life and membership of the community. To shun our legitimate duties and still expect our benefits from the community tantamount to bad membership and makes one a nuisance.

It is necessary for individuals to pay their taxes, obey just laws, work hard in their places of work, join approved associations and trade unions, protect public property and render services that can contribute to the betterment of the society. Christians called to be the light and salt should show good example as they excel in the fulfillment of their civic duties. Capable hands should join political parties, seek political posts and render selfless services to the community. The on-going voters' registration exercise in our country is a responsibility and personal obligation for all who have reached the voting age. Voting for good people is one way of contributing to the common good.

To protect and promote the common good is a task that is binding on every adult person.

10. NIGERIAN ATTITUDE TO THE COMMON GOOD

While respect for common interest and common good has deep roots in Igbo and some other Nigerian or African traditions, and while this attitude was divinized and universalized by Christianity, the attitude of some present day Nigerians has not always shown enough understanding or responsibility towards the common good.

No doubt there are many Nigerians, individuals and groups of individuals who have the right attitude towards the common good, still it can be said that the general present day Nigerian attitude towards the common good has been disappointing and sometimes near to barbaric. Many have lost their sense of responsibility for the things of the public. The ugly incident of fire burning hundreds of adults in their attempt to scoop fuel from a broken pipe shows our general attitude to public property as things which must be scrambled for, destroyed or even stolen. Many regards the common good and public sphere as a treasure trove which the powerful seek to grab and when they succeed cart away all they find there for personal, selfish interest. This is the one reason why our country, Nigeria – The giant of Africa always scores low on the Transparency International ranking of corruption among the nations of the world. The problem is so much that the heroic efforts of the few are drowned by the impunity of many in the sea of indulgence. Dishonesty with regard to the public good is not regarded with any sense of shame. Thus, there is hardly any of our public institutions to be proud of, many are simply not trustworthy.

The sense of responsibility of many in high positions of public trust is close to zero. No wonder our society appears to be drifting and in the public sphere performing well below its capability. Those in authority often forget that they are servants of others and should protect their common interest. Even the less-privileged exploit any opportunity to extort from others as soon as they are in position to do so. In this connection, think of the gateman, the messenger, the village school teacher, the police constable on our roads, the local government workers not to mention the councilors, many a time these demand gratifications before they can do their regular duties. The senior government officials like the state and federal legislators, the commissioners and ministers are not better off. In fact, the way things are going, it appears that most Nigerian public servants are all fixed on fleecing our common

institutions. They do not seem to be aware that one cannot be safe in an unsafe society, and that one cannot really be rich in a poor society, and they cannot be happy in an unhappy society.

Part of the reason for the dismal situation is historical. Colonialism imposed an alien order and governance on the Nigerian people. When colonialism came to an end, indigenous leaders take the place of erstwhile foreign leaders with neither their discipline nor their hard work, only with their presumed superiority complex. The result is that the present leaders see themselves as masters and not servants consequently they are not making enough efforts to teach the people that they are working for themselves, for their brothers and sisters and for their community. Civil service remains “Olu Oyibo”-white man's job-, even though the Oyibo is long gone.

The effect of this attitude is that as Nigerians we have been squandering our God given blessings, our public institutions are decaying, our people are poor and our image is battered.

11. SOME ASPECTS OF THE COMMON GOOD AND RELATED PROBLEMS

Public Funds: Embezzlement of public funds is no more news among us. Often the populace takes bad officials to be only those who embezzle money and use it alone. They

are bad because they do not distribute the booty of their loot to others. Again, some say, leaders should embezzle only sparingly and not much. However, such an attitude does not stand the test of morality. To misappropriate common funds is immoral and the offending individual is bound to restitution.

Public Offices: Politicians and other public officers often flaunt their power, and use their power for selfish ends. One who acquires power should do so for the service of others. On the contrary, what is observed is use of their position for personal aggrandizement, for self-enrichment, for oppression and sometimes for murder. For instance, the siren which is meant for cases of emergency is sometimes used by our public office holders on express roads where the road is quite clear and where there is no hindrance to their movement. Some of them disobey all traffic laws and cause serious accidents on our roads, such practices give bad image to public service.

Public Power: The state has monopoly of the use of force. But this use is not meant to be arbitrary, it is in fact meant to protect the common good. The judiciary, the police and the army enjoy this delegated power from the people

in order to enforce justice, law and order. But among us these institutions are often used as instruments of exploitation, torture and extortion.

Common Property: There is often an attitude of carelessness towards public property. Such items like houses, vehicles and movable property meant for public service are very often put into selfish use by those in position and abandoned at the end without maintenance. We need a better sense of accountability for public property

Common Time: Our use of time during office hours need to be revisited. Some public officers arrive late at their place of work and leave very early. While at work some spend the work time on endless conversation with a selected few while other people are kept waiting and work is left undone. Still, others abandon their work to go on private business. Such attitudes of abuse and misuse of time does not contribute to the common good.

Public Institutions: Many of our public institutions are abused. Some state radio stations are used as instruments of propaganda and praise-singing for those in power instead of giving correct information.

Many public schools, libraries, and science laboratories are only a mockery of what they represent.

The attitude of lack of interest or even exploitation of our public institutions cannot protect or promote the common good

Our Environment: Our environment is part of our common good. It is our duty to protect and preserve the environment in which we live. It is morally binding on us to create a healthy environment for ourselves and hand the same over to future generations.

On the contrary we witness a dirty and horrible environment. Our environment is constantly being destroyed when our rivers are polluted, our sea wages and drainage systems blocked and when the government does not make adequate provisions for people to answer the call of nature in public places thereby indirectly encouraging unacceptable behaviour in public.

Our Future Generation: The Youth of today are the elders of tomorrow and the future of our race. They are what the present generation bequeaths to the future. The youths are to be most valued and treasured. But our youths are neglected in broken families, decaying public schools and poor youth programs. To neglect the youth is to neglect our most precious common good.

12. SOME FACTORS AGAINST THE COMMON GOOD:

In our society today many factors are militating against the common good. Some of these include poor emphasis on education, lack of patriotism, undue reverence to money, bribery and corruption.

Poor emphasis on education: The old adage that one cannot give what one does not have, (nemo dat quod non habet) is justified.

Before you respect, protect and promote the common good, you need first of all to know what it is all about. There is a reduced emphasis on education in general and on moral and religious education in particular. Illiteracy and ignorance are on the increase.

Our educational system in the Eastern part of the country has been battered since after the Nigerian civil war. The government takeover of private schools edict did not help matters.

Today children study in primary and post primary institutions that have neither windows nor doors. Children study in high schools with no science laboratories, poor libraries old and poor equipment, insufficient number of teachers, no playing grounds and dirty environment.

There is little or no incentive to teachers such that brilliant students run away from tire profession. Ignorance tends to recycle itself and the end result is far from being a credit to the common good.

Lack of Patriotism: For the average Nigerian, the word patriotism which is love for one's own country makes no meaning at all. The opposite attitude of seeking maximum advantages from the country and doing nothing in return has become the common practice. Most people do not care about what belongs to be country or what can promote the common good

We need to instill the spirit of patriotism if we hope to protect the common good.

Undue respect for money: Money is of the most useful things on earth. But when money and what money can buy are almost worshipped such tends to send the wrong message. Today many thinks that the means does not matter provided you are rich at the end. Consequently, stealing is gradually becoming an acceptable game. Local, national and international fraud could be called a life style or even a profession for some Nigerians.

People steal everything including provisions made for the common good in order to make money; these include electric transformers, electric cables, hospital equipment, drug for patients and such public goods.

Thus, it is not enough to honour the rich, rather it is proper to honour those of them who are righteous.

Bribery and corruption:

Bribery and corruption which have eaten deep into the lifestyle of many Nigerians are a great hindrance to the common good. When people demand money for what they are already paid to do and when some give money or other forms of gratification for services they are not qualified for, the common good suffers.

13. THE WAY FORWARD:

At this stage of our discussion the natural question should be how can we promote the common good both as individuals and as communities? In other words, which is the way forward?

We shall here mention some of the ways through which we can contribute to the common good without necessarily following their order of importance.

1. Respect for human dignity: Holy scripture teaches us that man was created in the image of God. Being made in the image of God and redeemed by Christ man acquires an inherent dignity the basis of all his rights and respects.

The social teachings of the Church rests on a proper understanding of the true nature of the human person, whom God made in his image and likeness, crowned him with glory and honor, gave him dominion over the works of his hands, and put all things under his feet (Ps 8:5-8). The Church teaches that the human person, who stands above all things has rights and duties which are universal and inviolable based on his sublime dignity. "He ought, therefore, to have ready access to all that is necessary for living a genuinely human life: for example, food, clothing, housing ... education etc. (GS, no. 26)

Respect for human dignity calls for respect for the rights of the other person, starting from the right to life itself to those things which enhance fulfilled human existence. All those things that destroy, threaten, or diminish human life or its dignity should be consciously avoided.

Respect for the private goods and common goods of other individuals is a duty we owe to them in justice.

2. Renewed Sense of Service:

One major step towards promotion of our common good is the realization of the truth in the saying that “to serve is to live” (cf. Prof. Pat Utomi). The human person can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself. (Lk 17: 33). Did Christ himself not tell us when an argument about greatness arose among the disciples; "The greatest among you should be like the smallest and the leader must be your servant" (Lk 22:24) He further reminded the disciples; I am here among you as one who serves (Lk 22:27)

We must discover anew the role of service, its beauty and inherent joy. It is a law of life that service leads to greatness. The higher a

man rises, the greater a servant he must be. It is only the man who renders service more than others who would be exulted by God and men. It is true that human nature wounded by sin finds service very difficult nevertheless that is the road to true greatness. Our Lord gives us yet another example when the apostles were arguing about matters of precedence, position and prestige. “He poured water into a basin, and began to wash their feet ... If I therefore your Lord and master have washed your feet; you ought to wash the feet of one another. I have given you an example to follow. So then, do what I have done (Jn. 13:12-15).

Here Christ teaches an immortal lesson to each and every one of us especially those who are in positions of authority. Authority is for service. To serve is to reign: It is the road to greatness. Through service we can enhance the dignity of others and promote the common good.

3. True Sense of Religion; The Church teaches us that, “Just as the whole of creation is ordained to its creator, so spiritual beings(like Man) should of their own accord orientate their lives to God the first truth and the Supreme good" (Populorum progressio, no. 16).

God is truth, in Him there is no contradiction, no falsehood. Proper understanding of God would lead to true worship and proper view of God which would manifest in respect for man made in God's image.

The first law of morality is “do good and avoid evil”. This principle concretizes itself in the law "Do unto others as you would want them do unto you”. Any religion which does not respect human dignity is a contradiction. Religion, etymologically comes from Latin root, religare, that is to bind or to link

together precisely to link all we do to God who is our origin, to God who is love, to God who created us in his image of love.

The world is not a free for all nor is life a field day. Life has connection to our origin. Therefore, anyone who has a true sense of religion would respect the common good and sublime dignity of man.

4. True Christianity: Religion is elevated in Christianity and perfected in Christ. Since in the past, God spoke to our ancestors in many ways... but in these days, he has spoken to us through his son. He reflects the brightness of God's glory and is the exact likeness of God's own being. Heb 1:1-3 Christians should be conscious of their duty to show the light of Christ which is the light of love. Christianity is not only cult but in the words of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI; the Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments and exercising the ministry of charity (Deus caritas est, no 25).

The summary of Christian life and teaching is love. This involves practical living and compels each Christian to see as his calling, the duty to make the society better. Thus, being a true Christian is the surest way to protect and promote the common good.

5. Better Education: The first major step towards restoration of common good is to restore our battered educational system. Education is very vital in life as it helps or hinders proper human development, discovery of one's proper vocation or realization of one's destiny. According to Pope Paul VI "At birth, everyone is granted, in germ, a set of aptitudes and qualities for him to bring to fruition. Their coming to maturity which will be the result of education received from the environment and personal efforts, will allow each man to direct himself towards the destiny intended for him by his creator. (Populorum Progressio, no 15)

So, the proper development and fulfillment of a human person depends to a large extent on the education received. In our own part of the country education has suffered the worst set-back in the recent past. At a time, the government primary and secondary schools were closed down for one full academic year. For that administration, there was nothing wrong. It was all well and good. But that was the height of recklessness, insensitivity and loss of the sense of the common good – as the proper development of the children together with their aptitudes were being impeded. Some reasons for the closure of schools include inadequate funding, irregular or non-payment of staff salaries, poor and dilapidated infrastructure and insufficient equipment. These only go to say that education is not our priority. However,

proper positioning of our common good must begin with the revival of our educational system.

If there is truth in the saying that each, group of people is as good as their educational system, then education must claim a good part of our time and a large share of our budget. Concerning the indispensable role of education, the Venerable Fathers of the Vatican Council II tell us; “This sacred synod has carefully considered the paramount importance of education in the life of man and its ever-monitoring influence on the social progress of this age. In fact, the education of the young ... has grown more urgent in the circumstances of our time”. (Vatican Council 11, Declaration on Christian Education; Introduction)

Education leads one out of ignorance to the knowledge of truth. Such will lead to the recognition of human dignity and respect for the common good.

6. Training In Virtue: In the hierarchy of goods, moral good is higher than useful good or pleasurable good. Moral good is achieved by virtue which is good habit. Doing good things constantly and not only intermittently makes one develop a good habit generally called virtue. When skills are taught, learnt and developed they make one capable but when virtue is developed it makes one a good human being.

We need to train young people in the life of virtue. Here moral and religious education are indispensable. The need to give moral and religious education a prominent position in our school curriculum cannot be over emphasized.

A virtuous man has deep moral sense. He is responsible, reliable and accountable. A virtuous person is the best one to handle public property, occupy public post and preserve the common good.

7. Sense of Community: Man's life on earth is essentially communitarian. Though an individual, the human person is always part of a community starting from his immediate family of birth to larger groups and societies. Man's social nature reveals that there is an interdependence between personal betterment and the improvement of society (cf G.S no. 25)

Now and again the common good may require personal sacrifices to provide private goods to other people but such sacrifices will always work toward providing public goods including the interest of the individual actor. True sense of community enables man realize his true self, his noble dignity and his vocation in life. Selfishness destroys the common good while true sense of community promotes the common good.

8. Prayer for Peace and Justice: Peace is a gift from God. Justice though a natural virtue will always need love to be sustained. Love which is a theological virtue cannot be achieved by human efforts alone. We need the grace of God to live the life of love, to practice true justice and to promote the common good.

God is the first truth and the Supreme Good. The highest goal of man's personal development is transcendent humanism which is union with God, the source of life and goodness. We need the grace of God to achieve our individual maximum good and the good of others.

Prayer therefore is indispensable in the pursuit of peace, justice and the common good.

14. CONCLUDING PRAYER.

God our Father, open our eyes to see your hand at work. In the splendour of creation, in the beauty of human life. Touched by your hand our world is holy.

Help us to cherish the gifts that surround us, to share your blessings with our brothers and sisters and to experience the joy of life in your presence, through Christ Our Lord, Amen,

(cf. The Collect of 17th Sunday in Ordinary time, year C).

Given this day, the 21st of February, 2007,
Ash Wednesday, at The Holy Trinity
Cathedral, Onitsha, Nigeria.

MOST REV. VALERIAN MADUKA OKEKE
Archbishop of Onitsha