



BISHOP WARNS ON NEGATIVE USE OF PRIESTS ASSOCIATION AS PRESSURE GROUP TO PROMOTE SELFISH INTEREST

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JALINGO, NIGERIA -

The Catholic bishop of Umuahia, Most Rev. Lucius Ugorji has described the endorsement of formation of associations by various arms of the Body of Christ by the Church hierarchy as a vital tool for the enhancement of collaboration and unity within the Church and in conformity with the United Nations' Charter for freedom of association. He however warned that using such association as pressure group for the promotion of ethnic or selfish interest is detrimental to the common good of the Church.

Bishop Ugorji asserted this fact in his address delivered recently in Jalingo, Taraba State; during an interactive session between the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) and representatives of the Nigerian Catholic Diocesan Priests Association (NCDPA); at the Second Plenary meeting of the Conference held at St Charles Borromeo Pastoral Centre, Jalingo.

According to him: "The Church affirms the right and freedom of association of all its members, a right founded on the dignity of all baptised. She acknowledges the right of all Christ's faithful to establish and direct associations which serve charitable or pious purposes, or which foster the Christian vocation

in the world.”

The address titled: *Association of Diocesan Priests: Matters Arising in Episcopal Appointment in Nigeria*, focused on several aspects of the roles, expectations and challenges of the priests’ associations in the context of the Nigerian situation. The Bishop, expressing concern about the activities of some arms of the country’s NCDPA; noted that using the association as a pressure group for the appointment of Bishops, premised on ethnic, group or personal reasons is not in the interest of the common good of the Church in the country.

Referring to an official report received by the CBCN on the subject matter, Bishop Ugorji disclosed that “the Holy See has been receiving a series of letters from various Associations of Diocesan priests in Nigeria, trying to mount intense pressure on the Supreme Pontiff on the appointments of Bishops in Nigeria.” The report according to him, “observed that it was very worrisome that these Associations got out of their nature to become pressure groups, struggling to constrain the Pope in the appointment of Bishops”.

He continued: “While endorsing and promoting by all means their preferred candidates, they stop at nothing in discrediting or even destroying other candidates. As the report noted, there are even cases when these priests associations reject bishops legitimately appointed by the Holy Father, thereby scandalising the innocent, giving bad example to the People of God and negatively influencing associations of the lay faithful.” The bishop added: “These issues are matters of grave concern for our local Church. For long, they have remained sources of great embarrassment, shame and disgrace to

respectable Catholics in our country and wider world.”

Bishop Ugorji in his presentation, reflected extensively on the right of association of Diocesan Priests and Vigilance by Ecclesiastical Authority; Church unity arising from Communion in the same Faith, Sacraments and Hierarchical Order; Sacramental Brotherhood of Priests arising from Holy Orders; Bishops as the Visible Principle and Foundation of Church Foundation and the Supreme, Full Immediate, Universal.

Other aspects of the presentation centred on Transformation of Associations of diocesan Priests to Pressure Groups; outlining the challenges and dangers; Abuse of Pontifical Secrecy; Disobedience to the Holy Father, Vicar of Christ and Supreme Pontiff; Slander and Defamation and Ethnicity and Clannishness as threat to Ecclesial Communion and Unity.

Stressing the need for all stakeholders in the Nigerian church to collaborate and address the challenges addressed in the presentation to prevent the Church in the country from the present diminishing experience of the Church in Europe, Bishop Ugorji declared: “If the image and influence of the very vibrant Church in Ireland that produced the great missionaries who brought us the faith can be diminished at such a rapid rate, it would be self-delusional to believe that such rapid changes cannot occur in Nigeria.”

He added: “ If secularism has been responsible for the swift changes in the Church in Ireland, the inappropriate behaviours of the clergy in our country – the struggle for Church office, inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic divisions and bickering, the mindless dissemination of slanderous write-ups that defame the

hierarchy of the Church, damage the corporate image of the Body of Christ and seriously erode her credibility before the eyes of the world – can act as a catalyst to expedite the pulling down of the Church in Nigeria.”