



BISHOP ODETOYINBO REITERATES CHURCH'S COMMITMENT TO THE PROVISION OF HOLISTIC EDUCATION FOR NIGERIAN CHILDREN

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ABUJA, NIGERIA -

The Catholic Bishop of Abeokuta Diocese and Chairman of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) Education Committee, Most Rev. Peter Kayode Odetoyinbo has reiterated the commitment of the Catholic Church to the provision of quality education for the holistic formation of Nigerian children, irrespective of their ethnic, religious or social status backgrounds.

Bishop Odetoyinbo gave this assurance in his welcome address at the opening ceremony of the third National Catholic Education Summit held recently at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) Resource Centre, Durumi, Abuja. The theme of the summit was: *Catholic Education in Nigeria: Challenges of Child Protection and Human Sexuality*.

The four-day summit was attended by over 600 participants from all the Archdioceses and dioceses in the country as well as other stakeholders in the country's education

sector. Also present were: Archbishops Anthony J.V. Obinna of Owerri and Matthew Ndagoso of Kaduna who is also the Chairman of CSN Church and Society Department. Also present were Bishops: Hilary Okeke of Nnewi, Gabriel Dunia of Auchi, Martin Olorunmolu of Lokoja and the Auxiliary Bishop of Abuja, Most Rev. Anselm Umoren.

Speaking on the theme of the summit, the local ordinary of Abeokuta Diocese stated that “Catholic Education should and must always protect the right and sexuality of the child; adding: “The summit therefore is apt at this period of time when children are most hit by deprivation, abuses and ignorance.”

Noting that the provision of quality education and holistic formation of the human person is a mandate of Christ for the Church “to go to the world and teach all nations (Matt. 28:19),” the CBCN Education Committee Chairman stated: “At the backdrop of the very recent spate of abuses especially sexual atrocities against minors, it is salient to have a discourse that would evoke the consciousness of all stakeholders in the Church’s commitments to the values and rights of the human person and teachings on human sexuality.”

He therefore called on participants at the summit to initiate ideas and resolutions that will “help educate and promote activities on the need to educate and protect the Child from all forms of abuse in and through the Church in Nigeria”.

Speaking in the same vein, the Prefect for the Congregation in charge of Catholic Education at the Vatican, Cardinal Giuseppe Versaldi, noted that “the Church is living a moment of suffering because of the scandal of child abuse, adding that “the Holy Father is inviting us to a conversation so as to heal the wound created by this issue”.

Making reference to the position of the Second Vatican Council on the role expected of parents in the education of children, Cardinal Versaldi stated that parents are primary and principal educators of children. He emphasized that the collaborative efforts of the state, the Church and parents are necessary for the realization of the desired objectives.

The Cardinal’s message was delivered by Rev. Fr. Ralph Madu, the Secretary General of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN). Mr. Philippe Richard, Secretary General, International Organization of Catholic Education, Rome, also addressed the participants on the position of the Church on Catholic Education and protection of children from sex abuse.

Archbishop Matthew Ndagoso, the Archbishop of Kaduna Archdiocese and Chairman of CSN Church and Society Department delivered the keynote address on the theme of the summit. Papers delivered at the four-day programme included: *Sex and Media Education in Catholic Schools: Imperative for Child Protection against Sexual Abuse* delivered by Professor Walter Ihejirika of the University of Port Harcourt; *Single or Co-Educational*

Schools: Implications for the Future of Family by Professor Patricia Ojiah of the University of Abuja and *Catholic Ethos as the Foundation for Ideal School Leadership: A Contemporary Challenge* by Rev. Fr. Anthony Amadi, CSSp of Veritas University, Bwari, Abuja.

Other speakers were: Msgr. Professor Cletus Tanimu Gotan of Federal College of Education, Gindiri, Plateau State, whose paper centred on *Impact of New Media on Adolescent Sexual Activities and Behaviours of Students in Nigeria: Moral Implications*; Professor Maxwell Gidado of Nassarawa State University, who spoke on *Legal Implications of Child Abuse and Catholic Institutions*; while Dr. Emmanuel Okechukwu , Secretary, CBCN Health Committee, spoke on *School Health Programme for Catholic Schools: Strategy for Safeguarding Educability and National Productivity*.