



CALL FOR A MORE PROACTIVE CHURCH IN THE COUNTRY'S POLITICAL ARENA

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ABUJA, NIGERIA -

The need for the Catholic Church to be more proactive in influencing the political arena of the country took the centre stage at the sensitization programme organized recently in Abuja by the Justice Department and Peace Commission in collaboration with the Catholic Caritas Foundation of Nigeria (CCFN).

The programme which was attended by stakeholders from parts in the country featured the official presentation of the document: *Vademecum for Electors in Nigeria - A Manual for Responsible Citizenship According to Catholic Social Teaching*. The one day programme which took place at the CSN Resource Centre, Durumi, Abuja was attended by the Governor Kayode Fayemi of Ekiti State; Chief John Oyegun of the All Peoples Congress Party (APC), leaders of other political parties, representatives of Non Governmental Agencies (NGOs) and other stakeholder groups in the country.

The document was written by the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN), and aimed at educating the

people, especially Catholics on their roles and involvement in the politics and governance of the country.

In their addresses, the Catholic Archbishop of Kaduna, Most Rev. Matthew Ndagoso and Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto noted that the Catholic Church has always been in the fore front in the struggle for a just and egalitarian society, in different parts of the world, including Nigeria. According to them, the Catholic Social Teaching outlines and elucidates all that is necessary for the just, free and equal society for the common good of humanity.

In his own address, Archbishop Ndagoso who is the Episcopal Chairman of the Church and Society Department of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN) noted that there is the need for the Church to be more active in guiding her faithful in the discharge of their civic responsibilities in consonance with the social teachings of the Church. He declared that what the Catholic Church does “best in terms of teaching is the formation of the consciences of the faithful, to be able to live to responsibilities to all challenging situation in our chosen vocation, in our chosen career.

Going down memory lane on the Nigerian situation Archbishop Ndagoso reiterated the invaluable role the local Church in the country has played in sustaining the nation’s democratic process in the face of challenges and persecution. He however assured that with the presentation of the new document, the hierarchy of the Church is now poised to assist the faithful involved in politics in enabling them to make politics and the democratic process serve the common good of all.

In his own remarks, Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto stressed the need for the maximization of the social teaching of the Church to influence the political and democratic process in the country to make politics a responsible career and for the common good of the majority of Nigerians. He noted that the Church has positively influenced all facets of life in different parts of the world, and the Nigerian situation should not be different. He therefore admonished that the local Church should wake up to its responsibility in this perspective.

Using several instances in different parts of the world to highlight how the social teaching of the Church has been used to facilitate responsible leadership and good governance, Bishop Kukah regretted that the Nigerian situation seem not to be responding positively. His words: "The point I am making is that we have been on this road before and we have heroes and heroines who have taught us how a country and society should be organized." The local ordinary of Sokoto called on all the participants at the programme to be more proactively involved in the politics of the country guided by the social teaching of the Church and the document that was launched at the ceremony.

Catholic Bishops of Ibadan Ecclesiastical Province have stressed the importance of Catechesis for the proper formation of the youths of the Church in order to make them effective agents of evangelization.

The Bishop made this admonition while speaking on the recently concluded World Youth Day held in Panama, Central America; in the communiqué issued at the end of their Ecclesiastical Province Conference held recently at The Jubilee House Conference Centre, Oke Ado, Ibadan, Oyo State.

The communiqué titled: *Nigeria General Elections: Time To Walk In The Right Path* was signed by Archbishop Gabriel Abegunrin of Ibadan Archdiocese and Bishop John Oyejola of Osogbo Diocese; President and Secretary of the Provincial Conference respectively.

According to the Bishops, the programme, initiated by St. Pope John Paul II to inspire, unify and educate young people in the Church “is a call to them to be evangelizers to one another while making Jesus their best friend.” They continued: “The youth are challenged to seek knowledge of the faith through ongoing catechesis and study. Our country and the entire world have much to gain from such noble endeavours.”

Speaking on the 2019 General Elections, the Bishops of Ibadan Archdiocese, Ilorin, Ondo, Ekiti, Oyo and Osogbo Dioceses noted that: “Given the high expectations of Nigerians and the not-so-positive experience during past elections, having a better performance at the forthcoming exercise assumes monumental importance for Nigeria.”

They continued: “Most countries of the world improve from election to election and are reaping tangible benefits and dividends in economic growth and integral human development. Our country must not be different but aim at taking its rightful place in the comity of nations. We must therefore learn from and improve on our past mistakes and hold

elections that are not only truly free and fair, but also that are seen to be so.

The Bishops urged the government of President Muhammadu Buhari to deliver on its promise not to “unduly influence the work of the Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, which must also improve upon its good effort so far by according all contestants at all levels, equal importance and equal opportunities. They also urged the security agencies to do their work without fear or favour, “to prevent and curb every act of thuggery and violence which can intimidate the electorate or compromise the elections.” The Bishops also spoke on the need for the proper education of the electorate on their roles during the elections and called for Christian witnessing during elections by all Christians.

Their words: “Christians of all walks of life like journalists, artists, poets, artistes and others to remember their Christian duty and vigorously and actively oppose injustice, falsehood and evil in all its forms, especially during the forthcoming elections. By doing this, they do nothing more than build a good legacy for generations to come and bring about God’s kingdom of love.”