

The Catholic Church and tertiary education in South-Eastern Nigeria: Building up the temples of the Holy Spirit

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Abstract

The Catholic Church is in the lead as regards the establishment and management of private universities in South-Eastern Nigeria. Nine out of the thirteen NUC approved private universities in the South-east are faith-based. Five of these are affiliated to the Catholic Church. Other catholic dioceses are gearing up with their own university projects. Private universities are understandably out of the reach of a vast majority of people, especially the poor. This raises the question whether the huge investment of funds in this project is justified in the light of the Church's preferential option for the poor. Above all, investing more human and financial resources in the lower levels of education – nursery, basic and secondary – is a more assured way of improving the quality of education. This implies subsidizing education by providing educational infrastructural resources way beyond what many people, especially the poor in the rural areas, can pay for. The challenge is how to raise the funds and change the minds of the leadership of the Church. Using a discourse analytical approach, I propose the metaphor of human beings as temples of the Holy Spirit to show that such venture fits into the mission of the Church's ministry. The vision of building the temple of the Holy Spirit could also unlock the traditional Igbo sense of civic responsibility that is at the basis of the many community projects and even the university project being undertaken by the Catholic Church. The conclusion is a narration

of the pilot project of the writer funded by the ideas outlined above that shows the practicability and benefit of such an engagement of the Church in the formation of temples of the Holy Spirit.

Introduction

Seventy-nine (79) privately owned universities are listed on the website of the National Universities Commission (NUC) as licensed to operate. (NUC website) Thirteen (13) of these are located in South-eastern Nigeria. Nine (9) out of the thirteen are faith-based, that is, affiliated to a religious group. All are affiliated to four Christian organizations – the Seventh Day Adventist, the Living Faith Mission, the Anglican and the Catholic Churches. Five (5) of these faith-based universities in the South-eastern geo-political zone, are affiliated to the Catholic Church. More Catholic Dioceses are at various stages in the process of getting their university projects licensed. There are also other tertiary institutions affiliated to the Catholic Church. These efforts and establishments flow from the Catholic Church's self-understanding that she is called to be "mother and teacher" of all (Pope John XIII, 1961). The Catholic Church in Nigeria translates this as the obligation, among other things, to provide educational services at the four main levels of education – Early childhood/Nursery, Basic, Secondary and Tertiary (Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, 2015). Above all, the Catholic Church's involvement in education in the South-eastern Nigeria goes back to the time of the early missionaries. When it became possible for private universities to be established in Nigeria, the Catholic Church went into it. But, one can ask, whether in the Nigerian context and in the light of the Church's understanding of

her mission, this is the best route to go. It does not seem that this is right. This is the starting point of this reflection.

There were no private universities in Nigeria before May 10, 1999 (Olawore O.P & Ajayi T.B, 2016, p. 32). From 1948, when the first university was established in Nigeria, the establishment, ownership, management and funding of universities were seen as the preserve of the Federal, Regional and State governments. University education was conceived as a social and public good, so crucial for national development, that it should not be left to the private sector and possible infiltration of the profit and ideological motives. Over time, things changed. With dwindling revenue due to economic downturn and mismanagement, the provision of infrastructure could not keep pace with the surge in demand for university education. This resulted in fallen standards. These increased the appeal of the neo-liberal orthodoxy's insistence on deregulation and privatization of social services, university education included. This was formalized in 1999 with the granting of licenses to three private universities – Babcock, Igbinedion and Madonna universities. By this act, university education was realigned according to market principles. It became an area where private investors could venture in, provide the services, recoup capital and make profit. Competition among service providers improved quality but reduced accessibility because of relatively high tuition. This is understandable because without grant or subvention from the government, the private universities have to depend largely on payment from the students to run their operations.

In the light of the above, the Catholic Church's involvement as well as any other faith group's involvement in university education in the Nigerian context can be seen as a preferential option for the rich. This has given rise to the cynical remark that

Churches appeal to all, including the poor to donate money to build universities which the poor cannot afford to send their wards to. It bears repeating that the involvement of the Catholic Church and other religious groups is not because of the profit motif but because education is the means of exposing the human person to his or her final end which is life with God (Flannery A., 1988). This notwithstanding, university education is cost intensive. Thus, the involvement of any Church in university education is by default a service to a small segment of the society, a segment that have other alternatives. The question then is whether it is proper for any Church, following Jesus' example of preferential option for the poor, to commit the time, energy and enormous resources required for the establishment and management of university education for the service of a few. This does not square up. Alternatively, if these investments in time, energy and financial resources are made at the lower levels – Early/Nursery, Basic and Secondary levels of education – the many issues that are at the roots of the fallen standard of education would be addressed in one swoop and a sound educational foundation at subsidized cost will be made available for all.

Education at the home and at the lower levels lay the foundation on which subsequent levels of education build. (Etor, C.R., Mbon, U.F., Ekanem E.E., 2013). As verified in the area of construction, weak or faulty foundation limits what can be erected without risking a collapse. Analogously, tertiary education on a weak foundation of primary and secondary education can only result in mediocrity. The National Policy on Education of the Federal Government of Nigeria recognizes this. It has wonderful policies based on sound educational principles to forestall this. For example, the document insists that teaching

should be participatory, exploratory, experimental and child-centred (National Policy on Education, 2013, pg 7-8). This effectively undercuts the emphasis on memorization and recitation. Yet, this is the style of teaching that one observes in many schools especially in the rural areas. Thus, the shoddy implementation of the policy stipulations give rise to a widening of the gap between policy and reality. The crux of this article is that the Churches, especially the Catholic Church in Igboland, can bridge this gap. If all the (Arch)dioceses focus on upgrading the infrastructure – physical and instructional – and on subsidizing the education at the lower levels within their territory – urban and rural – there would be uncommon transformation of the educational sector and strengthening of the educational standards. Imagine a situation in which the (Arch)diocese ensures that every school has the appropriate educational infrastructure including well trained, remunerated and motivated teachers irrespective of where the school is located – rural or urban – or whether or not the affordable tuition in the community can off-set the operational cost of the school. This will occasion a quantum leap in the quality of the school leavers. Those to embark on tertiary education would have acquired the discipline, the background knowledge and the sense of direction needed to put them in good stead to maximize the gains from this investment in their lives. The religious congregations could be tasked with the establishment and management of universities to broaden the range of choice available to those destined for higher education. The need for investment in effective training and retraining of teachers is critical to the success of this proposal.

What is being proposed above requires a shift in mental framework as a condition for its possibility. The article aims at contributing towards that shift through a re-visioning of the

mission of the Church in terms of building up the temples of the Holy Spirit. Building this temple requires not only investing in the spiritual formation of human beings but also in the overall development - cognitive, emotional, human – of one and of all persons. This presupposes a discourse analytical approach in which temple of the Holy Spirit as a discursive field is drawn from in order to shape the minds and hearts of people towards a particular practice. A narration of the application of the ideas in the Adrian and Gloria Kramer Model School Ugwuoba, Oji River Local Government Area of Enugu State, forms the conclusion.

Before going further, it is pertinent to paint a picture of the lower levels of education in South-eastern Nigeria. This delimits the scope of our reflection. A brief exposition of the discourse analytical approach will follow as well as the clarification of the concept of temple of the Holy Spirit. These are geared towards the transform of consciousness and the institution of new practice on the part of the Catholic Church in education in the South-eastern Nigeria.

Education in South-Eastern Nigeria

The Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria is the title of the book by Victor Uchendu (Uchendu V., 1965). This immediately identifies the Igbo as the ethnic nationality to be found in the designated area. Without going into the details of the none coincidence between the boundaries of the Igbo ethnic nationality and the geo-political unit comprising of Ebonyi, Enugu, Anambra, Imo and Abia states, suffice it to note that Christianity penetrated deeply into the Igbo nation. Coincidentally, the school apostolate, that is the fact that the missionaries founded and managed many schools as part of their missionary endeavor, contributed to the success they recorded. These schools and others by private

proprietors were taken over by the government of the then East Central state of Nigeria after the civil war through the Public Education Edict of 1970 ostensibly to “provide stability, satisfy people’s basic educational and national needs, combat sectionalism, religious conflict and disloyalty to the cause of Nigeria.” (East Central State, 1971) This move by the government of East Central State quickly spread to other states.

This government take-over of schools marked a watershed in the history of education in Nigeria in general and among the Igbo. It spelt doom for education in Igboland. Relying on Prof. Ejiogu, who was once a Commissioner of Education in Imo State, Prof. Michael Ogunu sums up the result of the government take-over of schools. According to him, schools, especially in the rural areas, fell into disrepair. “Unless the parents contributed money through their children no school could even boast of a box of white chalk an essential instrument or tool in the teaching-learning process” (Ogunu, M., 2015, 110-111). This decay has continued so much so that there is acute shortage of teachers in some schools especially those in rural areas (Punch Newspaper, May 28, 2019). Some parents, especially in rural areas, under the umbrella of the Parents Teachers Association (PTA), hire and pay some teachers, referred to as PTA teachers just to ensure that their wards are not left unattended to when they come to school. These PTA teachers are often not qualified. All these are evidence of a dismal failure by the State to invest, monitor, regulate and manage schools.

More recently, some of the State governors in South-eastern Nigeria have handed the schools back to their original owners. Ogunu, M (2015, 138-139) reports that in 2011, the Anambra State Government under the administration of Mr. Peter Obi returned 56 Secondary schools and 1040 primary schools to their original owners. In 2010, the Enugu State Government under

Barr. Sullivan Chime returned 655 schools and the Imo State Government under Chief Ikedi Ohakim handed back 44 schools. Abia State returned 19 secondary schools. All these show an increasing recognition, by government, of the need for the involvement of the Churches and voluntary agencies for effective education. With the partnership comes a division of labor. Government provides the funds, regulates and supervises. The Churches and voluntary agencies manage the returned schools. This partnership obtains in a fraction of the schools in South-eastern Nigeria. It obtains only in those schools that had been returned to their original owners. Even then, not all these have been handed back. Besides, there are schools set up by the government and many others set up by Churches, voluntary agencies and individuals after the 1970 government take-over of schools. The schools without the partnership suffer lack, either of funding or of effective management and morale. Some of the private schools overcome this lack by passing the burden to the parents in the form of high tuition. Others offer low quality educational services at prices adjusted to the income of the families while building in their profit. The result is that many, especially poor people in the rural areas, are condemned to schools with low standards. To turn the situation around, one needs to provide high quality educational services. The Catholic Church has the managerial resource to bring about this turn around. There is also a Catholic Church in most villages in Igboland. The elements so far missing in the equation are the vision and the will for such an intervention and the financial resource to bring it about.

The aspect of the financial resource can be tackled by applying to the traditional sense of civic responsibility among the Igbo which has been noted and studied (Olutayo, O.A., 1999).

This sense goes back to pre-Independence times when there were Town Unions in various urban centres. It continues till date in such institutions as the August Meeting for the women groups. These unions and meetings are avenues for mobilization of funds for the provision of basic amenities through community self-help. Through levies and donations, funds are raised for the provision of power, water, roads, construction of schools, Churches, town halls, etc. In some cases, individuals single-handedly provide these amenities to the community. The belief that real wealth is one that impacts one's community (*akuluo uno*) may be part of the motivation for such philanthropy. Such philanthropic gestures can also be interpreted as deriving from the cultural dynamics behind title taking when those who have distinguished themselves in any walk of life that contribute to the society get honored with titles.

Igbo communities have also been known to tax themselves in the past to give opportunities to promising members of the community. Chinua Achebe tells the story of such communal effort in his novel, *No Longer at Ease* (Achebe C., 1960, 1994). The story is about a young man, Obi Okonkwo, sent to England through the collective effort of the whole community. Although the community was disappointed in him because he failed to live up to their expectation, many others, assisted one way or the other by their communities feel called to give back to the community in gratitude. Unfortunately, communal investment in individuals has waned. People still donate towards community and Church projects. Donation towards subsidizing education in a systematic way would require selling the vision both to the Church and to people. The framework of discourse analysis illuminates how the metaphor of building up the temple of the Holy Spirit can provide

the vision and motivation for the required shift in perception and practice.

The discourse analytical framework

Discourse, Norman Fairclough writes, “is a difficult concept, largely because there are so many conflicting and overlapping definitions formulated from various theoretical and disciplinary standpoints” (Fairclough, N., 1992, 2000, p. 3). The common thread that runs through these definitions is the concern with language and its effects. Language so used is wider than speech and includes communicative action using other media such as photography, music, dance, clothing, architecture, etc. Inasmuch as discourse is about language, it is termed discourse and not language analysis because the concern is not with language as an abstract system but with actual instances of communicative action through the medium of language. Discourse analysis is interested in how people draw on their knowledge about language, in the wider sense, to do things in the world.

A complementary view of discourse analysis focuses on how language and other cultural artifacts shape consciousness. Michel Foucault amply demonstrates this in his analysis of the birth of the prison (Foucault, M., 1979). This is about how a set of ideas, a rationality or *episteme*, to use Foucault’s term, articulated by Jeremy Bentham in the *Panopticon* was translated into an architectural design which totally transformed the prison system. Foucault’s analysis is in the service of a larger philosophical position: the application of an archeological approach to unearth how knowledge/power (discourse) shapes human subjectivity and gives rise to new practice. In line with this insight, one can draw attention to how democracy, for example, as a discourse, reshaped practice. In the 1970s, liberal democracy as a system of

ideas and values displaced developmentalism. The concern is not with democracy and the like. What is of interest is how a set of ideas constituting a discursive field can change vision and practice. It is in this light that we want to harness the metaphor of people being temples of the Holy Spirit for articulating a vision and *raison d'être* for the Catholic Church to refashion her practice as regards education in South-eastern Nigeria.

Building the temples of the Holy Spirit

There were temples in the Ancient Near East but it was when the Israelites settled down in Palestine that Solomon built the temple of Jerusalem. The king's prayer of dedication highlights some of the ideas about the temple. After acknowledging God's infinity, the king noted that the temple is where God has said, "my name will be there'." (1 Kg 8:27-29). Thus, the temple is a place where the distance between God and creation is bridged and God is present in a special way to hear prayers and console the people.

The idea of spaces or places of special encounter with the divine goes back to the time of the patriarchs. By the brook Jabbok, on his way to meet Esau, Jacob was at such place. He wrestled with an angel of God and he called the place Penuel (Gen. 32:30). The Ark of the Covenant served as a symbol of divine presence during the Exodus. While in Palestine, they had high places in Shiloh and Gilgal before the temple of Solomon. From the conversation between king David and Prophet Nathan (2 Sam 7:1-3), it is clear that the temple is not the condition for the possibility of divine presence among creatures. The Ark of the Covenant had satisfactorily mediated that presence. The temple is about a befitting place for that presence. The magnificent structure has no value in itself except as mediation of the divine presence. Thus, it was easy, as seen in Acts 7: 44-50, for the early Christians once

the differentiation from Judaism took place, to distinguish between divine presence and the magnificent structure in Jerusalem that mediated that presence. They thus relativized the physical temple in Jerusalem and transferred the imagery to the Christian community and to the individual Christians. These became the *loci* of divine presence.

St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “do you not realize that you are a temple of God with the Holy Spirit of God living in you? If anybody should destroy the temple of God, God will destroy that person, because God’s temple is holy and you are that temple” (1 Cor 3:16-17). The bigger context of this pericope, which is the division among the Christians in the Church in Corinth, indicates that it is the Church, that is, the Christian community and not primarily the individual Christian that is referred to as temple of the Holy Spirit. This notwithstanding, in 1 Cor 6:19, in his exhortation against sexual immorality, St. Paul asked the individual Christians in Corinth, “do you not realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?”

To refer to human beings as temples of Holy Spirit is a metaphorical way of drawing attention to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5) and in an extended sense to the fact that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. Human beings are sacred because they are bearers of God - *theophoros* - bearers of the Holy Spirit. Building up the temple of the Holy Spirit refers to any activity that contributes to enhancing the capacity for good of the human being in whom the Holy Spirit dwells to mediate more fully the divine. This captures a core aspect of the vision of Catholic education which is the formation of the human persons in view of their final end and the good of the society to which they belong. This final end is defined in

terms of making it possible for people to realize their capacity for the divine (*capax infinitas*).

The other aspect of the vision behind Catholic education – the formation of individuals to contribute to the good of the society to which they belong – indicate that Catholic education is adaptable to the context and needs of the society. As already indicated, the pressing need of the context of South-eastern Nigeria is not simply the provision of quality education or quality university education but the provision of quality education that is affordable to all especially those in the rural areas at the foundational level.

Raising fund for the temple of God

Religion has always moved people to dedicate labour, painstaking craftsmanship as well as enormous resources in erecting places of worship and fabricating objects of worship. Those who give up all these consider themselves privileged to be counted among those doing something for the ultimate being. In the story about the golden calf in the Bible, one reads that the Israelites stripped off their gold ear rings and brought them to Aaron, who used these to make the golden calf (Ex. 32:2). One would imagine that there would not have been such compliance if the project were bereft of any religious significance. Similarly, the Bible records that King David was denied the privilege of erecting a temple for God although he volunteered to do so. This heightens the view that erecting a temple for God is a sacred duty not reserved for all but to a few chosen of God. King Solomon was the one chosen to build the temple of God. He spared no effort and cost in making it an edifice fitting for divine worship. He paid from the royal treasury. But in rebuilding of the temple after the exile, individual contributions were used for the project. Nehemiah wrote down

the names of the family heads and the handsome amounts they donated (Neh 7:69). Although the story is not connected with temple construction, the story of the widow who put all she had in the temple treasury (Mk 12:41-44), shows the overriding power of the religious motivation.

The disposition of placing oneself and one's resources in the service of God subsists to the present age. This is true in South-eastern Nigeria, during the missionary era and even now. For example, when the missionaries came to Igboland, communities organized themselves and, in a bid to outdo each other, went great lengths, sacrificing time, labour and other resources to bring the missionaries to build Churches and schools in their communities. The construction of the stone Church in Otikpo Uga, the oldest in the Catholic Diocese of Ekwulobia, which started in 1924 was made possible by the sacrifice of "able bodied men and women" who quarried the stones kilometers away in adjoining communities and carried them back with their baskets (Ifemeje C.C. & Onuzulike, J.O., 1999). Such generous spirit towards Church projects seen as a means of enhancing the image of the community has continued in Igboland. Many communities contribute to erect befitting places of worship. Lately, individuals erect such edifices and donate to their communities. These projects gulp a lot of resources. People contribute to them in the belief and knowledge that they will be blessed for their sacrifice. The result is that in many villages in Igboland, there are magnificent Churches.

As has been argued, temple or Church has other meanings apart from the edifice in concrete and steel. In a sense, the human being is the temple of the Holy Spirit *par excellence*. This is the shift in understanding that can be discerned in the ministry of Jesus. At Jacob's well, Jesus predicted that a time shall come

when God will be worshipped neither on the Mount of Gerizim nor in Jerusalem but in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:21-23). This relativized the value of the temple built with concrete and steel. Without placing an outright ban on such temples, their revaluation took place. They became aids to the fostering or formation of the human temple. The plea of this work is therefore for the Churches and the Catholic Church in particular to recognize this shift and project such a discourse in order to shape consciousness and inspire the investment of more funds for the formation of these human temples than for the construction of temples of concrete and steel.

Conclusion: Adrian & Gloria Kramer Model School Ugwuoba, Pilot Project

What is being argued for is already being put into practice by the writer at the Adrian & Gloria Kramer Model School Ugwuoba, Oji River Local Government Area of Enugu State. This school, situated in a rural setting is the former St. Paul's Nursery Primary School Ugwuoba and belongs to St. Paul's Parish Ugwuoba. Opposite the school is the public school, Udoka Primary School Ugwuoba. Before the creation of St. Paul's Parish Ugwuoba in 2015 and the upgrade and change of name, St. Paul's Nursery Primary School, was one of those private schools, thriving not because of any high academic standard but because of a modicum of order and commitment. Other children went to the public school with all the attendant problems, especially, lack of order due to poor supervision.

Through the vision being advocated above, a massive transformation took place in the parochial school. While recognizing that children are not to blame for the poverty, the dysfunctionality of their families of origin or the lack of good

schools in their vicinity, there has been a commitment to ameliorate these and make it possible for as many children as may want to attain a school with high educational standard at affordable fees. The tuition has been pegged at N3,500 and N2,500 for those in the primary and nursery schools respectively and other avenues for funding are vigorously explored. Invited to invest in the future of their community under the metaphor of building temples of the Holy Spirit, some members of the community adopted teachers by making funds available for their payment for a specific period of time. Others made funds available for scholarship to pupils from indigent families. The head teacher, who had retired from civil service, volunteered her services. On her part, the school management developed an outreach programme backed up with prudent and transparent management of funds.

The commitment of the management to providing quality education at a subsidized rate to the pupils gradually became obvious to the community and there was a surge in the population. At this point, more help came. The family of Adrian and Gloria Kramer of Grosse Pointe, Michigan, U.S.A stepped in to solve the infrastructural problem of the school and invested more than N50 million. Construction started in September 2017. In July 2018, the school was named after them and in June 2019, the school was approved by the Enugu State government. A family in the community donated an ICT centre with a projector and thirty computers to ensure that every pupil has a computer to himself or herself when in class. The school management is providing internet access and subscription to major e-libraries. In this way, the pupils are launched into the 21st century at a subsidized cost. The school is also running a broadened curriculum. It seeks to retrieve some of the traditional skills and

competences as well as lead the pupils to develop curiosity about how the things around them work. Above all, effort is being made to inculcate healthy attitudes of hard work, integrity and commitment to society. An indication that something positive is taking root in the lives of the pupils is their frustration at what happened at the centre where they took the 2020 common entrance examination. The management spared no effort to prepare them for the external examinations and built up their confidence. Thus, they reported with dismay that some unscrupulous teachers from other schools were reading out the answers to the pupils. They even noted that some of the answers given by the teachers were wrong.

From the above, it is clear that this model for the provision of quality education at affordable cost in the rural areas, at least at the primary school level, is viable. It only tasks the management to think outside the box, be committed to the school apostolate solely for humanitarian purposes and make its financial records transparent and available to all, especially those who want to give back to society. The challenge always posed to the model is sustainability. But this can be overcome if there is networking at a higher level – diocesan or provincial. Above all, this model has the promise of revolutionizing consciousness when beneficiaries themselves come to positions of responsibility in society. This model also points the Churches to a greater appreciation of the temple of the Holy Spirit as primarily human beings fully alive, in the words of St. Irenaeus, rather than as structures of concrete and steel into whose construction the Churches commit a lot of time, energy and finances.

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