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African Catholicism and the Diaspora Phenomenon: A Socio-Political Analysis of African Priests in the Diaspora

Iheanyi Enwerem

Religious agents, including Catholic priests, are no exception with regards to involvement in the diaspora phenomenon. Among them, especially in the most recent time, are those who, for the purposes of this paper, are identified as “African Catholic priest-diasporas” (African priest diasporas, for short); that is, those Catholic priests from Africa who, for a variety of reasons, relocated from the continent to reside in a foreign country where they exercise their priestly ministry. This new and growing group of diasporas obviously forms part of the “African Diasporas”—a group African Union (AU) considers as Africa’s “sixth region” (Auma, 2009). The paper argues that the specificity of the African priest-diasporas cannot be told and understood outside of a context, namely: the situation of African Catholicism in the face of the continent’s socio-political and economic predicaments.

Introduction

Survival instinct remains a major law of nature for every living being – plants and animals (including humans) alike. This law is at the heart of the “diaspora phenomenon” from time immemorial. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, the “phenomenon” refers to a group of people somewhere in the world who are forced by a situation of political or religious persecution or adverse economic circumstance to relocate from their original homeland to settle and live out their lives in a foreign country or voluntarily make a similar move in search for possibilities of a better economic and socio-political well being while maintaining the link with their homeland (Esman, 1986, p. 333).

African priests of the Roman Catholic Church have been a part of this diaspora. This paper refers to them as African priest-diasporas. The following report from the Pew Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life puts the African priest-diaspora phenomenon into a better perspective. In its most recent publications, following its “more than 25,000 face-to-face interviews” in “19 sub-Saharan African nations,” the Forum presented a highly positive report of the state of religion in Africa (Pew Research Center, 2010, pp.1-17). Backed by extensive statistical data and in comparison with other parts of the globe, the

report presented Africa as the continent to watch, especially with regards to the on-going massive growth of Christianity and the popular currency religion holds in the life of the African people (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. 3). Specifically, Catholicism was highlighted as a major beneficiary of this currency, having also enjoyed a phenomenal growth in the continent.

The Pew Center's report, however, was silent on the economic strain the growth is having on the Christian churches, including the Catholic Church, in Africa and how these churches are trying to cope with the attendant strain. This state of affairs becomes worrisome in the context of a continent with an unfair share of political leaders whose trademark in leadership is more of corruption, paucity of good governance than a genuine commitment towards solving even the basic needs of the common people and the alleviation of their suffering. As the Pew report rightly noted:

compared with people surveyed in 2007 in other regions of the world, somewhat fewer sub-Saharan Africans today indicate they are highly satisfied with their lives. At least 30% in [19 sub-Saharan African nations surveyed] say there have been times in the last year when they did not have enough money to buy food for their families. (Pew Research Center, 2010, p. 15)

How African Catholicism responds to the diaspora phenomenon, in the light of Africa's socio-economic and political predicament, becomes a major challenge for the church leaders, bishops, and priests alike.

The paper, therefore, is an attempt, first and foremost, to raise awareness of the hitherto relatively unacknowledged emergence of African priest-diasporas as well as alert the leadership of Catholicism in Africa of a largely untapped potential of the diaspora phenomenon. Second, the paper will try to provide information towards understanding the specificity of why and how the African priest-diasporas emerged. Hence, while the paper argues in favor of ministry in the diaspora, it does so with a caveat: the ministry, as currently exercised, calls the leadership of Catholicism in Africa to a better organization and coordination in the mutual interest and good image of both the African priest-diasporas and African Catholicism.

For the avoidance of doubts, the objectives of the paper will be pursued from the purview and lens of the social sciences. Also, the reference point will be the scene of African Catholicism, although its Nigerian component will have an edge

over its counterparts in the continent. This is because, first and foremost, in comparison with their counterparts in Africa, Nigerian priest-diasporas could very well constitute the majority of this new group of African diasporas in Europe and North America, especially given the researched estimation “that Nigerians represent 50%” of the drain of human resources from Africa to the so-called developed countries (International Organization for Immigration, 1993, p. 93). Besides, Nigeria’s Catholic population of an estimated 20% of the country’s population of 150 million is larger than a considerable number of African countries. And on a different but related note: of all the African-based churches that scholars have identified in the diaspora, (Olupona & Gemignani, 2007, pp. 48-49) a great majority of them hail from Nigeria and are Nigerians. Thus, what happens in Nigeria, including in its religious and socio-economic terrain, can be used to gauge and be representative of similar happenings in other part of the continent.

History and development of African Priest-Diaspora

But for two respective works, one by Dean R. Hoge and Aniedi Okure (2006) and the other by Jacob Olupona and Regina Gemignani (2007), little or nothing has been written about the history of the involvement of African priests in the diaspora phenomenon in modern time. As far as this paper is concerned, however, the work by Hoge and Okure was quite limited, mainly because it subsumed the African priest-diasporas phenomenon under the general theme and experience of “International Priests” within the context of the global Catholic Church (Hoge & Okure, 2006, pp. 99 & 107). As for Olupona and Gemignani, their work is also limited, principally because its focus was largely on the churches that are said to “belong under the rubric of African Initiated Churches (AICs)” (Olupona & Gemignani, 2007, p. 92). Nowhere in their entire book did they pay attention to the Roman Catholic Church except a reference to its being one of the “Western denominations with missions in Africa...also represented among immigrant churches” (Olupona & Gemignani, 2007, p. 49). It is as if African Catholics or African Catholicism is allergic to the diaspora phenomenon.

Be that as it may, academic interest in the diaspora phenomenon has been directed mainly to its secular trend, namely, the aspect of the “brain drain.” This is characterized by educated professionals whose departure from their homeland in significant numbers to foreign countries has wrought very serious harm to the economy and social life of their home countries. Thus, although the diaspora

phenomenon seemingly originated from an ethno-religious context (Sheffer, 1986, p. 212), interest in the religious angle of the phenomenon has been more or less subsumed into that of its secular counterpart. With reference to Catholicism in Africa, this is understandable, given that participation of its priests in the diaspora phenomenon is most recent, especially when compared with their secular counterparts.

Using Nigerian experience as an example, while the emergence of its secular diasporas could be traced to the early 1970s, reaching its zenith between “the late 1970s to the mid-1980” (R.R. Reynolds, 29 (92), p. 272), the participation of the religious diasporas started in the late 1980s as a number of African clergy and religious chose to settle outside of Africa, notably in Europe and North America. In the United States, for example, the phenomenon started in the late 1980s. By the early 1990s there already was a sizeable presence of African priests, part of the reason that prompted the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to hire Rev. Aniedi Okure in 1995 as Coordinator of Ethnic Ministries to include providing acculturation workshops for the newly arrived pastoral ministers. With specific reference to Catholic priests of African descent, most diocese in Europe and North America have Catholic priests of African descent in pastoral ministries within their territories. For instance, one European-based religious community in Nigeria has 20% of its 150 members in diaspora ministry in Europe and North America. Another has 22 of its members in Canada with six in one diocese alone, not counting more of this number in the United States and Europe. In fact, one would be hard pressed to find a diocese in these places without some African priests among its so-called “international priests.”

Going by its definition of African Diasporas (Auma, 2009), the AU estimates the number to a total of 168.88 million drawn from Europe, North America, Latin America, and the Caribbean (Auma, 2009). There is hardly any statistical data about the number of these African Diasporas who are priests in general and Catholic priests in particular. No doubt, the number, it stands to reason, is tiny when compared to their more numerous lay/secular counterparts. Yet, African priest-diasporas are numerous enough to have become quite noticeable in the European and North American Catholic churches as to attract, like other foreign priests, the resentment of many European and North American Catholics, especially their priests and religious (Hoge & Okure, 2006, pp.50-68).

From the point of view of sociological categorization, rather than historical appraisal which is not within the competence of this paper, it is worth noting that

it is misleading to conceptualize the specificity of the African priest-diasporas as if they are unified or monolithic in their motivation and orientation. If anything, their emergence is from a number of varying contexts; these could be categorized under at least five major circumstances. The first category consists of African priests who got involved in the diaspora phenomenon for the reason of genuine missionary work. Primarily in this group would be two segments of African priest-diasporas. First, is the group who belong to European- and/or North American-based religious orders and congregations with missionary charism. Initially their members came to Africa as missionaries; now with the sharp decline of priestly vocation, leading to a drastic shortage of priests, as well as the decline in religious fervor in the home countries of these missionaries, the African products of their missionary enterprise, in the spirit of the missionary charism of the missionary orders, are sent as missionaries to Europe and North America.

The second segment of this category would be those priests who belong to African Founded Congregations (AFCs) with missionary enterprise as a major part of their charism. Prominent representatives of this group are two Nigerian-based religious congregations of men, the Missionary Society of St. Paul (MSP) and the Sons of Mary, Mother of Mercy (SMMM). The MSP, for instance, was founded by the Nigerian hierarchy, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), largely for missionary work. This development is what is now described as “reversed missionary enterprise.” Ordinarily the African priest-diasporas in this group would have been sent by their legitimate superiors to serve the pastoral needs of needy dioceses overseas generally at the invitation of the overseas bishop, and with some agreement regarding the terms of service.

The second category of African priest-diasporas is diocesan priests – meaning priests ordained specifically to serve their dioceses of incardination – who circumstantially become missionaries. Although they do not belong to religious orders or mission societies with missionary vocation they end up in the diaspora to specifically serve African immigrants at the instance of their bishops and in agreement with receiving bishops overseas within whose dioceses where there is a large population of African immigrants. The dioceses of Los Angeles and Washington D.C. in the United States, Padua in Italy, and the Toronto and London, Ontario dioceses in Canada – to name a few such places – typify this scenario. However, unlike their counterparts in religious orders and mission societies who could be assigned to missionary work for the rest of their lives, the

diocesan priests in this category are usually assigned to a short-term ministry in the diaspora. This implies they would normally be recalled to their home diocese after a few years.

The third category are African priests who came overseas purely for financial or, better, economic reasons. The varying factors that underlie this motivation have been well addressed elsewhere (Hoge & Okure, 2006) as to deserve no further attention in this paper except to highlight the context for the motivation. One such context is the financial handicap which is experienced by most of the dioceses and religious orders in Africa, especially those indigenous to Africa. Here one calls attention to the austerity measures which a number of African countries, including Nigeria, adopted and implemented in the 1980s at the instance of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In Nigeria as it was the case in many other African countries, for example, the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) that resulted from the acceptance of this proposal not only succeeded in depressing the country's economy but also set in motion a chain of hardships that have endured in the country and, by inclusion, among the membership of the church to date.

To make matters worse for African Catholicism, the explosion of growth of the population of African Christians was happening about the same time global economic decline was setting in side-by-side with the growing decline in church attendance in Europe and North America the generosity of whose Catholic members used to sustain the missionary enterprise of their kiths and kin on mission in Africa. Faced with this situation, bishops and religious superiors would send their priests to raise funds to support not only the projects by their dioceses and religious orders but also the welfare of their priests. For instance, as one foreign priest was reported to have noted while speaking about his home country: "sometimes it's a two-way relationship. The bishop sends Father Whatever to the States, but by signing, they enter a certain agreement with the bishops in America, and in return he might get some financial support" (Hoge & Okure, 2006, p. 80).

The fourth category of priest-diasporas consists of those who, right from the onset and for the love of adventure as well as in the spirit of missionary zeal, opt to work for dioceses overseas. On acceptance by the dioceses, they would take their training towards the priesthood in European or North American seminaries for the dioceses to which they become incardinated before and after their ordination to the priesthood. Although their number may be very small when

compared with their more numerous counterparts among African priest-diasporas, their reality is attracting the attention of a number of bishops in North America as one viable way to solve the lack of priests-personnel in their dioceses. The writer is aware of at least three dioceses in Canada, two of which are the diocese of Prince Albert and Archdiocese of Regina, that are not only open to this arrangement but have also but also actualized the policy to its benefit.

The fifth category are African priest-diasporas who simply want to work in a different and more fulfilling environment than what is in their respective home dioceses and countries. This group would comprise of African priests who were sent abroad for studies and thereafter decided to permanently settle abroad, having secured a job either within or outside of the church circle. Also in this group are a significant number of African priests who, on arriving in Europe and/or North America, entered into private arrangement with a willing bishop to minister in his diocese. To be more specific, this category of priest-diasporas, like their lay counterparts, wants to escape from the reality of the paucity of good governance in their home dioceses as is in their home governments. Add to this the practice where soon-to-retire bishops build retirement homes for themselves with little or no such provision for their priests. As one can imagine, a priest working under the above scenario would want, like his bishop, to provide himself such facility, and often at the expense of his parishioners. Besides, such a priest would not want to return to his home diocese, should he get the opportunity to migrate to a diocese, say, in Europe and North America, where there exists an enabling environment that is exercised on a level playing ground, especially with regards to the welfare of the clergy of the diocese. This scenario, in recent time, has contributed to a growing number of this category of priest-diasporas opting for incardination into the welcoming overseas dioceses. By so doing, these priests have definitively chosen to reside abroad and to work permanently for the dioceses of incardination.

Further characterization of the African priest-diasporas leads to an interesting revelation worth noting. Recall our earlier observation of Nigeria having the largest number of African diasporas and being Africa's most populated country with a population of Catholics whose size is larger than a number of countries in the continent. The same can be said of African priests-diasporas; most are Nigerians. And among them, majority hails from a particular part of the country and ethnic extraction, namely: the Igbo-speaking Southeast. Again, this is understandable. Not only is the Southeast the most Catholic part of

the country, the Igbos are the single most Catholic ethnic group across the length and breadth of the country. Besides, the Southeast is the home of the largest number of seminaries in the country among which are those with the largest number of seminarians, including, of course, the Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, which is reputed to be one of the largest, if not arguably “the largest Catholic seminary in the world ... [with a student population that] is roughly one-fifth the total number of seminarians in the United States” (Allen, 2009, p. 19)

To bring this section to conclusion, one notices that hardly anything is happening among the Nigerian Catholic diaspora community, by way of their North American born children opting for the priesthood. This so deserves a closer study beyond the aim of this paper. Suffice it to say that it is not because the Nigerian Catholic immigrant families, most of whom we have already noted to be Igbos, fundamentally lack commitment to the church or, as scholars like R. R. Reynolds would want us to believe, have “the traditional forms of socio-economics within the Igbo household” as the sole or “primary motivators” for their emigration decisions (2002, p. 275). This leads us to the lived context of the diaspora phenomenon.

The Diaspora Phenomenon in its Lived Context

The diaspora phenomenon is expressed and lived out in different forms and shapes. For instance, on the secular terrain, the event has caused what has been described as brain drain on African academic institutions as hundreds of thousands of African professionals and experts in different walks of life left Africa in search of greener pastures abroad. This is not exactly the case on the spiritual terrain, notably in the African church; in other words, the number of African priests who have relocated to the diaspora has not reached the level to be described as a brain drain on African Catholicism. Prior to the emergence of the diaspora phenomenon, an African priest would be sent abroad for specific course and years of studies. He would return to his home diocese to take up a waiting assignment. The idea of an African priest remaining abroad after his studies was almost unheard of. Even if he wanted to remain behind to take up ministry abroad, the possibility for such ministry was almost nonexistent as the dioceses abroad had enough of their own priest personnel to cater for the pastoral needs of their people.

Times, however, have changed. Today, with the shortage of priests in almost all the dioceses of Europe and North America, there is an openness of many of these dioceses to receiving foreign priests. And since the European and North American governments recognize Catholic priests as well educated professionals in their own right, the openness of these dioceses to receive foreign priests is encouraged and facilitated by the current structure of the visa application in these countries, especially in North America, which favor educational and professional visas. It is through this avenue, rather than illegal means, that African priest-diasporas gain entry into these countries and, by inclusion, the dioceses. This development has arguably shifted power relations between the church in Africa and its counterparts in the northern hemisphere. The churches from the north that used to be sending missionaries are now on the receiving end of missionary enterprise. Specifically, the situation now exists that while, on the one hand, the European and North American churches have the economic resources but not the priestly vocation to take care of their pastoral needs, their African counterpart, on the other hand, has the priestly personnel resources but not the economic wherewithal to take care of its needs. This would ordinarily and rightly call for a collaborative ministerial relationship between the churches of the northern and the southern parts of the globe.

This collaborative relationship, however, is not exactly the case. Thus while the European and North American churches welcome African priest-diasporas in their midst, they do so grudgingly and reluctantly. This is especially given that the average North American priest and religious bemoan the influx and presence of priest-diasporas in their midst, African priest-diasporas inclusive. The welcome accorded to African priests, as to other foreign priests, is generally and largely insofar as they keep their mouth shut and dispense the sacraments. Hardly are their ideas on church affairs welcomed; instead they are treated largely as second-rate priests by most of their North American counterparts or, as the African priests are pejoratively called in some dioceses, "third-world-trained" priests, implying that their training and status are inferior to their supposedly better trained and acceptable North American counterparts. Some of these priests equate better training to speaking English with a local/American accent, not minding that many African priests have advanced degrees compared to their North American counterparts.

One may think that the treatment and negative perception towards African priest-diasporas are limited only to the dioceses and diocesan priests. This,

however, is not the case; similar treatment and negative perception are directed at the African priest-diasporas by their North American colleagues who belong to the same European and/or North American-based religious orders and mission societies. As a matter of fact, it is often and generally at the invitation of bishops that the African members of these religious orders and mission societies work in dioceses in the northern part of the globe. For instance, one would be hard pressed to find a North American-based religious order and mission society that warmly welcomes in their midst their African members. Cases abound whereby these religious orders or congregations would prefer to close and/or hand over their parishes to the dioceses to encouraging and/or inviting for their replacement their counterparts from Africa, notwithstanding the acknowledged abundance of priests from Africa. It is even worse when the European and North American members of these religious orders and mission societies often directly or indirectly block avenues for their African counterparts to solicit for assistance for their work in Africa from a generally well disposed European and North American Catholics.

To note the treatments and perception above is not to be oblivious of European and North American dioceses where African priest-diasporas are warmly welcomed, treated with respect and even given high profile assignments. Notably there is a diocese in Western Canada where an African priest-diaspora is the Cathedral Administrator – the first of its kind in the Canadian Church - or a diocese in Ontario where an African priest-diaspora is the pastor of one of the largest parishes in the diocese and with two Canadian-born and trained associate pastors - or in another diocese in Western Canada where two African priest-diasporas are members of the Council of Priests and Priests' Personnel Board, respectively. These treatments and the underlying perception of the African priest-diasporas in these dioceses, however, pale in comparison to what we have already noted to obtain in the majority of dioceses of the northern hemisphere.

One, of course, is fully aware of the invitation of African priest-diasporas to serve the pastoral needs of the African immigrant Catholic community, specifically in those dioceses with a significant presence of Africans. However, even here, the attention is not different, mainly because the priest-diasporas are hampered by the structural specificities of a North American Church that is largely narrow-minded, inward-looking and, therefore, socio-culturally insensitive and inattentive to other cultures around them, especially of the

African immigrants. Here, a former priest-staff of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops hits the nail on the head, so to speak, when he noted:

It is not the identity of the Catholic Church to just do your own thing locally. We are Catholic, which means “universal,” and having priests going back and forth between countries has been a norm since the church began....Where the need is, you go in and you help out. It’s that global thinking that gets you out of being provincial. Not, “We are just going to take care of the American Catholic Church.” No. It’s universal. Once you take on that outlook, then things have a different take altogether. (Hoge & Okure, 2006, pp. 45-46)

The import of this assertion is better appreciated when one compares the North American Catholic Church’s attitude to its African diaspora members with how the African Initiated Churches perceive and cater for their largely African diaspora members. As someone aptly puts it:

Many Africans describe these churches as their “home away from home.” Immigrants are interested in a community they can call home in spite of what the department of Homeland and Security says about their status in the United States....[T]he founder of Christ Apostolic Church...says that immigrants are attracted to a church that understands their story and that can provide both material and spiritual resources for dealing with their pain and predicament....In the United States, the congregational context within these churches engenders a fraternity that helps to ameliorate the dangerous hierarchies and principalities of the outside world. Within the confines of a sacred canopy, members can develop veritable resources that will ease their civic incorporation into the American life. (Akinade, 2007, pp. 93-94)

Seemingly treated by their church with little or no attention towards making them find a “home away from home” in their church and in a manner that lacked the attentiveness towards engendering a fraternity that helps them “ease their civic incorporation into the American life,” the African Catholic diasporas apparently busy themselves more with survival than in much church-going. Herein, perhaps, one may locate an entry point into the explanatory reason behind the lack of priestly vocation in the North American church from an African Catholic immigrant community most of whose members hail from a homeland-background that is renowned for generating Catholic priests.

When the preceding scenario is situated within the discourse on how best to manage the diaspora phenomenon, the collective members of the leadership of African Catholicism, the bishops, leave much to be desired. This is particularly by way of their perception and management of the phenomenon both of which, together, take a heavy toll on designing avenues through which the phenomenon could best serve the Church's mission in Africa. Take the case of "perception" for an example. Generally speaking, the bishops frown at the growing phenomenon of their priests preferring ministry in the diaspora to that at home; yet these leaders are open to receiving and, indeed, welcoming the financial benefits that accrue to their dioceses from their priest-diasporas. This scenario reveals ambivalence to the diaspora phenomenon on both sides of the aisle - the Catholic Church in Europe and North America and its African counterpart - leading to the call for a more objective depiction of the phenomenon. This is because the diaspora phenomenon is often seen and portrayed in a largely negative light, especially in the context of its so-called resultant "brain drain." Take the former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo's portrayal, for example. In his speech in Atlanta, United States, to inaugurate birth of Nigerians in the Diaspora Organization of America (NIDOA) he stated:

Many of our best men and women, for lack of opportunity and challenge at home, have had to work outside of [Nigerian] shores. We would challenge them to return... I recognize that just as there are good and bright Nigerians abroad, there have remained many at home who have persevered. I salute them and assure them that their sacrifice, perseverance and tenacity will be recognized and rewarded by a grateful nation. (Adebayo, 2010, p.10)

It is as if those Nigerians in diaspora and, by inclusion, their counterparts from other African countries, lacked the spirit of "sacrifice, perseverance, and tenacity" and, therefore, deserve no "salute" and "reward by a grateful nation." In other words, the diaspora event is something lamentable and regrettable - something that should not have happened in the first place.

Those on the spiritual side of the aisle, specifically some scholars within the European and North American Church circle (McBrien, 1997, Jenkins, 2002) are no different from this negative portrayal of the diaspora phenomenon, especially as it relates to African Catholicism. On this note, Jenkins criticizes as "painfully short-sighted" if not "suicidal for Catholic fortunes," the Church's global

distribution of priests that favors the North American and European churches where the shortage of priests is less grimmer than it is in Africa and Latin America where the shortage is grimmer (2002, pp. 213-214). Another scholar portrayed the emergence of African priest-diasporas as a case of how “Western bishops are, perhaps with the best of intentions, plundering the resources of the global church” (Allen, 2010, p. 19). Going along the same line of argument as Philip Jenkins, and basing himself on his ratio of roughly one priest to one thousand and three hundred (1-1,300) baptized Catholics in the United States and Europe as compared to one priest to four thousand, seven hundred and eighty-six (1-4,786) in Sub-Saharan Africa, Allen, therefore, believes that “at least from a strictly arithmetic point of view...the bumper crop of new priests being turned out by Catholic seminaries in the global South is far more urgently needed at home” (Allen, 2010, p. 19). Lending his support in 2001 to the foregoing argument, Cardinal Jozef Tomko, the then prefect of the Vatican’s Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, portrayed African priests’ ministry in the diaspora as going to cause possible harm to the growth of the churches in the global South (Tomko, 2001, pp. 2-3).

What the exponents of the preceding argument seem to miss is an understanding or recognition of the global missionary vocation of the Catholic Church. As a global organization and from a missiological perspective, the church is called to use its human and material resources to advance the cause of Catholicism wherever the need exists. Besides, its adherents are supposed to take care of one another wherever they may be. And from a biblical perspective, there is the injunction on Christians to share their resources with the less fortunate, not just out of the abundance of their riches but, on a more spiritually rewarding note, out of the abundance of their sharing hearts, the proverbial widow’s mite (Luke 21: 1-4). Furthermore, the exponents are silent on the pressing practical need of the moment before the African Church. That is, how best to solve the economic demand and burden which has resulted from the massive growth of the faith and now placed on the shoulders of the church—a point we highlighted earlier in the paper in the report from the Pew Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life. Whatever may be the downside of the engagement in the diaspora phenomenon as the scholars above have enunciated and even if economic motivation may be partially behind the African Church’s engagement in the diaspora, these pale in degree and seriousness when compared with the harm which a number of Africa’s Church leaders inflict on the church. This is

especially with regards to the ease and frequency with which a significant number of them dine and wine with the members of the corrupt class of Africa's political leaders whose ill-gotten monetary largess is often the crave of these Church leaders.

The foregoing negative portrayals of the diaspora phenomenon, however, are far from the truth, especially when juxtaposed with the positive potentials inherent in the diaspora phenomenon. To begin with, the phenomenon is, per se, necessary, inevitable, and ultimately good. Sometimes, historical events throw themselves on society despite and beyond human plans and expectations. For instance, it was the historical events in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, notably the paucity of good governance that forced most Europeans of the time into diaspora in what became the New World and eventually the emergence the United States, currently the world's strongest and wealthiest country. The economic depression of the 1930s further added to the growth of the population of the European diasporas in United States and Canada. In the end, it was the descendants of the sons and daughters of these Europeans who not only helped to rescue their kith and kin in Europe from the effects of the depression and Europe's near self-annihilation in World War II but also saw to its post-war rehabilitation and rebuilding even to this day. Thus, it is plausible to argue that the diaspora phenomenon is something to celebrate and NOT to lament about. It would have been a tragedy, and against the interest of the African continent, if the phenomenon hadn't taken place at all, however and for whatever reason that it happened. In this regard, one should be slow in pushing the idea of people returning "home." Instead, one should stress the need to explore how best the advantages of the diaspora phenomenon can be extended and advanced for the good and development of the African people, Church and society.

Possible Abuses of Ministry in the Diaspora

Even critics of the ministry in the diaspora grant some positive credit to the African priest-diasporas. The following witness by one of the critics is a case in point. According to him:

For the most part...these guys [meaning foreign priests] do just fine. Two years ago, for example, I met [an Igbo priest] from Nigeria who leads a parish in tiny Johnson City, Texas, composed of white ranchers and Mexican farm workers.

He's fit in well, in part by drawing on his experience as a striker [on his country's soccer team], kicking a ball around with the kids before and after Mass. I was in New York...when it was announced that another Nigerian priest serving in a local parish was going back home as coadjutor bishop. As Archbishop Timothy Dolan scrounged around for a pectoral cross and ring to present as a gift, he passed along the reaction in his chancery: "We sure hope they can send us another guy, because they're really popular." (Allen, 2010, p. 19)

Yet, observation has been made of possible abuses. Here, the reality of "freelancing" priest-diasporas comes to light. By "freelancing," I mean the idea of "a worker who sells his labor or his product on a piece-work basis" or the idea of "one who speaks or acts solely on his own authority." It is generally believed that the majority of foreign priests in the global north are "freelancing." If the truth must be told, at least speaking from the North American context with which the writer is more familiar than with Europe, a significant number of these "freelancing" priests, especially in the United States, are Africans. Many of these African priests, however, are often engaged in jobs that, to say the least, are debasing of the priesthood, jobs which they would be ashamed to do in their home countries. For avoidance of doubts, one is not saying that all priests abroad fall into the kind of freelancing ministry just noted. Far from it! If anything, most of the African priest-diasporas are engaged in ministries that are becoming of the priesthood even if many, especially in the United States, are into hospital chaplaincy work.

This clarification notwithstanding, the fact still remains that the freelancing priest-diasporas, the good and bad alike, essentially and primarily work overseas largely on the basis of their private arrangement with the overseas dioceses or bishops. But one may counter: the priests have their home bishop's letter of reference and permission to show before they are employed by the overseas dioceses. True! Stories abound, however, of priests who either know their colleagues who have the ear of their bishops or have mastered the psychology of their bishops as to know how and when best to secure the needed permission and/or reference letters. Be that as it may, however, the fact of the matter is this: it is doubtful if a significant majority of the priests abroad, both in the past and the present, ministered with any contractual relationship between their home dioceses and the dioceses in the diaspora, or between the priests' home bishops and the bishops abroad. Often, this has telling implications and consequences on

both the priests and their respective home dioceses or, better, Catholicism in Africa.

The reality of freelancing priest-diasporas in various forms and its encouragement by an uncoordinated ministry abroad, together, remain a major avenue for an abuse of the diaspora phenomenon. The implications and consequences that arise from this are better imagined than experienced. One such implication and consequence is the fact that majority of the African priest-diasporas, especially the freelancing ones among them, are treated as objects whose usefulness is terminated at the least provocation. What is more, a priest in this kind of relationship has little or no rights so much so that even when he is abused or victimized by those for and with whom he works, he is not in the position to successfully demand his rights. Worst, even if all is well between the priest and the receiving diocese, there is little or no economic benefit that accrues to the home diocese; at best whatever economic benefit that comes to the diocese is more or less left to the whims and caprices or, better, to the determination and goodwill of the priest-diaspora.

Some of the abuses that arise from freelancing ministry in the diaspora – notably the greed, selfishness, and individualism – somehow rub off on the home front as majority of priests in this category flaunt their wealth around. In this regard, it would seem the creative acumen of a considerable number of African priests, using Nigerian as an example, is at its best when it is about how to squeeze out money from the laity. When one adds to this state of affairs its inherent poverty of priestly spirituality, one then begins to see the urgency for a corrective measure not only for the image and common good of both the clergy and Catholicism in Africa but also for a positive outlook on African Catholicism's needed engagement in the diaspora phenomenon.

What Can be Done?

We are today living in the era of globalization, and there is nothing to show that the church—be it local, national, or even global—is immune from the effects of globalization. Notably here is the reality of the world becoming one big village; old and traditional boundaries are giving way to new and fluid realities as resources from one part of the world can now be easily transferred and used to address the needs of another part of the globe. The diaspora phenomenon in the church obviously is an outgrowth of this development.

When the preceding remarks are brought to bear on the topic of this paper, the underlying question then is this: how can the Catholic Church in Africa - or churches in Africa for that matter - manage the diaspora phenomenon to their advantage and that of their constituents in the continent? The other side of the question is to ask: how can the African priest-diasporas help the home church or, better, African Catholicism? Here A. Adebayo's paper to the Association of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities comes to mind. He calls the country to transform the country's "brain drain" into "brain gain" (Adebayo, 2010).

Beginning with his suggestions around the practice of monetary and social remittances (Adebayo, 2010, pp. 14-28), he draws from the World Bank's exemplary implementation of its three-fold areas of emphasis, namely: (1) "establishing a strong partnership with the African Union on Diaspora development;" (2) "working with and supporting governments to enable them engage with the Diasporas and" (3) "directly engaging with Diaspora organization and professional networks to implement human capital development projects" (Adebayo, 2010, p.16), showing how, from a monetary perspective, the Bank has made progress on its aim to help African diasporas reverse and build "on the brain drain constraints to become brain-drain opportunities" (Adebayo, 2010, p. 16).

Adebayo, as we have already noted, also touched on "social remittances." Peggy Levitt defines them as "the ideas, practices, social capital, and identities that migrants send back into their communities of origin;" as such, Levitt further stated, they "permeate [the migrants'] daily lives, changing how they act as well as challenging their ideas about gender, right and wrong, and what states should and should not do"(Levitt, 2007, p.23). The North-South Center expatiates on these to consist of ideas, actions, social networks, and associated norms that have an effect on the productivity of a community (Adebayo, 2010, p. 17). Thus, without neglecting the need for and importance of monetary remittances, this writer posits that the social remittances are more rewarding, mainly because their end product is more enduring and far-reaching than their monetary counterparts that are largely ad hoc and transient in realizing the ultimate objective for harnessing the potentials of the diaspora phenomenon.

Conclusion

The foregoing observations and remarks set the stage for the conclusion of this paper. Without pretending to be exhaustive, the following three points are highlighted.

(1). Dioceses, religious orders, and mission societies in Africa with priest-diasporas need to establish a strong partnership with the dioceses that are open to receiving foreign priests or, for our purpose, African priests. Here, the urgency for a contractual relationship becomes imperative, particularly with dioceses overseas where African priests are currently or will later be working. This same contractual relationship should be applicable to those African priests who are engaged in non-church-related ministries and jobs either in overseas or even at home in Africa. In this regard, bishops or dioceses should enter into contractual relationship with their overseas counterparts. The relationship must be entered into on the basis of a collaborative spirit towards addressing mutual needs and benefits between the contracting entities or partners – something akin to a help-us-to-help-you understanding. This could take the form of the receiving dioceses sponsoring the further studies of African priests after a certain number of years of ministry in the diocese abroad. A number of dioceses in North America are open to this idea and are making it operational.

(2) On the home front, much needs to be done, especially in the area of exemplary leadership that demonstrates transparency, accountability, and credibility in governance. No doubt, no one could better understand African Catholicism in their respective domain than the bishops. Like their counterparts in all other positions of leadership, the bishops are the ones who face the challenges in their dioceses on a daily basis, manage scarce resources, and close the knowledge gap that may exist between those at home and in the diaspora with regards to life at both ends. As such the bishop is the one to ensure the creation of the enabling environment in his diocese for strategic planning and goal setting, training of pastoral agents (clergy and lay alike), infrastructural development projects, evaluation tools, and improvement of work environment. In short, he is expected to create an enabling environment that is all inclusive, non-discriminatory, and exercised on a level playing ground, especially with regards to the welfare of all and sundry in the diocese.

(3) It has been observed that economic reason is a major motivation for ministry in the diaspora (Hoge & Okure, 2006, pp. 60-62). There is an element of

truth in this observation. However, it would be morally wrong and, therefore, unchristian to elevate this reason as the sole motivation either in the perception of the ministry in the diaspora or engagement in it. In advocating for this ministry for African Catholicism, it is imperative to highlight the missiological dimension of the engagement. African Catholicism shares and should share in the missionary vocation of the Christian religion. In this regard, its engagement in the diaspora phenomenon is an actualization of this vocation.

The foregoing brings to the fore the imperative for an international and inter-cultural exchange of social remittances. The leadership of the Church in Africa must explore the possibility of sharing Africa's rich resources of religious vibrancy with the churches of the global north. In this regard, a consortium of experienced priest-diasporas and their counterparts from the global north could be created. Members of this consortium would serve as resource persons to facilitate the mutual and free-flow of a variety of social remittances to every sector of the churches of the global north and south, especially inter-cultural themes and ideas towards the inculcation of a mutually enriching understanding and respectful interactions between the entire membership of these churches—clergy and laity alike.

To bring the paper to its definitive conclusion, we make bold to say that rather than frown at the diaspora phenomenon or develop an ambivalent engagement in it, African Catholicism would do well to embrace it. In this regard, members of the hierarchy of Catholicism in Africa are called to creatively develop a well organized and coordinated program of harnessing the human contributions of the diaspora phenomenon both abroad and at home. In other words, African Catholicism's current attitude to the diaspora phenomenon is not in its best interest, given the enormous contributions it holds for the development of church and society in Africa. Besides, the phenomenon is here to stay for a long while and, therefore, cannot be wished away. On this note, let the North-South Center have the last words of advice for all and sundry in Africa and beyond, Catholics and non-Catholics alike:

[The diaspora phenomenon should be seen as] a potential resource rather than as a concern: a potential human and social capital that can make a major contribution to the political human and social development to the home

countries of origin...[and thus proving to constitute] one of Africa's greatest offshore assets. (North-South Center, p. 8)

And to more fruitfully tap into this resource, the Center further advises that

[T]he current pathways used by the diaspora need to be professionalized, strengthened and enlarged so as to become efficient routes of transmitting knowledge, know-how, expertise and networks in Africa. They also need to be recognized, valued and formally used by government institutions and the mainstream development organizations in the host country. (North-South Center, p. 20)

In other words, the diaspora phenomenon holds for Africa enormous potential akin to a gold mine; African Catholicism can only afford to ignore it or mine it lopsidedly at its own expense!

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