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CLIMATE ACTION, AFRICAN TRADITIONAL WISDOMS AND LAUDATO SI

“An ounce of action is better than tonnes of theory” - Igbo wisdom, Nigeria

1. Overview – Sustainability is framework for enhanced quality of life for all

This paper seeks to add voice to the urgent discussion for the redemption of CREATION, ECO-THEOLOGY AND OUR ENVIRONMENT through an understanding and integration of indigenous African thought and wisdom in modern thinking. The paper puts forward a practicable stakeholder orientation of African worldviews towards building a more sustainable and humane ecology using the traditions of the Igbo people of Nigeria with its religious and cultural values known as the ‘Omenala’ as a guiding thread. We also attempt to bring these African philosophies into a unifying voice, devoid of ideological interests across cultures to reflect reasoning and practices that embedded respect for life, the protection of the environment and respect for the sacredness of the earth and entire nature – visible and invisible. Listening to African voices by reflecting on its past traditions, wealth of values, priceless qualities and cultural-rational reasoning in respect of preservation of the environment would bring some contribution to this ongoing global dialogue and search for ecological sustainability promoted by the SDG Agenda 2030 of the United Nations.

For generations, Africans, and this applies to other traditions and cultures, developed a deep spiritual sense of stewardship over creation with practiced action of preservation that protected planet, people, nature and the world of flora and fauna and mammals. The advent of colonial, modern industrial and recent technological, financial and dominant political interests with foreign business-minded exploitative practices destroyed much of these cosmo-visions. In view of current efforts to salvage the common values of humanity and secure a new deal for nature, people and climate, Catholic Social Teaching complements African worldviews on eco-theology as expounded in the Encyclical Letter, LAUDATO SI of Pope Francis, published on 18 June, 2015. The appeal of Pope Francis in the profoundly religious and scientific document LAUDATO SI for Climate action summarises the Planet as our “*Common Home*”. The first step towards addressing this issue is the call for immediate action with “**ecological conversion**”. This encompasses social justice and spiritual responsibility.

The science is clear that we are now accelerating towards tipping points as past few years have gone down as the hottest in history. The ozone layer is thinly veiled. Catastrophic rainfalls continue to cause havoc with winds and tornadoes unknown to humanity a century earlier. Small states living on Islands could go under the ravaging seas and oceans within a century as Mauritius and others in this category suffer from devastating impacts of climate change. It is a matter of life and death for many people and nations. Global warming affects ecosystems as well as human health, livelihoods, food security, water supply and economic growth in many ways.

It is no longer news that the agenda for realising the 13th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG): **Climate Action** formed the basis for the world’s biggest UN Climate Summit Pact COP26 which held in Glasgow in November 2021. They are already a moment in history. The climate movement’s slogan reads - “**The time to act is now**”. All nations today have an urgent challenge to scale up climate ambitions, introduce carbon tax for redistribution, give stimulus programmes to save climate with reduction in emissions. There is need to listen to the call of activists who work for the protection of the poorer peoples and nations, and even minimum polluters, yet bear the brunt of negative consequences. The worst is yet to come, but the time to act is now.

In the ongoing dialogue and universal conversation towards finding a proper balance between individual freedoms and community welfare in their attitude to planet, nature and environment, discussions around the 'use' and 'abuse' of human and natural resources which threatens all have arisen, thus the growing desire for all-round environmental sustainability. The challenges and effects of climate change are common knowledge

Moving to action beyond lip service is uppermost to reflect the global common good in policies that guide the economy, society, technology and the way we live in a growing and complex but interrelated world. The era of ideologies and models of unbridled consumerism with an endless productive cycle of capitalism, built around big numbers and big data as measure of human progress is gradually over as it grossly destroyed the human ecology. The core idea of sustainability originally was to natural resource situations, where long-term environmental preservation was the focus. Today, the term is applied in many disciplines including economic development, environment, food production, energy, consumerism and lifestyle. This term raises controversy as well as challenges for present generations to meet the needs of today without the ability of future communities to meet their needs. Sustainability refers to doing something with the long-term view in mind and decisions made with a consideration of human activities into the future. The goal is typically towards preserving quality interactions with the local environment, the social system and the economy. Examples abound where communities seek economic development approaches that benefit the local environment and improve overall quality of life for many and for all.

Sustainable development provides a framework under which communities can use resources efficiently, create efficient infrastructure, protect and enhance the quality of life, and create new businesses to strengthen their economies. On the other hand, a 'sustainable community' is achieved by a long term and integrated approach to developing and achieving a healthy community, by addressing economic, environmental, social and cultural issues.

Fostering a strong sense of community and building partnerships and consensus among key stakeholders are also important elements. Gradually, policies of nation-states and activities of the various levels of any society, including corporations are measured against their sustainability. This involves taking account of the costs to the environment and depletion of natural resources. It also takes account of the economic cycle of production that is the use and disposal of products maintained indefinitely without denuding resources or damaging the environment or society. Some effort by each individual person to improve on their hygiene for our common Home, including ensuring that actions of their institutions and businesses comply to this standards can begin with a mental shift and change of attitude in the use of the goods of the earth.

2. An African narrative to Environment and Climate concerns

There are at least two sides to every narrative. One side may not necessarily present the whole story, but it is valid contribution and helps in getting to the whole picture. The reality of Africa is more complex than the "outsider clichés" would have it described. Africa is not simply a "continent of hunger and heat, nor is it the land of the dark-skinned people whose religion, culture, politics, art and history is uncivilised and primitive". It is even difficult to treat the continent as one piece, even though some generalizations are allowed as applicable. History teaches that Africa is that continent where humankind first began, where art, religion and philosophy commenced, and where civilization and culture first arose (Cf. Ike, O. F; Understanding Africa - Traditional Legal Reasoning as a Basis for Culturally Rooted and Sustainable Development, 2001, CIDJAP, ENUGU, pp.1 – 4;).

One is always amazed at the complexity and diversity of human cultures, each distinct by virtue of its historical evolution, making it structurally unique and original. Theories of

development have often neglected the cultural and spiritual dimension of the human person. In the complexity and sophistication of our modern societies, it is possible to have lost track of the basic and simple values that give life meaning, including ethics.

The African narrative starts with a spiritual dimension and understanding of space and time as gift and mystery from the divine who is creator and first principle. It is this principle and worldview that is embedded in culture, ever dynamic and yet constant, transmitted through generations. Such education transmitted guides the values of people, which affect structures of the economy, politics, society, religion, ethics and technology. This African narrative, embedded mainly in values and beliefs, go beyond codified legal instruments or laws and impact people's attitudes to climate concerns and the environment.

These values include respect for the divine and the sacred; respect and use of trees and animals according to the needs of life; divination of the stars and the planet as sacred and to be preserved; respect for life and community consciousness; respect for elders; keeping to one's promise and standing to one's word; honesty at all times; justice and fairness in dealing with others; keeping to agreements and cultural norms above private needs; putting the interest of the community over private and individual interests; avoidance of conflicts; a culture of transparency, disclosure and accountability; preservation of the common good; the protection of all life and the environment of nature; prudence in speech and not harming others; contentment and absence of greed.

Our search therefore is to rediscover these inherent traditional values and principles of sustainability, subsidiarity and solidarity and apply them to modern models of a global culture that speaks of Corporate Governance, Corporate Social Responsibility, Business Ethics, climate justice, environmental protection in order to maintain contextual best practices within an African milieu. We establish thereby the integral nature of African cultural and religious values considered as ethical values in the protection of the planet - our common Home.

3. An integral approach to the Environment at Three levels of Existence – Past, Present and Future

African Philosophies teach that the individual exists within the context of his/her social existence, with responsibility at three levels of existence:

- i. The present-living, meaning the community in which the business operates, the employees who work within the corporation, the suppliers, the consumers, the environment, and the entire world community.
- ii. The living dead, meaning the cultures and ancient traditions of the people in whose communities the businesses operate, as well as where they market their goods and services. This would mean recognition of our heritage from previous generations, and include respect for the diversity and plurality of the world.
- iii. The yet-unborn, meaning responsibility towards future generations, particularly in the use of the world's natural resources and therewith a recognition that ownership of these natural resources cannot be absolute. It would also recognize the responsibility of every business to the sustainable management of nature's gifts.

This vision of the world imposed some cyclical guide for responsible and sustainable management of resources with future generations in mind (Ike, O. Freedom is more than a Word; On Potentialities for Development in African Culture; CIDJAP Press; 1998).

Omenala (culture of the Land) linked the past, the present and future in one continuum offering a basis for understanding the dimensions of sustainability much clearer as cultural

(past), social (present) and ecological (future). The three levels of existence in Igbo Logic 'Igbology', offer an important principle and philosophy in understanding the interplay between community and individual; forces of nature and nurture; religion and business; the environment and humanity; and generally helps us better understand various factors and values that ensured sustainability and stakeholder participation among traditional African peoples. It provided a valuable foundation for problem-solving in modern times (Ike, O. Tradition, Toleranz und Diskurs', Kongress Paper: Ethik in der Demokratie – Demokratie in der Ethik, der Internationalen Vereinigung. This corresponds to the findings of the Frankfurt Hohenheim Guidelines and the work of other rated and respected schools of thought such as the Project Group, Ethical-Ecological Rating/Oekom Research AG, Hoffmann/Scherhorn (eds.) and their Implementation via the Corporate Responsibility Rating, (Schriftenreihe zur oekologischen Kommunikation, 8, 2nd extended edition, Oekom Verlag, Frankfurt, 2003).

Omenala as culture, understood as the entire way of Life of the people (past present and future), is the traditional law in African societies, a central thread guaranteeing the protection of life and property, the harmony of members of society among themselves and with nature, their linkage to the divine through the ancestors and the deities. In various African cultures and among the traditional Igbo people of Nigeria, Land (nature), Human Resources and Material Wealth (capital) signified more than just factors of production. Land, for instance, was a goddess 'Ala' 'Ani' – "*the Earth Deity*". It was the earth deity that determined customs and traditions (*Omenala*), much of which was the promotion and protection of all life, a transgression of which ('*Nso Ala*') was punished by 'Ala', the Earth deity. Taking the Igbo people of Nigeria as an example, Land, including water, mineral resources, animals, animate and inanimate beings were all creatures of "Chukwu" (God) who made them all for a purpose according to religious interpretations and these were all interlinked. Indeed, in Igbo cosmology, all nature visible and invisible live and relate to each other as ordered by Chukwu. They manage their relationship according to the guidance of Chukwu such that their common destinies were interlinked. Any imbalance triggered off tragic consequences and it was regarded that the destiny of the individual, the community and entire environment was interlinked (cf Afigbo, A, Ropes of Sand, Studies in Igbo History & Culture, Oxford University Press Ltd, 1981, pp 6 ff).

Some lessons from African wisdom towards achieving climate justice in the present global situation include:

Doing something with the long-term perspective in mind.

Making decisions with consideration of its impact on humanity, ecology and the future.

Meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generations to meeting theirs.

The balance between the community concerns and the individual aspirations, made manifest in the concept of communal ownership of land and water and natural spaces.

Each member of the clan was considered as a stakeholder. This ensured equity in economic affairs, since opportunity and access for all was guaranteed. An individual could own property but because of the intrinsic ties between the individual, the family and ultimately the community, ownership of property is understood as a social mortgage.

The wisdom thought here is essential: "*it belongs to me but I belong to the community*". Whatever property was acquired by the individual was based on the individual right of access and use, in a proximate but not ultimate sense. Members of the extended family were empowered as stakeholders and co-owners of the individual and his/her enterprise, and participated actively at different levels in the management of the political, social, cultural

and economic life of their community. As stakeholders, they were co-responsible for the success of the business alongside community life, ensuring that business and public interests were managed by members of the community, thus promoting values of solidarity and subsidiarity.

The Igbo attitude to the ownership and management of wealth and property exposes a deeply spiritual, yet secular understanding of the interconnectedness of the 'universal destination of created goods'. The traditional Igbo interplay of the secular and the sacred ensured that ethical considerations were an intrinsic part of economic life. Deriving from the traditional Igbo ownership and management traditions are the humanist principles of solidarity and self-reliance (subsidiarity), which manifest as guiding principles and as the starting point for a modern economy. In traditional society, there was a profound sense of the sacred intrinsically woven into society's communal way of life.

It is said that every people have a culture, a way of life that links their past to the present and the future. Even though culture is not static but steadily dynamic, some of the elements that provided rationality for cultural practices in the past may have disappeared in the face of modern realities of migrations, new technologies, scientific discoveries, wars to mention but a few ingredients. Nonetheless, there is need to enhance the linkage and sustainability of cultural developments and its interpretation at least on the levels of principles that identify these societies even in the face of a modern age. In the African milieu, whether amongst an agricultural people or nomadic tribes, Culture (Omenala) provided a proper foundation for a sustainable economy where the preservation of the environment, the enhancement of principles of equity and fair play and the promotion of an economy that recognizes both individual interests and communal protection existed alongside.

4. Community concerns and the Common Good precede individual interests

African philosophies and cultures centre on community, well expressed in the phrase '*I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.*' (Mbiti, J. S., African Religions and Philosophy, Heinemann, 1975, p 108-9). This is a cardinal point in understanding an African view of the relationship between planet, people and environment, or between individual, personal priorities and the common good. African communal consciousness means that:

"only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his or her own being, his or her own duties, his or her own privileges and responsibilities towards himself or herself and towards other people. When he/she suffers, he/she does not suffer alone but with the corporate group. When he/she rejoices, he/she rejoices not alone but with his/her kinsmen, neighbours or relatives whether dead or living. When married, he/she is not alone neither does the wife belong to him alone; so also the children belong to the corporate body of kinsmen even if they bear only the father's name. Whatever happens to the individual, the individual can only say 'I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am'" (Mbiti, Ibid).

The individual exists as part of the community, not "Apart" of it. This formed the basis for Social Responsibility that include the past (ancestors) and the yet-unborn. It is also the basis for Continuity and Sustainability. The typical African wisdom thought is "*It belongs to me but I belong to the community*". This guaranteed property relations and usage of temporal goods which ensured that ownership rights existed and were respected, yet limited by overall social concerns and communal purposes so that every member of the community, beyond the immediate family including the kith and kin benefitted. This sense and recognition of community found expression in the daily lifestyle of people where loyalties of kinship, clanship, language, culture, politics, religion and economy converged to create

social groups recognized as stakeholders. Property relations in traditional Igboland were guided by a philosophy that supported the common good. As such, absolute ownership of land and other means of production was discouraged. This was an important factor in ensuring the sustainable use and management of natural resources, and the protection of the stakeholder interests at three levels of existence.

In other words, any young person who consciously cuts off from the community and develops as a successful individual personality in the modern or sometimes, individualistic and autonomous sense, is no longer a person in the African sense no matter the degree of individual prowess. If such an individual is to survive to some degree, the person must quit the village and begin existence somewhere else. No matter how prosperous such a person eventually becomes, one is presumed to miss something in one's personality when existing apart from the community. It is only in re-establishing the link with one's kith and kin, which is actually part of oneself, that one can once more be a person i.e. the 'full self' (Ref; Bradley, F. H., *Ethical Studies, Essay li: Why Should I Be Moral?* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2nd Edition, 1927).

The New Testament of the Christian Bible contain such practices. (Cf: Acts of the Apostles, chapter Three - the story of Ananias and Saphira). Humans become who they are only through their relationship with others. One's individuality would be understood in and through one's social relations. Being in a community is a constitutive element of the human make-up (cf. Nzomiwu, J. P. C., *The Moral Concept of Justice Among the Igbos*, 1977, Lateran University Rome, p 39). The individual was recognized as deriving his/her existence and relevance as a member of the community. In other words, wealth had significance when it was used responsibly to further community interests and not hoarded only for individual use. This furthered social responsibility at the individual and corporate level.

5. Not only Humans are part of the Community but entire Nature

In many African cultures, belief systems maintained that all natural resources belong to Chukwu (the Supreme God) who ceded management thereof to 'Ala', the earth deity. The ancestors were thought to have obtained the 'traditions and customs of the land' (referred to as Omenala) from 'Ala'. A modern interpretation of this may be the acknowledgement of nature and natural resources, including air and water, as a gift to be used, managed and held in trust. This is an important element often lacking in modern business management where the pursuit of private interests inadequately recognizes responsibilities towards the use of natural resources. There is an urgent need for businesses to manage with greater responsibility the natural resources which actually belong to the entire human community.

The Igbo 'Omenala' (customs and tradition) was handed on from one generation to the next generation just as the earth 'Ala' upon which the Omenala was anchored. As such, the responsibility to preserve and sustain the tradition of the African Igbo and the natural resources, including land, plants, animals and entire nature for future generations was transmitted as culture, taught and understood as an intrinsic part of being a community member with the rights of usage of land: that is the conduct of business and daily life. Those presently-living, meaning the community to whom the individual 'belongs'; the ancestors who are past custodians and referred to as the living-dead, but from whom tradition and culture derives their continuity; and the yet unborn who ensure that the future is guaranteed. (Cf. Isichei, E. *A History of the Igbo People*, Macmillan Press Ltd, 1976, p 3ff).

Life and existence are view in Igbo metaphysics as a continuum that extends beyond the demise of the material self. Central to this religious world-view is the belief in Chukwu (Chi Ukwu – the great God), who is the author of life and is the absolute owner of all things that exist in all creation, whether visible and invisible. Chukwu fashions and carries the world;

owns the universe and sends the sunshine and the rains at various times for the good of creation. Chukwu makes the crops grow and is the source from which people derive their Chi (destiny, soul, luck, identity). Since the Igbo believe in Chukwu as merciful, they believe Chukwu allows lesser spirits, the dead ancestors (living dead) and humankind to manage the created universe as stewards.

What emerges from this Cosmo vision is interconnectedness between the spiritual realities and the material; between the sacred and the secular; between the past, present and future. It is an integral worldview where although God is the absolute owner, human beings and other spirits are sub-delegated to act on behalf of Chukwu in the ownership and management of goods of the earth.

There exists in African traditions, the moral consciousness of the individual in his/her existence as a part of the community upon which actions and behaviour were judged right or wrong. The principle or sense of togetherness extends to include both the temporal and the spiritual sphere: *“not only the living but also the living dead, the ancestors, the Supreme Being, and the entire spiritual world are interconnected”*(cf. Isichei, E. A History of the Igbo People, Macmillan Press Ltd, 1976, p 3ff). There is no room for rugged individualism as every person is related to the other, making possible a deep common solidarity and loyalty. Even natural objects are interrelated as symbols of each other, thus nature and the environment are included in its concept of stakeholders. The rights of usage of natural, human and capital resources are accepted in traditional society together with implied responsibilities towards the providers of these factors of production, whom we call stakeholders. The stakeholders of a business include the host community, the host country and associated society, culture and environment. In an increasingly global world, it is easier for companies to shirk responsibilities being ‘foreign’ business. This has had significant and disastrous consequences and there is need to emphasize the moral obligations of capital, and address the increasing imbalance between the three factors of production: land, labour and capital. Business decisions should not be taken solely in the interests of rewarding the providers of capital with a higher rate of return at all costs.

As such, the communal ownership structures and corresponding participatory management practices of the Igbo were embedded in specific ethical value propositions. These can be found in the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, which provide for us an overlap with Catholic Social Thought in the body of which these principles are expressly defined.

6. Sustainability is linked to Solidarity and Subsidiarity concerns

Sustainable coexistence in traditional African society could best be understood as the continuity of historicity, defined as the linkage of the past, the present and future. Such thinking takes a view at the past as the guarantor of the present and as the basis for the future. It provides strong arguments and long-term foundations for a more grounded and rational basis which seeks to promote a sustainable world for everybody. In this context, the UN defined sustainability *“building upon the resources and heritage of the past generations, to meet needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”* (United Nations, UNEP, Rio Earth Summit, 1992; Cf Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development. Our Common Future. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

According to these ethical principles of subsidiarity and solidarity as embedded in the Igbo worldview, subsidiarity implies that each person (private interest) exists individually and that small groups or levels of authority have competencies of responsibility at that level; The

classical definition of this principle is found in the Papal Encyclical 'Quadragesimo Anno' (QA) of Pope Pius XI:

“Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the social body, and never destroy or absorb them... Therefore, those in power should be sure that the more perfectly a graduated order is kept among the various associations, in observance of the principle of 'subsidiary function', the stronger social authority and effectiveness will be, the happier and more prosperous the condition of the state.”

The principle of subsidiarity presupposes the principles of solidarity and the common good, but is not identical with them. That society must help the individual is a clear statement of the solidarity principle which emphasizes mutual connection and obligation. The distribution and delimitation of the competence to be considered in this help fall to the subsidiarity principle. The point being made here is that African traditional religion is essentially a philosophy and a spiritual way of life, which permeates, pervades and animates the traditional social institutions, norms and celebrations. Every Igbo ritual act of the peoples of southeastern Nigeria, including sacrifice, dance and festival had a philosophy or idea behind it. In other words, action was motivated based on values which involved a basic belief, a philosophy, an underlying principle or an idea. These values thus generated actions and behaviour, which in turn influenced individuals and groups.

7. Stakeholder orientation beyond simply Shareholder Value

The African philosophy of: “*I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am*” clashes with modern values of a world economy dominated by the liberal capitalist practices, where the human person has become a factor of production – simply - a labourer who does a paid job and is relieved when not needed. The labourer is a cog in the wheel of the production process. Here, the interests of stakeholders other than shareholders- are neglected and side-lined. Such questions as ‘what is the responsibility of businesses and their managers to shareholders, and stakeholders?’; ‘what mechanisms could be put in place to guarantee a balance between the pursuit of private interests of management or shareholders and public interests including those of the environment, society, host communities, employees, etc.?’”, do not arise as such where the responsibility of businesses and individuals to stakeholders is recognized and acted upon. In recognizing the existence of stakeholders to include shareholders, employees, host communities, customers, suppliers, the environment as well as society and humanity at large, businesses could and should realign their private interests to ensure that sustainability (at the cultural, social, environmental and economic levels) becomes an agenda alongside that of profit-making.

Finally, traditional African economies, with communal structures, implied certain ownership and management structures which promoted social responsibility, equity and sustainability. These structures, which promoted equitable access instead of accumulation of wealth, have been criticized as being the cause for why Africa has not been able to launch herself economically on the world stage. Refuting this critique is not the object of this paper. Rather it is to say that the African concept of communal ownership and participatory management structures put forward a business model that promotes sustainability and balances private (business) and public interests. It would be seen that there was a tension between the individual and the community on matters of ownership in the Igbo culture. Indeed, this tension did, and does still, exist. However, a balance was sought for and achieved in such a way that individual ownership of property was a natural, valid and necessary expression of

the right to acquisition. Possession and control did not however assume an absolute dimension but were restricted within the limits imposed by their social function. This original African tradition of communal ownership does in fact correspond to a Christian conception of the world and of life. Writing in *Laborem Exercens* in 1981, John Paul II states that “Christian tradition has never upheld the right to private property as absolute and untouchable. On the contrary, it has always understood this right within the broader context of the right to common use of the goods of creation. The right to private property is thus subordinated to the right to common use and to the fact that goods are meant for everyone.” (34) The Igbo understanding of ownership is practically demonstrated in the life of its people centuries before this Christian teaching was formulated. In summary, this research examines ownership and management structures of traditional Igbo Businesses based on ethical values of subsidiarity and solidarity. It understudies and promotes African traditional values which, applied to modern issues of sustainability and the corporate governance function, offer as a solid basis to establish a fair and sustainable future for individuals, communities and societies. In this context, I argue that our generation would do better by building upon the resources and heritage of the past generations, to meet needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

8. Property considered a social Mortgage

One of the most fundamental cultural, social and economic realities in Igbo culture, as is found in many other African societies, is the basic understanding of property as a natural right and therewith a human right, for the satisfaction and protection of the needs of the individual, the family and the clan as a whole. Property is the basis of wealth and the Igbo tradition of communal ownership makes everybody a stakeholder and not just strangers in their own community. Although an individual has the right to own property, and in fact does own some property, it is the family and the entire community which ultimately owns the individual because he or she is tied to this community in an intrinsic manner. In traditional society, whatever the individual acquired as private property (farm products, animals, skills, utensils, clothing) was based more on the right of ‘access’ and of ‘use’ in a proximate but not ultimate sense. Igbo culture and tradition understood ownership to mean the possession, authority and control of and over something by an individual, a community and the ancestors, which implied a spiritual bond. The destiny of the individual and the community was often interlinked.

Since private property was necessary for the security, life and survival of the family it was understood as a “social mortgage”, emphasizing the right of access to which every member of the community was entitled. This meant that in traditional society, ownership had an intrinsically social function, which it has retained till date. The division of ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ in society was avoided by ensuring every member of the community had access to factors of production, including land, according to their need and entrepreneurial ability. The exclusive usurping of property rights by a few lucky, enough to access capital, and corresponding marginalization and exploitation of the rest of society was generally not possible. In modern society, much of this has changed but the lessons and values remain.

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creation. *The right to private property is thus subordinated to the right to common use and to the fact that goods are meant for everyone.*"

9. Lessons from Laudato Si of Pope Francis

The main contribution of Pope Francis to the climate crisis in the Encyclical Letter Laudato Si is a call to **ecological conversion** by all actors. This ecological conversion encompasses ecological equilibrium, social justice, and spiritual responsibility, and it calls for immediate action.

Laudato Si brings the wisdom found in African cultures and other traditions into sync with Christian teaching, calling the earth our common Home. To tackle global environmental degradation, Pope Francis uses the evidence of natural sciences and the frightening results made available by the scientific community to say that the earth which is our "*sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her*" (LS, 2015, n.2). *We now see ourselves as Lords and masters entitled to plunder the earth at will.* It is an unprecedented document in its adoption of scientific concepts and terms, thus establishing the new concept of "**integral ecology**" within the churches social thought.

This addresses the need to integrate social justice and spiritual responsibility in each person's attitudes and actions. This call is based on biblical foundations grounded in the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ (John 1: 1). It takes on the Faith of entire humanity for a better world for all and finds theological and philosophical considerations with ethical and scientific reflections that point to the need for a change of lifestyle in how humanity relates with the entire ecology of space and time and nature. The Pope argues that a "*very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system, a rise in the sea level and an increase of extreme weather events..*" (LS, n. 23)

He re-iterates a religious vision of "sister earth" which Africans call by another female name "Mother earth" with an urgent plea for action. "*Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption*" (LS, n. 23). "*Yet, we are called to be instruments of God our Father, so that our planet might be what he desired when he created it and correspond with his plan for peace, beauty and fullness*" (Pope Francis, LS, n. 53).

Even though Catholic Social Teaching decrees the "universal destination of all earthly goods and a social mortgage on property, for the first time, Pope Francis points to the *climate* as being "*a common good, belonging to all and meant for all*" (LS, n. 23). He defines it at the global level as "*a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions of human life.*"

The crucial section of Laudato Si makes it clear that poverty is not a side issue to the ecological problem but an essential part of it. He therefore argues that "*the earth's resources are also being plundered because of short sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production. The loss of forests and woodlands entails the loss of species which may constitute extremely important resources in the future, not only for food but also for curing disease and other uses*" (LS, n. 32). Pope Francis is bold and states that "*we cannot be silent witnesses to terrible injustices if we think that we can obtain significant benefits by making the rest of humanity, present and future, pay the extremely high costs of environmental deterioration*" (LS, n. 36). Indeed "*we cannot overlook the huge global*

economic interests which., under the guise of protecting (biodiversity) can undermine the sovereignty of individual nations. There are proposals to internationalize the Amazon, which only serve the economic interests of transnational corporations” (LS, n. 38). He calls for a revolution, saying “all of this shows the urgent need for us to move forward in a bold cultural revolution(LS, n 114) and stop boiling down human knowledge to the purely instrumental while ignoring ethics. This will require a fresh vision and new responsibility in the face of new challenges. To the political class, the Pope issues some invitation and clear words calling on politicians to act. “Politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy. Today, in view of the common good, there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life (LS, n. 189).

Finally, in a critique of global injustices perpetrated against the vulnerable through unethical practices that exploit the planets resources, the Pope calls for an attitudinal change, a Metanoia for all persons. *“in the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and preferential option for the poorest of the our brothers and sisters” (LS, n. 158).*

The words addressed to the market and to unbridled consumerism are also apt in the context of this paper: *“since the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products, a change in lifestyle could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power”(LS, n. 203 – 206).*

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- (b) open to all. Both principles are asserted in traditional Igbo society and economy cf

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