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**BEING A CHURCH IN A SECULARISED  
WORLD**  
**“You Are the Salt of the Earth... You Are the  
Light of the World” (Mt 5:13-16)**

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**Introduction**

Undoubtedly, the Second Vatican Council enabled the Church to have a new interpretation of herself for the present era. Not unlike theologians of earlier periods, participants of Vatican II also identified pertinent issues in the life of the Church, issues that form the basis of their deliberations. These early theologians employed every literary form as well as the collective memories of members that were available to them in establishing Christian orthodoxy in the face of a massive secularising influence. Social theorists such as Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim, all agree that modernization of society would include a decline in the level of religiosity. Pope John XXIII convoked the Council in order to align the Church and her mission with modernity. The metaphor of “Salt of the earth and Light of the world” (Mt 5:13-16) in a sense articulates this mission of being a church in a secularising world.

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"You are the salt of the Earth... You are the light of the World" (Mt 5:13-16). These words resonated within the Council chambers as theologians strove to find ways in which the Church can positively engage the emerging society. New ecclesiology emanating from the Council recognizes the reality of human existence rather than a pyramidal model of the Church that emphasizes leadership role and structure. For most Catholics the Second Vatican Council was a welcome event in the life of the Church. Two Vatican II documents, *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, particularly stand out. *Lumen Gentium* underscores the notion of Church as the People of God and light of the world. It also emphasizes the general priesthood of the faithful. *Gaudium et Spes* among other contributions liberates the Church from a siege mentality of Vatican I and offers the freedom to address issues that bear on the Church's self-understanding in the world. *Gaudium et Spes* gives a solid backing on the theme of human rights. In a way the document reiterates and offers full support to Pope John the XXIII's 1963 *Pacem in Terris*. *Gaudium et Spes* places the full weight of the Church behind social doctrines. In sum, the Council offered a new lease of life to Christ's faithful and prepared them to embrace the emerging global community with a new zeal and confidence.

The Church in many parts of the world continues to make tremendous progress along the lines of the Council's directives. Others, however, are still unravelling the Council's teachings while still others are yet to come to terms with the whole idea of a Vatican II and its new ecclesiology. The Church in many African countries belongs to this last category. And the Nigerian church is not immune. After fifty years, the implementation of the instrumentalities of Vatican II is yet to filter down to the grassroots. One must not deny the modest changes made in the area of liturgy. Obvious external changes such as the priest facing the congregation and celebrating the Holy Mass in the local language are laudable. So also the inculturation of musical instruments, dances, clapping and singing. However, the non-material aspect, the transformative teachings articulated in *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, have yet to gain the desired audience in most dioceses. For the most part, however, the study of the Council's documents is the preserve of seminaries and houses of formation without a process to bring it to those at the pews.

The teachings in *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* provide abundant tools with which to engage the modern world with its complexities. Faithful to the mind of the Council initiator, John XXIII, these documents set in motion how to coordinate the Church with the general culture, secularism inclusive. Although the Council offered local Churches some freedom as to adaptation, the Council's blueprint remains invaluable in dealing with some complex issues. The suggestion here is that ignorance of the Council teaching can be problematic. Thus various Churches, regional and local began a self-study to enable the self-understanding of themselves as Church. A self-understanding represented in part by a model of Church facilitates the different areas of ministry within the ecclesial community and beyond. A well articulated model of church is half the battle won in dealing with challenges posed by secularising agents.

The Church in the African region has the church-as-family for her model of Church. The model of Church-as-family, articulated by the 1994 African Synod was an attempt to formulate a self-understanding that will enable the Church engage passionately an emerging world within a "post-colony" landscape. Another way to express the African setting is neo-colonialism of which globalization fronts as the drum major. To what extent has the model of Church-as-family succeeded in forming a People of God who actively engage the emerging so-called global culture is part of what this study investigates, particularly in the Nigerian context? Salt of the earth and Light of the world (Mt 5:13-16), two homely metaphors of effective discipleship, provides the grounding to explore being a church in a secularising world. This paper proceeds from my position as participant-observer and an indigenous researcher.<sup>1</sup> The rest of the paper is divided into four sections. First I offer a survey of the Ecclesial context of the Nigerian church. Besides being an area largely in need of primary evangelization, a review of the secular environment in which the Nigerian church witnesses to her mission as salt of the earth and light of the world is the subject of the second section. An exegetical survey of Matthew 5: 13-16 follows. The final and concluding section deals with appropriation.

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<sup>1</sup>Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, London: Zed Books, 2012 (Second Edition), 198.

## 1. A Survey of the Ecclesial Context of the Nigerian Church

Church is not a building. Neither is it the structures of authority within the organization.<sup>2</sup> According to Hans Küng, from the earliest times, until the present, the church has been as it still is a fellowship of those who believe in Christ, the fellowship of those who have committed themselves to the person and cause of Christ and attest it as hope for all men and women.<sup>3</sup> Küng goes on to state that the original meaning of the *ekklesia*, 'church,' was not a 'hyperorganization' of spiritual functionaries detached from the concrete assembly, but a community or an assembly of persons sharing a common bond through baptism and united in the Spirit of Christ.<sup>4</sup> This image of the church presented in the New Testament with its plurality provides a witness from which the Nigerian church can begin to negotiate being salt of the earth and light of the world. Pluralism was an underlying element in the Jesus Movement. From this diversity what came to be known as church emerged after the Pentecost event (Acts 2:1-13). Two currents, the model of the Church adopted by the 1994 African synod and the so-called global culture (globalization), impinge on Nigeria's struggle in being a Church in a secularised world. Because theology cannot be done in a vacuum, inquiry into the welfare of a local Church must take the concrete situation of people into account. Just as the Word became incarnate in a specific circumstance, the transmission of the Christian message also takes form in a particular context. Regardless of the universal and comprehensive claim of the nature of the gospel, its meaning for a people can only be accessed through their specific circumstance. This supports a model of the Church that can carry the full weight of the culture, a project of contextual theology.

Theology is about the Creator God and creatures. The sensitivity of making the Gospel message relevant to peoples and their circumstances across cultures has been the position of the Church from its inception (Acts 15). In the light of this, the African Church gathered in a Synod (1994) in seeking to articulate its self-understanding of Church asked themselves the key question: "Church in Africa, what must you now become? Becoming a church

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<sup>2</sup>Caroline Mbonu, *The Nigerian Journal of Theology*, 27 (June 2013) 114-125.

<sup>3</sup>Hans Küng, *The Catholic Church: A Short History*, translated by John Bowden, New York: The Modern Library Chronicles Books, 2001, 6.

<sup>4</sup>Hans Küng, *The Catholic Church*, 5.

in a secularized and pluralistic environment is not without difficulty. First, the process of becoming a church demands a self-understanding that takes into account the cosmology of the people. According to the Synod, this self-understanding is gained through perceiving the “church-as-family” in service of the mission of Christ. This study perceives the mission consistent with being salt of the earth and light of the world. However, some African theologians did not accept fully this model of Church-as-family.<sup>5</sup> Some perceive a model that suggests “family” as reinforcing the traditional hierarchical and pyramidal model of the Church that characterized the Vatican I era; a church where the Chief shepherd is always “my lord.” Elochukwu Uzukwu points out the appropriation of “Church” which the idea of lordship denotes. He notes,

a Nigerian bishop addressing senior seminaries some years ago is reported to have underlined this difference in formulas such as ‘We are the church, you are not the church; the church speaks, you listen; we talk, you do the listening; we give directives, you obey; you are there, we are here; we send you, you go!’<sup>6</sup>

Uzukwu’s observation shows the urgency of articulating the idea of the Church according to Second Vatican Council for this population.

One must recognize that plurality is a constant in the African continent and diversity in ethnicity, culture, religion and environment create a mosaic that is akin to the situation from which the Jesus movement metamorphosed into a community called church. Furthermore, the rhetoric of family can be so romanticized that one loses sight of the reality of the image of family in this postmodern era in which anti-foundational ideologies appear to hold sway. Moreover, some persons have a positive sense of family while others would have difficulty connecting with their families at any level whatsoever. In sum, the word “family” carries much cultural baggage. Almost two decades after the synod (1994), the

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<sup>5</sup>Benjamin Kiriswa, “African Model of Church as Family: Implications on Ministry and Leadership,” in *African Ecclesial Review* 43, 3 (June 2001) 100. Some African scholars have commented that a model of Church-as-family is retrogressive. Kiriswa argues, “to transfer onto the Church the image of a family where the father is harsh, authoritarian and dictatorial, and the mother/wife is the slave who does all the donkey work, without any role in decision making, and the children have to be altogether silent, is to continue perpetuating a patriarchal, and dictatorial leadership in the Church.”

<sup>6</sup>Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996, 121.

transformative effect of the chosen model on the Church in the region is still being assessed. Perhaps only the context of the metaphor can offer validity to the word “family” as an acceptable model. Even so, to derive meaning, a metaphor must be interpreted. Thus posing yet another set of problems.

Being a Church in a secular world was problematic for nascent Christianity. Until the Edit of Milan (313),<sup>7</sup> being a church was an ominous undertaking, fraught with danger. Lessons from this period can be instructive. Extant secular historical sources as well as the Patristic writings provide abundant literary material to enable theologians reconcile historical and contemporary social events with their self-understanding as a Church, the People of God. Gerhard van den Heever comments on the resourcefulness of the early theologians as a genius of social engineering:

One needs only pay attention to the vast topic of the cornucopia of literary exhortation spanning the whole period from the Apostolic Fathers to the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers to understand how Christianity was literally exhorted into existence according to the needs and dictates of communities situated in different geographical locales, interacting and contending with opposing viewpoints.<sup>8</sup>

Those opposing viewpoints were not only doctrinal but also socio-economical. Pressures from the secular environment formed part of the struggle.

Secularisation is not a modern day phenomenon. Secularisation has been a threat to indigenous peoples as well as religious traditions from across the century. Ancient Israel struggled with secularisation and the fear of assimilation in their relations with their Canaanite neighbours and other communities from which they in part received their cultural definitions. A poignant account of martyrdom the theme of the Fourth Book of Maccabees (Intertestamental Literature) is an example of Jewish struggle against secularising Hellenising influence. The author of the Fourth book of Maccabees articulates his stoic philosophical text to encourage his co-religionists to stand firm

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<sup>7</sup>The Edict of Milan was granted by Emperor Constantine the Great in the West and Licinius Augustus in the East in 313 granting religious freedom throughout the Roman Empire. In addition, the Edict ordered the restitution of property confiscated from Christians. <http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/constantine/g/edictofmilan.htm>, accessed, July 29, 2013.

<sup>8</sup>Van Den Heever, Gerhard, “On How To Be or Not To Be: Theoretical Reflection on Religion and Identity in Africa,” *Religion and Theology* 8, 1 (2001) 6-7.

in the tradition of the Torah.<sup>9</sup> This work was written for Diaspora Jewish community about AD 20—54.<sup>10</sup> This resistance piece of work<sup>11</sup> is reproduced in summary fashion in 2 Maccabees 7, a narrative of detailing the martyrdom of a mother and her sons. Jewish resistance literature of this era enabled Diaspora Jews work against secularising influence imbedded in the Hellenistic worldview.

But the African model of church has been criticized. Critics view it as not able to support the full ecclesiological weight of the African Church. Church-as-family has less universal appeal, it suggests a direction inward. That is to say the Church's primary concern is for those within similar to standard family structure; such structures have little or no interest for those outside the "family." Such exclusivist approach to the church does not resonate with Vatican II's *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Decree on Ecumenism. Moreover, an exclusivist leaning also questions the value of *Nostra Aetate*, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, which spells out Catholic relations with persons of other religious traditions, particularly Judaism. Less than full attention to these Council documents takes from the Church's position to attend to her mission as salt and light. Lack of knowledge of events outside the family inadvertently exposes the Church to secularising elements. One such secularising element is the western hegemony through the market system. Rather than foster intercultural exchange, and promote common humanity, the effect of globalization on most local economy, cultures, religion and, otherwise is distressing. The Church appears unprepared to face this singular secularising agent. Even within the larger Christian denominations, a Nigerian version of Pentecostalism feeds on the secularising agenda.

## 2. A Review of the Nigeria Socio-Religio Environment

Nigeria was a former colony. Not unlike most former colonized people struggling to recover dislodged cosmology, Nigeria has its share of unresolved social issues. Political uncertainties, religious intolerance, gender bias, including other situations that enervate

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<sup>9</sup>David A. DeSilva, *4 Maccabees*, Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, 11.

<sup>10</sup>Moses Hadas, ed. *The Third and Fourth Book of Maccabees*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953, 96.

<sup>11</sup>Mary D'Angelo, "'Ensebeia' Roman Imperial Family Values and the Sexual Politics of 4 Maccabees and the Pastorals," *Biblical Interpretations*, 11, 2 (2003) 139-165.

human dignity. The Church, which must deal with secularising influence, remains part of the culture and its consciousness. Secularisation is not monolithic. The phenomenon has many levels of meaning, both as a theory and a historical process<sup>12</sup> but that is not the concern here. Suffice to say that the research employs the word secularisation to mean the transformation of a society from close identification with religious values and institutions toward nonreligious values and secular institutions.<sup>13</sup> One aspect of secularisation in Nigeria is the clean antithetical separation between Church and state, which consequently, led to the divorce between religion, on the one hand, and politics, economics and social interaction in the life of the Nigerian on the other.<sup>14</sup>

These notwithstanding, the different forms of religious expressions flourish in the land. However, new religious movements, particularly Pentecostalism with its attendant Gospel of prosperity is one of the greatest secularising influences affecting “salt and light” of the Nigerian church.<sup>15</sup> Identified as a very subtle form of secularization, a form of Pentecostalism is Christianity devoid of the Cross. Adherents to this brand of Christianity hang on prosperity as the ultimate end.

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<sup>12</sup>Max Weber, *Sociological Writings* <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/weber.htm>, assessed October 8, 2013.

<sup>13</sup>Secularization: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secularization>, assessed October 8, 2013.

<sup>14</sup>Charles Chikezie Agu, *Secularization in Igboland: Socio-religious change and its Challenges to the Church among the Igbo*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989, 391.

<sup>15</sup>Prosperity-driven religious faith appears as the benchmark of Nigerian Pentecostalism. These new-age churches endorse a magical way of life, a life of miracles centered on prosperity, a life devoid of suffering and of the cross. Miracle consists in money, power, and pleasure. The cross becomes an abhorrent subject, something that must be ‘rejected.’ Proponents of the prosperity gospel reject suffering. “Suffering” they say, “Is not my portion.” They seem to ignore the fact that the Christian faith is born out of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Pastors parade the latest sleek automobiles in town. Some have private aircrafts! Furthermore, many prosperity preachers bear in their bodies a manifestation of their affluence; they carry around bulging bellies. They consume resources that should have been given to the poor of the LORD, exemplified in widow, the orphan and the stranger. In the complexity of the Nigerian economic environment, material benefits and gains arising from prosperity Gospel have given rise to a proliferation of churches. There seems to be a church in every street corner in every town and city, pastors promising on-comers material prosperity without the labor. Since dominant religious groups preach material prosperity, materialism has come to dominate the social arena giving rise to various forms of untoward behaviours.



Undoubtedly, this form of Christianity is akin to “wolf in sheep’s clothing,” a situation that negates the biblical metaphor of salt and light.

The propensity to equate wealth with divine blessings is biblical. But the tendency does not constitute an end in itself. What the individual does with the blessings is where the problem lies. Attention to the poor, represented by the widow, the orphan and stranger, remains a major component of covenant theology. The Psalmist celebrates the poor, “Though I am afflicted and poor, the Lord keeps me in mind” (Ps 40:17). An outright rejection of the poor or poverty (not destitution) draws attention to an inability to adapt ethical and spiritual needs of the time. Inordinate preaching of prosperity gospel suggests an activity that is no longer under the control or influence of religion; it is secular.

The Gospel according to Luke, for example, has an array of parables about the poor. Present-day preachers have become selective in their preaching the Word. A selective preaching of prosperity with corresponding ignoring subject of poverty in our local churches and denominations does not seem to fully represent the Good News of salt of the earth and light of the world. In a country where a significant percentage of church-goers live in real poverty, Pastors of mega Christian (prosperity) churches own private jets. Some own more than one! Such discourses run contrary to the eschatological vocation of discipleship and the Church.<sup>16</sup> With so much poverty in the land, material as well as anthropological, the inordinate pursuit for the prosperity Gospel among many Christians tends to support Karl Marx’s criticism of religion as the opium of the people.<sup>17</sup> Although it is no longer the case that secularisation is the dissolution of religion, the emergence of new religious movements demonstrates otherwise. Curiously the Catholic Church has not remained unaffected by the excesses of these heterodoxies. A survey of some dioceses will corroborate this assumption. The degree to which the Church appropriates secular ideals in terms of wealth belies the humble beginnings of the Christian faith in the country.

Chronologically, Christianity in Nigeria spans six centuries (1515 to the present). Written history credits Portuguese missionaries as the

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<sup>16</sup>Caroline N. Mbonu, *Handmaid: The Power of Names in Theology and Society*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2010, 60.

<sup>17</sup>Marx-Engels *Studienausgabe Band/Philosophie*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Bücherei, Taschenbuch, 1966, 17-18.

first to reach the present geographical space called Nigeria about the later part of the sixteenth. The missionaries came at the request of Oba Ozulua, who sent an embassy to Lisbon to indicate interest in Christian conversion while asking for firearms, including cannons.<sup>18</sup> It was a mix bag enterprise. Missionary activities were centered in the area of the kingdom of Benin and the Port of Warri (Edo and Delta States of modern Nigeria and environs). Unlike in the Congo, the Benin romance with Portugal was short-lived. The Portuguese King reneged on the terms of agreement and the Oba invited the missionaries to leave his territory, ending the mission. But some form of the Christian faith lingered on after the exit of the missionaries. The period that followed was marked with some form of mixing the traditional religion and Christianity, a syncretism that is prevalent in these areas of first missionary contact. Hence, it is not uncommon that some Christians attend the Holy Mass on Sunday morning and consult a traditional oracle or a soothsayer in the evening.

Christian activities resumed in Nigeria about two centuries later. The second wave of missionary activities about the middle of the nineteenth century (1860) brought yet another set of missionaries to Western Nigeria (1860), this time the Church Mission Society (CMS). Catholic French Holy Ghost Fathers arrived at Onitsha, a town by the River Niger in Eastern Nigeria in 1885. It can rightly be said that Christianity in Nigeria is barely in its second century. Some are still converting from the native religion while others are second and third generation Christians. Primary (re)evangelization in many parts of the country remains the principal mission facing the Church even as she works with secularizing agents propagated by globalization.

Globalization is a complex phenomenon. The trajectories of globalization bear on religion, culture and socio-political arena. Globalization, the “wind” from the west, tends to exert influence on the different cultures of the world and Nigeria and her people are not spared. The force of this wind tends to erode native “reflections”. Only that which is from America, for example, is right. Even indigenous religious traditions are not spared of the blight of globalization. Simply put, globalization represents a culture that seeks to subordinate indigenous values; a culture that banishes and,

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<sup>18</sup>Adrian Hasting, *Church and Mission in Modern Africa*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1967, 77.

indeed, seeks to universally homogenize local ethics and cultures.<sup>19</sup> In this milieu, being salt of the earth and light of the world becomes a real challenge.

### **3. Salt of the Earth and Light of the World: Exegetical Survey of Mt 5: 13-16 (Parallels: Mk 9:50; Lk 14:34-35)**

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lamp stand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father” (Mt 5:13-16).

Delivered in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, the Gospel of Matthew places the above verses (5:13-16) immediately after the Beatitudes (5:3-12). The positioning of the salt and light metaphor impresses on the disciples, the embryonic church, and their primary role in the reign of God. After enumerating the eschatological blessings, the conditions that will obtain after the return of the Son of Man, the Gospel of Matthew goes on to specifically address the disciples (5:13-16) potential inheritors of the eschatological goals. The whole content of the Sermon on the Mount represents personal and collective aspect of the new piety and behaviour which salt and light symbolize.

Salt of the earth and Light of the world delineate the boundary of the Church, in this case, its universality. The universality of the Church makes the task of being salt and light arduous. Every individual member as well as the community called Church has a role to play in realizing the universal goal of spicing up and lighting up the entire world with the Reign of God. The imagery of salt has great current as well as historical interest. Called sodium chloride by chemists, salt had two purposes in the first century Palestine. Salt was used to preserve food, especially meat and fish. Second, salt was used and is still being used as flavour enhancer. But salt is not merely a

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<sup>19</sup>Caroline Mbonu, “The Study of Religion and Culture: Significance and Prospects in Contemporary Nigeria,” in *Introduction to Religion and Cultural Studies*, 211-224, ed., Akama, Emumena Samson, Port Harcourt, Nigeria: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2012, 211.

flavour enhancer or preservative that most people today have come to know. To appreciate the metaphor of salt, some history is appropriately recalled here.<sup>20</sup>

Salt has long held an important place in religion and culture. Scholars point out that salt has played a vital part in religious ritual in many cultures, symbolizing immutable, incorruptible purity. Salt is mentioned more than 30 times in the Bible one of which is the unnamed wife of Lot turning into a pillar of salt (Gen 19). Covenants in both the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament were often sealed with salt: the origin of the word "salvation." In the Catholic Church, salt is or has been used in a variety of purifying rituals. Perhaps this enduring quality of salt gave a rich significance in the saying, "You are the salt of the earth."

The homely metaphor of salt and light is laid upon the embryonic Church gathered to hear the message of the first book of the new revelation, the Sermon on the Mount. The richness of salt is combined with the brilliance of light, an image that resonates with Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*, light to the nations. Light drives away darkness (Jn 1:1-10). The incompatibility of light and darkness points to the Church's vocation and mission in a secularizing world. The Gospel of John makes abundantly clear that the presence of light in darkness is something which is unmistakable. Modernity must not deem the Christ, the light of the world. Metaphorically, salt and light remain indispensable components of the mission of the Church in Nigeria.

Salt losing its taste and the light being hidden under a bushel invites blandness and darkness, something of nihilism into the world.

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<sup>20</sup>As far back as 6050 BC, salt has been an important and integral part of the world's history, as it has been interwoven into the daily lives of countless historic civilizations. Used as a part of Egyptian religious offerings and valuable trade between the Phoenicians and their Mediterranean empire, salt and history have been inextricably intertwined for millennia, with great importance placed on salt by many different races and cultures of people. Even today, the history of salt touches our daily lives. The word "salary" was derived from the word "salt." Salt was highly valued and its production was legally restricted in ancient times, so it was historically used as a method of trade and currency. The word "salad" also originated from "salt," and began with the early Romans salting their leafy greens and vegetables. Undeniably, the history of salt is both broad ranging and unique, leaving its indelible mark in cultures across the globe. [http://www.saltworks.us/salt\\_info/si\\_HistoryOfSalt.asp](http://www.saltworks.us/salt_info/si_HistoryOfSalt.asp), accessed July 30, 2013.

#### 4. Appropriation and Conclusion

Fifty years after Vatican II, the teachings of the Council have yet to make impact at the grassroots in many areas of the Nigerian church. A well articulated model of church to hang on would provide the grounding for implementing the Council's directives. Relationship undergird Africa's mode of social interaction. And African's much praised religiosity revolves around endless rounds of relationships. A model of the Church that takes relationality into consideration closely approximates *Lumen Gentium's* notion of the church as people in relationship, the People of God, involve in co-responsibility in evangelization. A church in relationship supports strongly *Gaudium et Spes's* thrust on social justices. Because theology in Nigeria, for the most part, remains an intellectual discourse, many of the lay faithful simply hang on to the faith of their forebears with little or no nourishment from new theological conversations, particularly those emerging from evaluation of fifty years after the Vatican II. How can the Nigerian Church be salt to the earth and light to a world, in an environment that is increasingly becoming secular in religious expressions? A milieu besieged by materialist Pentecostalism and Islamic militancy? And a Church whose leadership structure supports the sense of "you are there, we are here," stated above? Given the insidious secularizing agents, particularly those masked in Christian robes, being salt of the earth and light of the world, takes on an urgent significance. A concerted effort on the part of African theologians to teach, write, and preach on ecclesiology, at least in an elementary form, would perhaps facilitate positive response that can stem the secularizing vestiges in the Church.

That the Church is the Reign of God on earth is our belief. The new vision of the Church occasioned by the new ecclesiology has its impact not only on the self-understanding of the Church, but also on her relationship to the world. To maintain her relevance, therefore, the African Church as a whole must engage the civil space as salt and light. The realization of this mission of the Church underscores the urgency of articulating a culture-sensitive ecclesiology that would facilitate the grounding of the faith in the local Church.