



IN DEFENCE OF PHILOSOPHY

**CRITICAL REFLECTIONS
ON THE WORKS OF PROFESSOR UDOIDEM**

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Chapter VI

Udoidem on the notion of Self and People Empowerment

By

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Introduction

There are few people with sufficient independence to see the weaknesses and follies of their contemporaries and remain themselves untouched by them. And these isolated few usually soon lose their zeal for putting things right when they have come face to face with human obduracy. Only to a tiny minority is it given to fascinate their generation by subtle humour and grace and to hold the mirror up to it by the impersonal agency of self-sacrifice.

These were the words of Rev. Fr. Professor S. Iniobong Udoidem at the 1995 Convocation Lecture at the School of Accountancy, Uyo. In this lecture he prescribed excellence in whatever one does as a panacea for self-empowerment.

In recent times, the discussions and the implementations of the processes of Empowerment at all levels of societal life have been the mission, focus and paramount concerns of many Non-Governmental institutions, organizations and associations in our country. Empowerment refers to the dynamic process by which people gain the inner power, determination, self-confidence, and the vision to pursue a goal that is possible to achieve, worth achieving and which is good for the individual and the society at large. Professor Udoidem's literary and academic contributions to the development of the concept of empowerment for the common good of the people and for nation building mark him out as one of the tiny minority willing to hold the mirror up so that people can see clearly how to be spiritually, politically, socially, economically empowered. The thesis of his numerous writings in this area is that empowerment is only possible when there is a group Solidarity. The idea of Self-Empowerment as implied in Udoidem's numerous writings if adhered to can help people to:

- [a] enhance their personal skills and capabilities in life
- [b] challenge their low social status
- [c] discuss the issues of inequality
- [d] articulate the problem of marginalization
- [e] ask questions on Resource Control
- [f] discuss the process of inculturation for relevance of the Christian message in our culture
- [g] think of the issues of Nation Building.

- [h] learn how to articulate their Human Rights, and Leadership issues
- [j] articulate issues of solidarity as an effective strategy for Socio-Political Relevance
- [k] ask question about Globalisation, etc.

Only a Self-Empowered person according to Udoidem's philosophical writings can work effectively for the growth of a new society. The purpose of this work therefore is to analyze five of Professor Udoidem's writings that boarder on the issues of Self Empowerment showing how his Public Campaign on this issue can create a new people with changed attitude and a new society of empowered people. I shall also endeavour to bare open the important aspects on the issues of Empowerment that Professor Udoidem seems consciously silent about. The first area to be discussed would be the issue of the relevance of authentic values to empowerment.

Values and National Empowerment

In 1991, Udoidem published his *Values and National Development*. This text is a *Crusade For Moral regeneration* for the authentic individual. An authentic individual must necessarily be Self-Empowered, be an embodiment of moral values. These moral values must be the cherished principles, goals and standards or ways of life held or accepted as desirable by the law, individuals, class or society. These values must not negate but enhance the realization of full human potential whether of an individual or of a group. Values according to him are said to be of moral worth if they are cherished ways life that promote mutual welfare, ensure the common good of man as man and enhance the realization of the full human and national potentials. One

must have the conviction of striving for the moral values that foster the good of other human beings and the society at large. Individuals that propagate values that have no moral worth are unempowered and lack self-confidence to change for the better. A thorough reading of this text reveals that the integration of acceptable moral values requires courage and willpower on the part of the individual and is the basis of authentic nation building. The development of any nation as Professor Udoidem points out in this work, depends on the character of the citizens and the moral character of the citizens depends on their orientation. This text educates the public that the moral values of individuals that can enhance and change society are: Discipline, Queue Culture, Work Ethics, National Patriotism, Honesty, Courage, Environmental Sanitation, Justice and Holiness. These moral values as highlighted by Udoidem are meant to inspire people to self-confidence and the realization of the inner power, the inner drive that people need to cultivate for the common good of the nation. According to him, Moral Values are *sine qua non* conditions for the development of any nation. The cultivation of right Moral Values enhances the development of self-reliance, ingenuity, resourcefulness, endurance, pioneering spirit personal skills and capabilities, which are the principal ingredients in the process of Self- Empowerment.

The Value of Group Solidarity

In a paper titled *Akwa Ibom Solidarity: An Effective Strategy for Sociopolitical Relevance*, delivered at the 4th Obong Sampson Udo Etuk annual Lecture in 1993, Udoidem worked out the mechanics of group solidarity as a recipe for political empowerment. This work aimed at inspiring an inner political power in the people of Akwa Ibom State to collectively consider the empowered option of having a common purpose, a common dream, a common present, and a common future. This is the only ingredient for the realization of a political

consciousness that opens the way to development and technological advancement. He advised the people to put away their myopic insignificant dialectal differences and remember their common past and pursue the future as a group. It was here he developed his much popularized concept of **Nsibegheism** – an unconcernful attitude that tear people apart, breeding hate, disunity, hampering empowerment process and making people refuse to appreciate the achievements of their geniuses. The strength of an inner will that is characterized by concernfulness is what Professor Udoidem calls for constantly so that his people may realize a true political empowerment.

Further in this same paper, he discussed Nkorotoism – another negative philosophy of unconscious self-destruction. According to him, this concept is rooted in the experience of a certain type of yam called *Nkoroto*, which often gets burnt when roasted because it does not want to be eaten by the roaster; but the problem is that in trying to avoid being eaten; it gets itself destroyed. The attitude 'If I cannot have it, you cannot have it' is for Professor Udoidem very unprogressive and destructive as a domestic policy. The perpetrators of the negative philosophy of *Nsimbegheism* and *Nkorotoism* can achieve nothing positive. These attitudes dis-empower people making them neither "becoming" nor assisting others to "become". Effective political participation and achievements are realized when people are concerned about the welfare of their compatriots and fight together as one in an empowered manner.

Today, Akwa Ibom State and other States of the Niger Delta are discussing seriously the issues of Resource Control. This, according to him, can only be achieved if there be a collective voice and a one-front fight towards its realization. A change of attitude on **Nsimbegheism** and **Nkorotoism** is needed to set the stage for discussing this issue. If the issues of Resource Control are settled in the favour of the Niger Delta States, then there is a real possibility that they will be economically empowered to work towards a societal transformation.

The Value of Vision

In the history of humanity, we see that *Vision* which is the ability to see beyond the immediate day to day challenges, has always characterized every great leader of the world. Vision as Udoidem points out does not only animate, it also inspires and transform a compelling purpose into action. This was also one of the themes of Udoidem's Convocation Lecture at the School of Accountancy and Business Studies. The text prepares the stage for Empowering people towards developing a *Vision* that would draw people out of their petty pre-occupation in order to unite them in the pursuits of objectives worthy of developing the society. It is a way of inspiring an inner energy and powerful will in the people to build a nation for tomorrow. No one, after reading this work would not be challenged to listen to her/his inner self, and be prepared to act for the betterment of the society. According Udoidem, people should strive to work at the frontier where tomorrow is taking shape. Working in a frontier where tomorrow is taking shape requires the immediate change of attitude and change of negative philosophies that can draw people back into their small preoccupation that leads to no political, economic and social growth whatsoever. The negative philosophy which is rooted in what Udoidem describes as *Nsibegheism* is what makes people refuse to challenge their low social status as a group; articulate the problem of marginalization and poverty of the masses. *Nsibeghe* is the attitude of one who has no inner power to challenge the existing status quo; it is the attitude of one who has not experienced a deeper empowerment to achieve great things for the future. When the youths and adults do not *Tomo Nsimbeghe*, then the stage will be set for collective empowerment programme for the transformation of the society as well as state security consciousness.

The Value of Authority

In his book, *Authority and the Common Good in Social and political Philosophy* Professor Udoidem rightly notes that: *Authority* can be destructive or constructive, liberative or suppressive. Whatever form it takes depends on what it is understood to be. Where it is understood and used as an instrument of domination, the result is that human society and individuals become victims of misguided authority, in forms of tyranny, oppression and exploitation.

In Nigeria we have experienced, particularly during the Military Dictatorship, the misuse of authority to the detriments of the citizens. In other organs of the society, it is known that the misuse of authority often leads to infringement on Human Rights where the dignity of the Human Being is subjected to jeopardy. Many African nations have experienced the misuse of authority and citizens have undergone unprecedented suffering and abuse. This is why the African Union established in July 2000, has as one of its organs a Proposed Court of Justice where injustice and abuse of the human dignity by those placed in authority over others can be redressed.

Professor Udoidem sets out in this Book to show how authority can and should be used for the common good of the citizen so that the citizen may be empowered to work towards national development. An injured and abused person is incapable of effecting a thinking process, is incapable of developing an inner will-power to face the challenges of life. In the various forms of Authority that he enumerates: Paternal, Epistemic, Moral, and political, he emphasizes that all those who exercise these Authorities in any capacity must do so for the common good. In other words, the common good must be the end of every authority. If those in position of authority would accept to share in the knowledge of Professor Udoidem in this area, they will be challenged and empowered to renew their inner power to build a just and good society for their citizens who in turn would share in their empowered leadership. This work is capable of producing true and authentic

leaders for the future of Africa. Leaders who would understand the political grammar of today and subsequently work towards reversing the history of the African Continent for the better.

Spiritual Empowerment

As a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, Professor Udoidem embarked on Spiritual Empowerment programme in his book on Inculturation. He presents a simplified version of the concept of Inculturation for the common man's understanding.

The text, *John Paul II on Inculturation* is a source of Spiritual self-empowerment for the appreciation of the Christian message on the African soil. This text is saying to the people: *You need not weep any more. Christianity is not meant to be strange to you, it is not meant to make you regret giving up some of your cultural practices, no, rather Christianity is part of your culture, Christ Jesus was born as a man as you are.* In this book, he assures all that the Holy Father John Paul II himself encourages the process of Inculturation. As he points out, the good news of Inculturation is that Christ is already present in our culture. Everything in our culture could not be bad and should not be all condemned. Therefore, he proposes a new kind of understanding of the burden of evangelization. A New Evangelization that should urge everyone to identify and proclaim Christ who is already in our culture. The aspect of introducing our culture into the life of the church is very empowering and it is an invitation to universalize the presence and the message of Christ as it manifests itself in our culture. The new forms that would have been identified must be recognized and accepted as being part of the many faces of the universal church. Hallelujah! What a new beginning, a new appreciation of the Christian messages. It therefore means that within the context of Christianity people are now spiritually empowered to courageous worship as a people, that they are to reduce undue artificialities and focus on issues that best expresses their religious sensibilities.

A Critique.

The Empowerment of women for the improvement of their social, economic and health situation is paramount in the agenda of many a nations today. The United Nations Human Rights machinery has a special Commission on the Status of Women as well as a Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against women. After the example of the United Nations, many Governmental and Non-governmental Organizations have put hands on deck to enforce Female Empowerment. There are in Nigeria for instance the National Commission for Women and Ministries for Women Affairs which have been created and are functioning for the purpose of Empowering Women. These emphases on Women Issues came as a result of constant violation of Female Rights in various cultural and sometimes religious circles.

It is surprising that Professor Udoidem in his extensive writings does not in any way focus on the issue of women empowerment. His writings are not Gender sensitive. It does appear that on the issue of female empowerment, Professor Udoidem by his silence is tilting to the side of his fellow ancient Theologians, e.g. St. Paul, Aristotle, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, etc- those he constantly adores. These thinkers always reinforce a negative image of women. The teaching of the early Church fathers and the scholastic theologians of Thomas Aquinas' school reinforced a negative image of women. The theologians of the first five centuries of the church were sort of spiteful of women. Aquinas adopted the Aristotelian conception of women defending the proposition that only males represent the fullness of the human nature. He regarded women as physically, morally and mentally deficient. For Thomas Aquinas maleness in the generic sense of the human species, represents the fullness of the human potential, while the deficiency of a woman confines her to sub-servient position in the spiritual as well as in the social order.

Even though Udoidem in his empowerment programme in general has achieved a great deal, he has failed to point out in his writing how women are to be empowered given their vulnerable position in our culture. It is my conviction that the programme for female empowerment should be gender-specific and gender sensitive.

Notes

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