

## **“ROCHAS ANAYO OKOROCHA & CO EXPOSED”**

**By Msgr. Nathaniel I. Ndiokwere**

When I told one of my closest friends about the present write-up, which I intended would be published in Nigerian newspapers and on the Internet; he was so happy and encouraged me to go ahead. He suggested the above title – **“Rochas Anayo Okorochoa Exposed”**. But I was not comfortable with the title and protested, “No! I don’t want to castigate the governor. No I don’t want to mess up my governor! I have no such intention please!” My friend insisted: “No! Don’t misunderstand me. I personally mean no evil, but I assure you this is the best caption that would attract many readers to your topic.....” he added. “Don’t you know Rochas has many enemies, not less among his political opponents, even among his own people who claim they had not benefitted from his government. Some claim he took their land without compensation.....and stuff”. I want interested in such political animosities, agitations and name calling.

I would have published this same write-up earlier than now but stopped a while because I thought honestly this would fall into the hands of his numerous enemies and damage his chances of re-election. But now the elections presumably have come and gone and Rochas has been re-elected, it is right to re-visit **ROCHAS REVOLUTION.....Leadership By Example (Copyright@2012 Nathaniel Ndiokwere – American Edition & Nigerian Edition)**.

For those who don’t know me, I am a Catholic priest of Orlu diocese, Nigeria and before undertaking my book project had never met Rochas personally but had heard a lot about him especially that he is a well known philanthropist, kind hearted man interested in education and rights of the poor. As the prominent opponent of Ikedi Ohakim those days, most Imolites considered Rochas a “messiah” destined to liberate Ndigbo from the present political and economic predicament, slavery and disunity and then lead this unfortunate race to the Promised Land! Look at what Ndigbo, Biafrans, have suffered in history .....pogroms, genocide, dispossession of their properties and disenfranchisement. They are not welcome anywhere in Nigeria. They are not loved in spite of their contributions to development all over the world....people with great stamina and intellect!

I believed fanatically the man they called Owelle Rochas Anayo Okorochoa was the right man at the right moment. I became Rochas man; Rochas fanatic and truly infatuated and intoxicated with everything ROCHAS. So many Imolites (even Catholic clergy, who never cared about politics, came out openly en masse to make sure Rochas was elected governor of Imo state on whichever party platform! For the first time in the history of Nigerian politics (I need to be corrected), the slogan changed ‘Vote for personality and not party! It worked!

To make sure the Rochas, the choice of the people, picked up the momentum and danced the right music tune, I contributed to Imo Radio News Talks, newspaper write-ups, urging Rochas to ride on and never look behind. He was to convince the Imolites and the world that he is different from the rest of Nigerian politicians.....

In an uncontrollable frenzy I embarked on my book ROCHAS REVOLUTION! It was a real revolution because the man was behaving like a prophet of the old, tearing and pulling down and setting records unseen anywhere in Nigerian leadership and political scenario. I continued urging Rochas never to relent, never to mind those calling him names because he demolished illegal structures and stuff!

In the United States I published the AMERICAN EDITION of ROCHAS REVOLUTION. Back home in 2012/2013 I took two copies of my book (both the American and Nigerian editions) to Rochas Okorochoa at his home village Ogboko. At that first meeting the following dialogue ensued: (Fr. Ndiokwere) "Sir, you are Rochas....I am sure you don't know me and this is the first time I am meeting you.... I have brought you copies of the book I have written about you....You may like it.... (Rochas) taking one of the books and glancing over asked excited, "Has it been launched.....I will go through it.....(called one of his personal assistants), collect the books and present them to me when we get back home....

#### **WHAT HAPPENED – AFTER 3 YEARS - THE BOOK WAS NOT LAUNCHED!!**

I met Governor Rochas and personal assistants at least six times to find out what happened to the book! No meaningful explanation of what was going on. Most of my friends who got worried urged me to meet him personally. I summoned courage and met him one day in his global office. "Sir I wonder.....(Rochas) ....Oh! Father, I am sorry.....(called different aids and secretaries, scolded some....and regretted something had not been done? ***(Those in Rochas 'Company' were Mr. Reginald Emeka Duru (PA), Emeka Offor (One time Rochas Information minister, Pastor Harietta (SD), Ralph Afoaku (PS))***. (Fr. Ndiokwere), Sir I didn't write that book to make money. No!! I don't want to become a famous writer.....I don't want any political appointment. I am too qualified for any office. But I don't want any money from you. I just want you to use the book as souvenir especially at the first/second anniversary of your election.....I am not looking for any remuneration.....No Sir, please don't misunderstand me.... (Rochas) Father I am sorry....I know priests don't indulge in politics and a Reverend Father writing this makes the book credible.... (Fr. Ndiokwere) Sir, I have **about 600 copies of the book** in my car here. Can you tell your secretary or someone to follow me and get them collected? Use the books as souvenir please. Six hundred copies of the book, neatly wrapped in about 30 packets were removed from my car and deposited in the office e of the secretary to Imo state government.....

## BEHOLD, SOMETHING HAPPENED!!

After sometime, impatient they were, 3 of my closest friends (perhaps I had not received millions of naira or political appointment from Rochas and Imo state government), told me why Rochas did not take interest in my book after all. One of them explained that my book was “wonderful” but earned Rochas **apathy** from the onset. He believed he, Rochas did not read (as he promised that first day of our meeting at Ogboko) more than two pages of the book. My friend was convinced that Rochas was *upset and displeased with the publication, right from the beginning of the book, right from page 1, THE INTRODUCTION*. The friend insisted he knew Rochas very well, more than so many in Imo state asked the rhetorical question: “Didn’t you know Rochas is a very ambitious man, a crook, a con man.....”!!!

I intervened (Please stop! No, no! I don’t want this type of rubbish you are insinuating. I know he is not a saint. But he is better than so many other politicians, I said pleading with my friend to shut up. If he has embezzled government money, tell me. Tell me where he has erred very grievously....I heard people don’t like him because he does not ‘share money’. I don’t care about those allegations.

Whatever the case, no matter how poorly he has treated me and my books, I still love him. I have no bitterness against him. Surely the publication of the two editions of ROCHAS REVOLUTION cost me about **one million naira**, and I received not one kobo as remuneration, I am not worried. Only God knows why Rochas behaved as he did....History will judge), I tried to convince my friend and as well console myself.

Another friend blamed me for my ignorance and what he called ‘over-presumptive attitude. He argued “You should have consulted him before embarking on your book project. Then he or his political secretaries could have dictated what to write and what you should not mention? Didn’t you know these politicians like praise-singing and sycophancy? You don’t know much about Nigerian politics.....You could have become a millionaire as well as commissioner for ‘something’.

But my argument was that such precautions could have made nonsense of my intentions and efforts. After all more than 90% of the entire write-up was actually ‘praise-singing’ and almost practically nothing negative about the governor.

On another note, one of the observations of the other friend struck me negatively bad. He was almost shouting at the top of his voice: : “You churchmen claim Rochas is a Christian, catholic....He respects the church, bishops, priests and other church ministers....See how he has treated you and rewarded your honest sweat. Will he treat any layperson, a common writer or journalist like this? Oh! My God! I exclaimed as if coming out of my slumber, shells falling off my eyes! I mockingly questioned, with little reflection: **“Can the devil speak the truth?”** That was Macbeth’s reaction as he saw the witches’ prophecies concerning his kingship coming to fulfillment! Wow!

But since this exchange of views I have continued to wonder what must have happened to the **600 (out of 1500) copies of the book “Rochas Revolution”**, published in 2012 in Nebraska, USA and Owerri, Nigeria and deposited in secretary of Imo government office, Owerri.(the rest lying waste somewhere). It has one of the best

images of Owelle Rochas Okorochoa on the front cover. Have they burnt the books or thrown them into trash bins? That will be an unforgiveable, heartless and reckless blunder.

### **ROCHAS OKOROCHA & ODUMEGWU OJUKWU – THE MOSES OF NDIGBO**

As the scenario was charged with unrelenting sentiments and fanaticism during Biafra/Ojukwu Revolution, so it became during the emerging Rochas revolution in Imo state. Under Rochas leadership most Imo young men and women including my humble self believed Rochas was the Ojukwu of Ndigbo.

Before I deviate I recalled that during Biafra Revolution those days I was one of the tens of thousands of Igbo youths who trusted Ojukwu to date, dead or alive. I defended and fought for Ojukwu. Anyone who ever criticized Ojukwu was in trouble! Most of us were ready to fight and die with Ojukwu. Soldiers mercilessly lashed us with koboko canes as we lined up for recruitment into Biafran army. We were rejected. The soldiers said we didn't qualify or we were not needed!

However, come shine, come rain, most of us remained Biafra/Ojukwu vanquard. At the collapse of Biafra Republic, was Ojukwu a coward to have escaped to Ivory Coast ! Never! We wanted him safe anywhere. Perhaps some other time he would re-emerge and continue the cause of Biafra or Ndigbo. Biafra as bone and flesh republic, an independent state in the world community of nations? No! Perhaps in spirit. For me and perhaps many Imolites ROCHAS has become an embodiment of Igbo aspirations, and in the footsteps of Odumegwu Ojukwu the one to wipe out Igbo tears and like the Moses of the old to lead Ndigbo to the Promised Land of new "Biafra!"

### **If I were Rochas Anayo Okorochoa .....**

Immediately Rochas was confirmed governor of Imo state after the re-run of the so called 'inconclusive elections' in 2011 I set out writing news talks advising the governor in my little capacity as a compatriot, lover of Ndigbo and Rochas fanatic what he should do. "Now that the elections had been won and lost.....Which Way Forward? History will never change as one would ask right now April 25<sup>th</sup> 2015!! Hear me.....That was in 2011. I reproduce some of my "recommendations" then.....

1. **If I were Owelle Okorochoa**, I would capitalize on the overwhelming support and love I have received from the people, young and old, elite and commoners from Owerri, Orlu, Okigwe, and Igbos and non Igbos far and wide to accomplish the "Unthinkable!" The "Unthinkable" stands for "Faithfulness." It stands too for the fulfillment of election promises, even down to a tiny percentage of each declaration of intent.
2. The "**Free Education**" should *not* be pursued in such a way that it becomes a burden that is unbearable for the government to effectively manage. If it

becomes burdensome, enemies will laugh and feel vindicated, for they never believed it could be possible.

3. A “Master Plan” for the development of Orlu and Okigwe townships is overdue. The past administrations woefully ignored this all-important development of these two zones of Imo state. Work on the project must begin soon.
4. The provision of Health Care services may have to include reconstruction of existing and dilapidated hospital structures, equipping them to meet reasonable standards. There ought to be no need for Nigerians to travel to India and Pakistan for health reasons!
5. Employment opportunities for thousands of our youths have to be gradually created. Priority attention may have to be given to “**Imo Area Boys.**” They loved Owelle and voted massively for their governor. The Okada people love Owelle and look towards him for succour! The security problem will take care of itself!
6. **If I were Anayo Okorochoa**, I would give as my first priority, attention to Imo workers. I would begin by wiping away tears from the faces of thousands of unpaid Imo workers and pensioners. These individuals have suffered long in abject poverty. Many died travelling up and down for their pensions. No one cared for them. The “Messiah” has finally arrived. Owelle is the one to say to the “bereaved”, sorry! Stop weeping! I have heard your cries.
7. Many rural roads are in a mess! Where will our governor begin? Somewhere, of course.

Part two of our **Open Letter** had to do with “extra cares” and “commitments.”

1. **If I were Owelle**, I would select only men and women who are as honest, trustworthy, kind and committed to the task at hand as our able governor. Their anti corruption slogan must become infectious in Imo state.
2. No corrupt fellow should be found in the government cabinet led by Owelle Rochas. Those selected to help Owelle must like Caesar’s wife be above suspicion. They should do the **unthinkable**, surrender some percentage of their salaries and remunerations to state government coffers to help execute charitable projects in Imo State. The masses will shout with jubilation! They will go wild with joy!
3. Priests and the Church leaders do not *play politics*, but they certainly do know what happens in politics. Please, Owelle, you are a man of integrity. Your friends and foes say you are **PDP** politician in flesh and blood. But you are now **APGA**. Please do not decamp and abandon your people in the cold. Truly Imo people voted for you, not caring about strict party affiliation. They voted for Owelle, and perhaps too for **THE COCK (OKE OKPA)**. They know what the symbol stands for today as well as in the olden days.
4. **If I were Owelle** I would listen to a group of learned and thoughtful leaders of Igbo extraction debate this party issue. Hear them: “**We want Owelle to remain a frontline Igbo leader, in the footsteps of Ikemba Nnewi, Chief Odimegwu**

**Ojukwu and Nnamdi Azikiwe, Owelle of Onitsha! He, Rochas should make APGA a formidable party in the South East, like ACN in the West and CPC in the North, Owelle should gradually get his counterparts in ENUGU, ABIA, ANAMBRA AND EBONYI to embrace APGA, the party of their political forebears.”**

5. Most enlightened Nigerians, North and South, East and West categorically do not approve of the **ONE PARTY SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT IN NIGERIA**, where political aspirants always join the Winning Party! They yearn to see honest democracy in action.
6. Owelle, hear this finally: Imo people, young and old insist that they stand and swim with you as long as you are **God fearing, kind, incorruptible and morally upright**. They will follow you wherever you are going as long as you are not a **con man, crook (by their fruits they are known), not a liar, not a 419'er, not devious**.
7. **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”** That is a well known Christian prayer. Most good people of Imo state hope that Owelle will forgive his “enemies.” Speaking of those who worked hard, fought like wounded lions to frustrate the ideals and goals of the people’s revolution. Let Owelle “embarrass” them with good gestures, in word and deed!
8. Finally, the people who played a major role in your election, the masses of Imolites, continued to say they were behind you. “Anyi kwu gi na azu!” Will Owelle say, *No?* The ball is in your court! .....

### **THE STROKE THAT BROKE THE CAMEL’S BACK – THE PRESIDENCY/ASO ROCK SAGA**

Shakespeare said in Julius Caesar that ‘ambition is made of sterner stuff’. It simply means that ambition by itself does not get a job done. It must be combined with determination, perseverance, and a passion to get the job done well. Another anonymous writer says ‘power corrupts...absolute power corrupts absolutely. It seemed Rochas did not like the introduction stuff at the page one of my book: Take a look!

***“To our numerous friends who are not familiar with Imo state and Nigeria, it may be necessary to introduce the man we appraise in our book....Rochas Anayo Okorocho is the present governor of Imo state....Okorocho took up office as governor after the 2011 elections in Nigeria, and has been in the limelight of Nigerian politics since early 2007 when he contested for the presidency in 2007 but dropped out in the primaries....As a politician of an Igbo extraction, and ex-Biafran, coming from the secessionist region that fought Nigeria in the 1967-70 civil war, Rochas could not have clinched the highest political office in Nigeria, in spite of his popularity among other Nigerian ethnic groups, North, West and South of the nation.....”***

Most Imolites and Nigerians who know Rochas ambition maintain that the man has his eye on the presidency! Wow! Let us watch! There is nothing wrong with ambition. It is positively a virtue. But is your ambition realizable?

If “Onyigbo” (see and read too “Ndigbo”) will become the president of the Nigerian nation, come ‘when’, there is no need to quarrel over the issue now or even be skeptical. If Ndigbo politicians will occupy the offices of ambassadors, Senate president, House of Representatives and Houses of Assemblies at whatever levels in Nigeria, we must examine the performances of those who had been offered such opportunities in the past. How many of them, dead and alive had exhibited “Biafran spirit” during their tenures?

My friends who read my book ROCHAS REVOLUTION told me Rochas did not like that introductory remarks. Another, a sworn enemy of the governor told me “Rochas must be disappointed with my suggestion in no 3, first part of my write-up above! Telling him not to decamp from APGA was a joke, my friend said! They always decamp and join ‘the winning party ten times a day, he maintained. I agreed. They are reckless politicians, but I added: “But that was only a suggestion I made.....Rochas, if he were a good leader, a fair player in a game, must not take up arms against anyone that did not agree with him in an argument. Good leaders are never vindictive. They must show maturity and understanding, I maintained.

### **VIRTUES VS VICES – FRUITS OF OBSTINACY**

“Obstinate” simply means refusing to change behavior or ideas; perversely adhering to an opinion, purpose or course in spite of reason, arguments or persuasion. When we battle with our ambitions and vices we try normally not to allow the vices to outweigh the virtues. Credible leaders of the people – political and traditional -must always listen to the voice of reason and listen to the admonitions, counsels of the elders.

When the devastations arising from Rochas infrastructural and road projects in many parts of Imo state, including new and uncompleted projects reached very ugly proportions many Rochas lovers undertook goodwill protest missions to some well known elders of Ideator, Rochas own people, pleading with them to approach Rochas and tell him “**to bite as much as he can chew**”, I heard one of the elders summarized the situation this way: “There is not much we can do again....we have told him to stop several times...this guy doesn’t listen to anybody, he is too obstinate.....we can’t flog him....he has absolute power.....Another added: “It is clear he doesn’t hear...Moreover he is ‘**onye aghrigha**’ (reckless, unorganized”.....He begins one structure today...uncompleted ....he starts another and abandons it half-way...!!!)

### **WHY, HOW ROCHAS WON RE-ELECTION – APRIL 2015**

**Not on account of his popularity.** No! Not out of love as for those who voted for him. He won primarily because most Imolites have been frustrated with the state of affairs in Imo politics. They maintained that Rochas should be voted for....simply to continue and see to the completion of some of the projects he started. The “**Imo Youth Must Work**”

group maintained they had not been paid salaries and their status had not been confirmed 2 years after deployment? Is it true?

There is nothing for Rochas to celebrate. There is no need for banners. The margin of win between APC and PDP in the last election is not much, sure evidence that most of the Imolites are not happy with Rochas. If PDP had not been categorized as "*Money-sharing-party*"....if they had presented a more formidable candidate, they could have grabbed power at the Douglas House! Rochas may not know that he has so many real enemies. Some 'protest voters' simply grumbled: "stay there....Continue...to whom are you going to hand over these ugly unfinished projects....for better , for worse, we want you to continue. Maybe the Lord will hear our prayers and our governor will listen and bring his projects to glorious end....."

There is no doubt that many enlightened Imo youths fought against Rochas aggressively on the web and campaigned openly for his downfall in the polls. In my several attempts to appeal to many youths to be fair in their judgments', I made more bitter enemies. Many critics of Rochas told me openly I was crazy supporting a man I did not know. How? I argued, perhaps sheepishly and blindly? I questioned them to tell me how much public fund Rochas has embezzled (my yard stick for assessing Nigerian leaders and politicians?). One of the many anti-Rochas vanguards simply concluded, "Father, forget this matter. You will not understand..." They may be right! There are many other criteria for judging success, good leadership and good governance as a whole.

## **CONCLUSION**

What did I not understand initially? Perhaps it is time now for deep reflection, especially on the part of the ruling government of APC. Rochas has not failed in his rescue mission. He still has a lot to do. The free education project has many dents. Most of the wonderful school buildings are not completed. Most of the classroom furniture are of poor quality and will not last. A close look at the QUALITY, not only QUANTITY of education in Nigeria as whole is imperative. EXPO aka EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE has ruined education in Nigeria. This is a catastrophe. Free education must not replace hard work and integrity

The embarked-upon and un-finished road projects are too many to mention. Poor road construction materials being used by the so-called contractors must be addressed by the present administration. It is weird seeing rural and urban roads constructed two months ago developing potholes at the first downpour. It is heart-breaking and waste of tax-payers' money. One well-constructed one-kilometer-road is better than one hundred poorly finished and un-maintained ones.

A God-sent leader, as 'messiah' will climb to any amiable height, rule from seas to sea without any opposition, and rarely stumbles provided he listens to the counsel of the ancients "*Ana esi n'ulo mara mma apu ama....*" (charity begins at home...) "Aso Rock 2019? " Dream or reality? But the most important question: "Elections won and lost....which way forward?" "Ambition is made of sterner stuff". Whither Imo State?



