

CONSECRATED PERSONS AND SOCIAL CONCERNS OF EVANGELIZATION VIS-À-VIS THE FAMILY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

In Nigeria, we live in a period with so many social concerns affecting the families of today. In these precarious moments, one cannot but think out ways through which Consecrated Persons as “agents of evangelization” could contribute to the improvement of the social conditions of families in the society. Evangelization today cannot flourish independently of the social concerns of humanity. There is a need to bring into the general purview of evangelization the social concerns affecting the families of today. In fact, we cannot talk of any holistic form of evangelization done outside the contextual realities in which we are in today. What it implies is that, any form of evangelization must be able to embrace the whole of realities affecting those to be evangelized, social, political, economical and religious realities. Thus, a systematic study of the effective ways through which Consecrated Persons can be part of the social dimension of evangelization in relation to some social concerns of family was carried out with the write up “Consecrated Persons and Social Concerns of Evangelization vis-à-vis the Family in Nigeria”.

INTRODUCTION

In the reality of our ecclesial life today, the need for consecrated persons to be fully engaged in the social dimension of the ecclesial ministry of the Church is of so much importance. This is because ours is an epoch which does not permit indifference to the many social realities facing humanity today. Evangelization today cannot flourish independent of the social concerns of humanity. Hence the need to constantly remind all of the need to be aware of what the men and women of our time are going through. We cannot talk of any holistic form of evangelization done outside the contextual realities in which we are in today. What it implies is that, any form of evangelization must be able to embrace the whole of realities affecting those to be evangelized, social, political, economical and religious realities.

In his first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis, invites Christians “to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization” marked by the joy of the gospel, and our encounter with Jesus Christ, “which liberates us from the sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.”² With such beauty that flows from the encounter with the gospel, in the Person of Jesus Christ, through the missionary activity of the Church in the world, and the actions of the Holy Spirit, one cannot

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² Francis *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation, November 24, 2013, n. 1.

ignore today the need for Consecrated persons to reflect on their own contribution to making the message of evangelization more effective and touching on the issues affecting the many families of today.

SCOPE AND CONTEXT

It is indeed very important to state from the onset, that this article has its focus on Consecrated Persons and the social contexts of evangelization in regards to contributing to the improving of the social realities affecting families in Nigeria. This article does not in any way hope to historically and sociologically attempt to make a complete study of the connections between consecrated persons and evangelization. Therefore, it suffices to state that this work is only a contribution to the various ways in which consecrated persons can be galvanized into a deeper-renewed approach to the social context of evangelization as it affects families in Nigeria.

Some clarifications are needed also to help the reader to understand a few things which do not concern this work as it progresses. Firstly, this is not a work on mission *ad gentes*, but on evangelization. Therefore, one should not confuse this work as a work on mission *ad gentes*. On the one hand, we must understand and state that mission and evangelization are not the same realities. The first concerns the proclaiming of the message of the gospel to new territories, while evangelization concerns itself with the building of the already existing faith of the people, promoting the values of the gospel which there have already received. In fact, John Paul II, further made the above distinctions and defined mission in three concrete categories, mission *ad gentes*, pastoral activities, and new evangelization.³

The specific mission of this article is aimed at the social aspect of evangelization, and not so much on mission *ad gentes*, which is directed to those who have not yet believed in Christ, or far from him, or in whom the Church has not taken root.⁴ With the above clarifications, we shall now try to examine the following precise issues in this work: orientations of evangelization today, consecrated persons and evangelization, the social milieu of family in Nigeria, and proposing some possible ways of engaging in effective evangelization in its social context. At the end it is hoped that this work would help to galvanize thoughts and provoke some actions among consecrated persons in the work of evangelization its social context vis-à-vis the family in Nigeria.

ORIENTATIONS OF EVANGELIZATION TODAY

The mission to evangelize is as old as the Church itself, because right from the first moments of the Church, to evangelize has always been a mandate she received

³ Cf. John Paul *Remdemptoris Missio*, Encyclical Letter, December 7, 1990, nn. 33-34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, n. 34.

from the Lord, to make disciples of all nations. Thus, Benedict XVI, rightly stated in clear words that:

It is the duty of the Church to proclaim always and everywhere the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He, the first and supreme evangelizer, commanded the Apostles on the day of his Ascension to the Father: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). Faithful to this mandate, the Church – a people chosen by God to declare his wonderful deeds (cf. 1 Peter 2:9) – ever since she received the gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:14), has never tired of making known to the whole world the beauty of the Gospel as she preaches Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the same “yesterday and today and for ever” (Heb 13:8), who, by his death and Resurrection, brought us salvation and fulfilled the promise made of old.⁵

Through the mandate received from the Lord, the Church has made mindful efforts to reach out to the men and women of each epoch, with its own history, cultural realities, and eminent questions. Precisely because, each epoch has its own peculiar realities which are often times not universal issues and/or constant for every age and time. Even in this same age, some issues of evangelization might not be the same for every culture and people within the same epoch. A clear example is the drop of active participation in the liturgical life of the Church in most of what used to be Christian Europe. Whereas the above might rightly be a strong issue in Europe, in Africa on the contrary, that is certainly not an issue where at least people are still very active in the liturgical life of the Church. Nonetheless, a crowded church does not necessarily mean deep and rooted Christianity. If not, how do we explain the many terrible atrocities we keep experiencing in our African continent even in Christian communities? Or how do we explain the high level and cancerous reality of tribalism that is eating the fabrics of our social-political, economic and religious lives?

In our time, the Church has not failed to contextualize her missionary mandate to bring the gospel to shed its brilliant light on the realities of today. In this day and age, we are faced with a great danger, whereby the world is “pervaded as it is by consumerism” and “the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience.”⁶ And in the midst of such perverse society, the Church through evangelization reaches out to the world to proclaim the joy of the gospel, precisely because the world needs to hear the gospel and its message of liberation. There is an urgent need to make the gospel to be heard anew in the world of today, especially knowing that we are faced in some lukewarm attitude towards the values of the gospel. For it is a reality that:

⁵ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *motu proprio ubicumque et semper*, September 21, 2010.

⁶ Francis *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 2.

Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God's will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ.⁷

EVANGELIZING IN MERCY AND LOVE

Evangelization today is not just telling people about God, but letting the men and women of our time experience the beauty of God's mercy and love, which flows from our encounter with the Person of Jesus Christ. Benedict XVI, rightly puts it that: "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction"⁸ This encounter, is further made explicate through an evangelization that is rooted in the mercy of God for his people. That is, an evangelization which opens the doors of God's mercy to those searching for a sense of direction and purpose in life.

Every form of service in the Church "arises out of the joy of meeting the Lord and from his call. The mission is to bring to the men and women of our time the consolation of God, to bear witness to his mercy."⁹ Consolation from the gospel of mercy should shape our sense of evangelization today and the way we minister to the people of our time. Hence, in the teaching of the Church, it must be noted that there is no room for hostile praxis which quenches the thirst for God's love and mercy. "People today certainly need words, but most of all they need us to bear witness to the mercy and tenderness of the Lord which warms the heart, rekindles hope, and attracts people towards the good. What a joy it is to bring God's consolation to others!"¹⁰

Authentic evangelization should bear the hallmark of mercy, and love. To this end, Pope Francis has never ceased to remind the men and women to today of how the value of mercy should influence the whole idea and practice of evangelization. And this takes concrete shape when the ones who evangelize are able to be with the people and show them the merciful face of God in their concrete realities. In his

⁷ Ibid., n. 2.

⁸ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* December 25, 2005, n. 1.

⁹ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Rejoice: A Letter to Consecrated Men and Women*, February 2, 2014, n. 8.

¹⁰ Ibid, n. 8

words to the Bishops of East Timor, during their *ad limina* visit in 2014, the Pope says: “agents of evangelization must be able to warm the hearts of people, to walk with them in the night, to discuss their illusions and disillusion with them, to overcome their divisions. Without diminishing the value of the Gospel ideal we need to accompany, with mercy and patience, the different stages of people’s growth which they build day after day.”¹¹

The logic of mercy which features in the teachings of Pope Francis as it relates to evangelization cannot be overlooked or wave outside as something of little or no importance. Since, “without mercy, today we have little possibility of inserting ourselves in a world of “the wounded” that are in need of understanding, forgiveness, and love.”¹² More than ever before, the world needs evangelizers who are merciful, and do not block the flow of God’s mercy reaching out and liberating the men and women of our time. In this line of thought, Benedict XVI emphatically states that, “In our time, humanity needs a strong proclamation and witness of God’s mercy.”¹³ When those who are at the fore front of evangelization lack the value of mercy one is tempted to ask what then is the motivation of such evangelization? Through mercy and love, we are able to deeply reflect and become proactive agents in addressing the many social predicaments affecting the men and women who look up to the evangelizers for a new form of hope and consolation through their pastoral activities rooted in the love and mercy of the incarnate Word.

It is interesting to note that the indissoluble connection between evangelization and mercy and love. They are core aspects of the gospel message. In fact, it is in mercy and love that the incarnate Word, revealed his salvific liberating acts for humanity. The mystery of the incarnation and the works of Jesus Christ and his paschal mystery are all summed up in the very mystery of his love and mercy for humanity. Undeniably, “mercy is the central nucleus of the Gospel message; it is the very name of God, the Face with which he revealed himself in the Old Covenant and fully in Jesus Christ, the incarnation of creative and redemptive Love.”¹⁴ The onus of the gospel message is a revelation of a God who loves the sinner, and who is not tired of forgiving the sinner. When we take away this core aspect of mercy and love from the practice of evangelization, we are left with an empty message for a wounded people, who are waiting to be consoled by the words and actions of the evangelizers.

Mercy and love help the Church to reach out and to not close her doors to humanity. The Church cannot be an evangelizer with a closed door. “The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open.”¹⁵ Pope Francis

¹¹ Francis *Address of Pope Francis to the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of East Timor on Their "Ad Limina" Visit*, Monday, 17 March 2014.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Benedict XVI, *Angelus Message*, September 16, 2007.

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, *Regina Caeli Message on Divine Mercy Sunday*, March 30, 2008.

¹⁵ Francis *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 47.

has decried the fact that: "Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators The Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems."¹⁶ A close door in itself signifies either a dead Church or a Church that is not connected to the people who are wounded.

Passion for the love of God should be our motivational strength for evangelising. Outside the purview of the love and mercy of Christ evangelization loses its saltiness and value.

"Caritas Christi urget nos" (2 Cor 5:14): it is the love of Christ that fills our hearts and impels us to evangelize. Today as in the past, he sends us through the highways of the world to proclaim his Gospel to all the peoples of the earth (cf. Mt 28:19). Through his love, Jesus Christ attracts to himself the people of every generation: in every age he convokes the Church, entrusting her with the proclamation of the Gospel by a mandate that is ever new.¹⁷

The love of Christ fundamentally leads us to love the men and women of each time, and to embrace them with the joy of the gospel. "Joy is not a useless ornament. It is necessity, the foundation of human life."¹⁸ The love and joy which flow from the gospel are magnetic forces for an effective evangelization, and can only be attained by those who in themselves have a deep sense of the love of Christ and have been touched by the joy of his gospel.

CONSECRATED PERSONS

Consecrated Persons are "men and women who set out to follow Christ with greater liberty, and to imitate him more closely, by practising the evangelical counsels (...) Many of them, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, became hermits or founded religious families. These the Church, by virtue of her authority, gladly accepted and approved."¹⁹ Consecrated persons live a life which is based on the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ and who continues to shape the consecrated life.

The Consecrated Life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit. By the profession of the evangelical counsels *the characteristic features of Jesus* – the chaste, poor and obedient one – *are made constantly "visible"*

¹⁶ Ibid, n. 48.

¹⁷ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter "*Motu Proprio Data*" *Porta Fidei*, 11 October, 2011, n. 7.

¹⁸ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Rejoice*, n. 3.

¹⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 918.

in the midst of the world and the eyes of the faithful are directed towards the mystery of the Kingdom of God already at work in history, even as it awaits its full realization in heaven.²⁰

Consecrated persons belong to Societies of Apostolic life, Religious Order and Institutes devoted contemplation or the works of the apostolate be it Societies of Apostolic lives and secular Institutes, as well as other forms of consecrated persons. "Consecrated life is a call to incarnate the Good News, to *follow Christ*, the crucified and risen one."²¹ This means in reality, to follow Jesus Christ, "to take up his way of life, to adopt his interior attitude, to allow oneself to be invaded by his Spirit, to absorb his surpassing logic and his scale of values, to share his risks and his hopes."²²

Consecrated persons ought to be men and women who radiate the joys of the gospel and who bring this into their daily lives, and encounter with the people of God. It is a life which bears testimony to the joys of the gospel. And this joy in itself comes as a result of an encounter with the Divine Word. It is this joy in the gospel that Consecrated Persons ought to proclaim to our wounded world.

In the work of evangelization, first and foremost, the communities of Consecrated persons must radiate the values of the gospel. It is indeed a sad reality as observed by Pope Francis, the discord in the Christian communities. Thus, he writes,

It always pains me greatly to discover how some Christian communities, and even consecrated persons, can tolerate different forms of enmity, division, calumny, defamation, vendetta, jealousy and the desire to impose certain ideas at all costs, even to persecutions which appear as veritable witch hunts. Whom are we going to evangelize if this is the way we act?²³

We cannot be effective evangelizers if we are not evangelized ourselves, and understand the principle of love and the value of working together and learning to forgive. Thus, the advice of Pope Francis should animate Consecrated Persons to enter into a deep renewal of learning to live as one. "To pray for a person with whom I am irritated is a beautiful step forward in love, and an act of evangelization."²⁴

²⁰ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, March 25, 1996, n. 1.

²¹ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Rejoice*, n. 5.

²² *Ibid*, n. 5.

²³ Francis *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 100.

²⁴ *Ibid*, n. 102.

CONTEXT OF FAMILY LIFE TODAY IN NIGERIA

In the light of so many issues affecting the people of Africa, one needs no intellectual gymnastics to accept the observations of E. E. Uzukwu, that Africa is seen as a continent of misery based on the endless crisis on the continent.²⁵ And Nigeria as a nation is not spared from the endless list of crisis facing the continent of Africa. We exist as a nation in a continent of endless crisis. Just when we might be celebrating progress in one area, we are faced with even more quagmire situations in other areas.

The times and changing realities have today not only affected the way people live and think but the very nucleus of human society, family life. The economic and social contexts of today in which families find themselves in could best be described as scandalous because of the vast wealth and resources in Nigeria. Many of the families we encounter are troubled by all forms of realities which threatens the stability of families, and the peace of the society. It is not an uncommon feature in our communities, and during the course of our pastoral encounters and duties, to witness the many plights of families. Their (families') social realities, becomes for us as Consecrated Persons, a vital context for understanding the challenges before us in relation to evangelization. Thus, the words of A. E. Orobator can easily be applied here, that "social contexts provides an important tool for understanding the church in Africa."²⁶ In like manner, social contexts are necessary and important tools for understanding how best to respond via evangelization to the various challenges facing families in Nigeria.

A closer analysis of the situations of today confirms that ours is an age of great distress despite technological advancements in many areas. It is in an age of religious intolerance leading to religious massacre and displacement of so many families, as well as the death of many members of several families. We also see among nations, especially in the so-called Third World nations, how very often most families live in depressing economic situations.²⁷ Ours is a wounded society and the precarious situations are so obvious that there cannot be any authentic evangelization of families if the socio-political and economic realities are ignored. Ours is an age of great injustice in the market place, where the gap between the few rich and the vast poor is increasing.²⁸

²⁵ Cf. E. E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, Orbis Books, New York, 1996, p. 1.

²⁶ A. E. Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos*, p. 15.

²⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, Apostolic Exhortation, November 22, 1981, n. 6.

²⁸ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 56.

For us in Nigeria, the situations are even more precarious, based on so many factors which we cannot exhaust in this write up. However, it is good to know that these situations are as a result of several factors: greedy and inept political and civil class, manipulation of the poor with religion and the propagation of false prosperity gospel (which promises so much and fulfils nothing), unstable economic systems, religious violence as well as political instabilities even in the face of so-called democracy. We have not forgotten also the whole issue of lack of developmental projects to build a society that is just and dedicated to the promotion of the common good.

Poverty is a depressing condition which affects a vast majority of the populace with a few privileged class and their collaborators living in affluent in the society. The level of poverty in Nigeria is not only alarming but scandalous and challenging for a society that is richly blessed with so many natural resources, and not to forget the vast human resources that abound in the country. It beats human imagination that Nigeria should ever be considered among third world nations, because most of the so-called western nations do not have as much resources as Nigeria. Yet, as a nation, we are not near the many nations of the world that have less than the natural and human resources which we have. Such depressing situations pose a great challenged to the followers of Christ, and especially to Consecrated Persons.

In a just society, where things are planned out and the structures are put in place to promote the common good of everyone, there is going to be a reduction of the sufferings of the people. For example, very often in Nigeria, the poor have no access to qualitative education, and security, or economic powers. In such context, the reality becomes a big gap that exists between the rich and the poor. "The real problem today is the conspiracy of a greedy elite to further impoverish the poor, through the selfish appropriation and reckless plunder of the material and agricultural resources of our fatherland."²⁹ The cancerous level of poverty and underdevelopment couple with "situations of unemployment have material and spiritual repercussions on families."³⁰ These can intrinsically promote a whole break down of values of family life and create societal crisis with devastating consequences on development and peace in the society.

Furthermore, there are also the social and moral contextual predicaments of widows who are constantly maltreated by in-laws, orphans, as well as childlessness of many women which are seen as a taboo in the society. Thus, there abound so

²⁹ G. Ehusani, *A Prophetic Church*. Provincial Pastoral Publications, Ede, 1996, p. 73.

³⁰ Pontifica Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, LEV, Città del Vaticana, 2004. n. 294

many childless women, who have become victims of all forms of abuses and discrimination. These issues are constantly before us and there is no way there can be effective evangelization without bringing into pastoral perspective and pastoral decisions if these whole gargantuan issues are not addressed. In fact, these issues pose to us fundamental questions about our Christian faith and Consecrated commitments. But one truth which we cannot ignore is that, the Christian faith and especially the very nature of Consecrated life, implies that, "God's revelation through the incarnation obliges us to unmask the ultimate scandal of our faith: Jesus Christ made a radical choice in favour of those considered to be the dregs of the world."³¹

EVANGELIZATION AT THE SERVICE OF SOCIAL CONCERNS

At this point, we shall postulate several ways of helping to evangelize effectively in its social context taking into consideration the social plights of families in Nigeria as we have already pointed out above. The various ways we shall point out, are not in themselves solutions to the problems of families, but methods through which as Consecrated Persons, we could be more effective in letting the gospel to shed its light on social conditions of families in our ecclesial communities and the society in general. On the one hand the goal at this point is to focus on some ways of realizing evangelization in its social context. It is indeed only prudent to state that, the pointers we shall present subsequently here might not be exhaustive in themselves but they should help to contribute in the thinking process of finding out best models and practice of evangelization in its social context.

We have already stated above that within the contextual orientations of evangelization today, are two key essential elements which should be present in every form of evangelization. These elements are mercy and love. Without them it would not be possible to even comprehend why Consecrated Persons should be effectively active in the transformation of the society and the building and promoting a better social condition for families through the work of evangelization. Mercy and love are the eternal keys or put differently inseparable components for evangelization. Without mercy evangelization is impossible, and without love there cannot be a transformation in the precarious socio-economic, political and economic situations of the families of today. The difference between actions for social change done in mercy and love and actions for social change done for self-aggrandizement are self-evident in themselves. While those actions that are done out of mercy and love are aimed at the interest of those who suffer injustice and distressing situations, the other is only a promotion of selfish interests and goals. Therefore, it is important always to understand here that what we aimed at are those actions for social change rooted in the principles of Jesus Christ, which is selfless love.

³¹ J. M. Ela, *My Faith as an African* translated by J. P. Brown and S. Perry, Eugene, Wipf & Stock, 1988, p. 105.

1 EVANGELIZATION AND CULTURAL VALUES

Looking at our cultural heritage, values for life and respect the community are valid sources which when put in proper perspective can shape the way evangelization is carried out. There are important values within our cultural worldview especially those that promote unity, life, and common good. Consecrated Persons should be the first persons to promote such values because these values are the same values which the gospel promotes. Moreover, “whenever the Christian faith incorporates and lives the African values of communion and solidarity, with their specific requirements and implications, this enlarged community has a specific impact on the health of human relationships. In fact, it is this option for community that governs all the contemporary questions about evangelization in Africa today.”³²

We need to bring back those cultural values of communion and solidarity which were rooted in our cultural worldviews. In fact, one could easily say that the dilapidating social realities in Nigeria could easily be traced back to neglect of our cultural values that were once the foundation of our society. Once the neglect of those values had reached an alarming stage, we were left with self-deification over and above the common good of the people. Thus, this paved way for the many ills in the society of today. And indeed, these realities have caused untold hardship for families. The plight of the young people, the disrespect for the institution of marriage, the high increase of unemployment, and the insecurity in the land are all traceable to a neglect of those (good) values that that once shaped the cultural worldviews of the many cultures in Nigeria. To this end, Consecrated Persons must be at the forefront of bringing those beautiful values back into our society, through their active participation in the social dimension of evangelization in relation to families in Nigeria.

2 EVANGELIZATION AND SOLIDARITY

“The apostolic vocation of the church is an encounter with Christ in order to continue his mission.”³³ The mission of Jesus Christ with humanity and in our world was an eternal mission in solidarity. And the whole of the activities of Jesus Christ pointed to the fact that in him humanity has a point of reference in terms of the solidarity. There is no better solidarity than the perfect example of the incarnate Word of God, who has opened the way for humanity to enter into an ongoing solidarity with the suffering people of each epoch. Solidarity “expresses in summary fashion the need to recognize in the composite ties that unite men and social groups

³² Ibid, p. 146.

³³ O. A. Onwubiko, *The Church in Mission: In The Light of Ecclesia in Africa*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications, 2001, p. 384.

among themselves, the space given to human freedom for common growth in which all share and in which all participate.”³⁴ Solidarity encompasses all forms of willingness to be committed to the good of one’s neighbours, and be ready to serve them and to be at the service of each other, not for some personal gain, by taking advantage of others, but to promote the dignity of the other.³⁵ Solidarity “is a virtue directed par excellence to the common good.”³⁶

Social evangelization should help us to promote the values of justice and peace and human development in solidarity, taking into cognisance the scandalous presence of injustice in the society. In fact, “Justice is about guaranteeing the basic conditions of life for the most number of people, rather than for a privileged few.”³⁷ There should be a radical witness to the truth and value of social justice. A society that carelessly about the vast majority of her people must be taught by the social message of evangelization by Consecrated Persons that such a reality is unfair and cannot be acceptable. For when there is justice lacking in the economic setting there would also be lacking peace and development. These realities explain why in Nigeria very often there is unstable peace, because there is lack of justice as well. Therefore,

To build peace requires the active pursuit of the goals and benefits of development. The components of this development are many and varied. Essentially they would include the following elements: creating opportunities for human fulfilment, eliminating inequalities that polarise different groups, addressing social ills (unemployment, lack of social services like education, housing and healthcare), curtailing environment degradation and creating just and human environments of living and working.³⁸

In solidarity, Consecrated persons are not only showing greater concern for those who are at the receiving end of injustice, but they become agents of social transformation as well. As agents of social transformation in the society, consecrated

³⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 194.

³⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, Encyclical Letter, December 30, 1987, n. 38

³⁶ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 193.

³⁷ A. E. Orobator, *The Church as Family*, p. 36

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 37.

Persons, are in fact, bringing the gospel to have its way in the social realities of the people and in the society. "God's revelation through the incarnation obliges us to unmask the ultimate scandal of our faith: Jesus Christ made a radical choice in favour of those considered to be dregs of the world."³⁹ To be in solidarity inevitably implies "attentiveness to those who live in a state of oppression and suffering under unjust social structures."⁴⁰

One cannot separate constructive attentiveness to the issues of social concerns in the society and the work of evangelization. Although, why the Church is not a mere social entity and the work of her members (in this case Consecrated Persons) cannot be reduced to mere social works, issues of social concerns constitute a major concern for the members of the Church. In relation to this therefore, there is no gainsaying that Consecrated Persons should be active in every ecclesial way possible to promote solidarity with families who are the first victims of today's social concerns. In the light of the gospel that we present to the world, Consecrated Persons are called therefore "upon to bear witness to God in faith at the heart of a society in which, for a greater number of jobless, marginalized girls and women, their only work tool is their bodies."⁴¹

3. Evangelization and Human Dignity

In an age of greater awareness about human dignity, it is not an overstatement to note that issues affecting human dignity form a whole lot of concerns for those involved in evangelization, but even more for Consecrated Persons. This is so because issues of "human rights are a topic for discussion everywhere."⁴² Also, it is a statement of fact that "all social values are inherent in the dignity of the human person, whose authentic development they foster. Essentially these values are: truth, freedom, justice and love."⁴³ Thus, Consecrated Persons cannot be ignorant of the vast issues of human dignity which are common topics of discussions today. We do not need to look too far to see how these issues are present before us, because these issues abound in multiple realities in our ecclesial communities and human society. "The poor and the underprivileged are crying for justice but only a

³⁹ J. M. Ela, *African Cry*, p. 105.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 104

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 92

⁴² B. Bujo *The Ethical Dimension of Community: The African Model and The Dialogue Between North and South*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications, 1997, p.143.

⁴³ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 197.

few people seem to pay attention to them. They are being denied self worth and basic rights.”⁴⁴

Evangelization should necessary take into consideration of the many ways the rights of families have been trampled upon and the unethical situations which debase the human person. At the core of every evangelization we must state is the promotion of the dignity of the human person. For the gospel message is rooted in Christ who cares for every human person and human family. Thus, the Christian faith is a “witness to a God who takes up the cause of those who cannot defend themselves.”⁴⁵ For Christ that is proclaimed to humanity “touches human needs at all levels.”⁴⁶ It is this same Jesus Christ that calls and sends forth into the world Consecrated Persons, according to their particular vocations to be the salt and light of the world, and hope for the oppressed and voice for the voiceless suffering families in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In this write up, we have been able to look at evangelization in its social context from the purview of how Consecrated Persons could be better involved in the social dimension of evangelization especially as it affects families in Nigeria today. We stated from onset that our purpose was not to address all the issues associated with evangelization in its social context vis-à-vis families in Nigeria, but to point some strong orientations from the social perspective of evangelization today. During this course of this write up, a conscious effort was made to domesticate the orientations of evangelization in its social context vis-à-vis the magisterial teachings of Pope Francis. Thus, constant references of his *Evangelii gaudium* were used especially during the first part of this article. We tried to address as much as possible some social concerns regarding evangelization with an eye on the social concerns affecting families in Nigeria.

By way of concluding, it is thus worthy to restate that, Consecrated Persons have a huge role to play in the social dimension of evangelization in Nigeria. This role flows from our understanding of the orientations of evangelization in the Church today, which takes into cognizance the many social concerns of the men and

⁴⁴ I. Jooji, *Mending the Cracked Pot*, Ibadan, Daily Graphics, 2003. P. 47.

⁴⁵ J. M. Ela, *African Cry*, p. 93.

⁴⁶ M. A. Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*, Eugene, Orbis Books, 1986, p. 99.

women of our time. The time has passed for a lukewarm attitude towards the social plights of families. Thus, Consecrated Persons have much to impart in the world for the social transformation of the social situations of families, in the light of the joy of the gospel.