

**CONSECRATED LIFE FOR THE SERVICE OF GOD: THE VOCATIONAL
DISCERNMENT AND THE RELEVANCE OF MISSION IN THE
CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

Sr. Chikere Gladys Ngozichukwuka, OLA¹

ABSTRACT

This reflection presents those who are called and why they are called. It discusses the steps taken to ascertain the authenticity of one's vocation as vocational discernment. It talks about the relevance of mission in our world today. And we hope that the consecrated life will continue to be meaningful in the Church and in the world at large.

INTRODUCTION

The consecrated life today is exposed to all sorts of attacks and temptations. Consecrated persons themselves seem more attracted to the flashy life style of the post modern world around them, such that they make little impact in the lives of the faithful. This big problem affects the kind of witness they bear. Besides, the consecrated life is described as a stable style of Christian life by those faithful call to follow the Jesus Christ of the gospels closely in a more exacting manner, recognised by the Church, through the profession of the evangelicals of: poverty, chastity and obedience, lived in community and sustained by daily Eucharistic celebration (Cfr. CIC, canon 573§1). If this is true, how could Consecrated persons be easily swayed by the manipulations of the riches and attractions of their world? To what avail does God choose an individual to the consecrated life?

God calls persons to the consecrated life by way of special invitation to His service through purely human situations. He sets apart such individuals for the emulation of the gospel values and for the salvation of His people. They are set apart for a life of witness. Although the consecrated life is as old as the Church and has suffered a lot of changes, challenges and losses in vocation, it has never lost its relevance in the Church and to the world. Men and women have lived and still live the religious life style, to deepen their relationship with God, their love and devotion in a continued striving in the imitation of the Virgin, Poor and Obedient Christ of the Gospels. Yet, no one takes this honour upon her or himself(Heb. 5: 4).

¹ Sr. Chikere Gladys Ngozichukwuka is a member of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles (OLA). She has Bachelor in Theology from the Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA), Port Harcourt, Nigeria. And a (Licence/Master) Licentiate in Moral Theology from l'Université Catholique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (UCAO), Unité Universitaire à Abidjan (UUA) Cote d'Ivoire. She presently reside in Our Lady of Apostles Convent, Yaba, Lagos (Nigeria).

Why the consecrated life? The Fathers of the Church opine that the Consecrated life is not given to all rather to those who can live it. God entrusts to the consecrated persons the responsibility of guarding, guiding and living the mysteries of Christ's life style of poverty, consecrated celibacy and obedience. Does the world still receive revelations, does God still speak to individuals and how does one know and understand God's invitation?

Response to the call to be like Christ and to bring His message to others demands a process of exploration. It requires a discernment of vocation, which is done under the observation of a spiritual director or directress, in truthful openness, prayer and freedom. The director or directress serves only as a mediator and witness to the meetings between the candidate and the Holy Trinity, and he/she is not to interfere in the decision taken. A well discerned vocation stands the test of time, showing spiritual maturity in the face of temptations and tribulations.

Although the consecrated life has suffered a lot of changes and challenges due to different socio-political ideologies, moral, ethical, medical and other differences of the 21st century, the place and mission of the consecrated life still remains relevant to our world. With an unprecedented eruption of technological development, series of deviations from the norms and values of a sane society, the mission of the consecrated life must be a challenge of the thought process and to the conscience of everyone.

A lot of this write up is based on research, personal experience and by participant's observation. The expectation is that this reflection will contribute to impact our lives as religious women and men called to live the true imitation of the Jesus Christ. It can contribute to make the formation of prospective candidates to Religious Life be solidly founded after a guided vocational discernment.

CONSECRATED

The term "**consecrated**" is the past tense of the noun "consecration" and should not be strange to us. But for the purpose of some audience who might be encountering the word for the first time, we are obliged to define it.

The word "consecration" connotes setting something or someone apart for some holy or sacred responsibilities. It is the act of declaring a person, or an object, for sacred use by a deity. Consecration is the noun of the verb, to consecrate and is mostly employed in Christian / Catholic religious circles and ceremonies to denote dedication of persons, places and things to the service of God. Etymologically, its origin is the Latin "*consecrationem*"² and the Anglo-French word "*consecratiōn*", its past tense "consecrated", which is our concern in this presentation. We wish to explore the reason for which God calls, why He calls these persons. In the same vein, discuss the procedure of discerning this call as well as its missionary relevance in the contemporary post modern society.

²Cf. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/consecration> consulted on the 13th April, 2018.

Consecration therefore is the solemn religious profession of vows or priestly ordination, the dedication of persons, places; for instance, churches, shrines, Grottos and or things such as altars, vessels, etc to and for the service of God. Thus for God's work or mission, persons give voluntarily themselves in response to God's invitation for consecration. One is consecrated therefore for a life of dedication and service after the exemplary life of Christ in the Gospels. In the light of this topic, we limit ourselves to the "Individual" consecrated to the service of God through His people. To be consecrated then is to respond to the Divine invitation of being set apart in particular to be in the service of God, after the example of Christ according to the definitions above. This call which transcends all forms of considerations, traditions and cultures, old as it were, yet never ages. It is a gift, a treasure, inspiration, hope and support of the Church which accompanies the spread of evangelisation in different parts of the world.

The apostles affirm that they hadn't received any commandment concerning virginity; nevertheless, they left it to the power of those that are willing to take it³. Thus attesting to the understanding that, the consecrated life is not given to all. It is an invitation to those who have been chosen to live the audacity of Christ's life. In corroboration with the apostles, the fathers of the church opine that following the example of Christ, the apostles offered their lives in self commitment to be consecrated. To them, vocation to the consecrated life is a gift, a call given only to those who ask. This explains Origen when he said: "Ask and it shall be given to you (...) God therefore will give good gifts, perfect purity in celibacy and chastity, to those who ask with their whole soul (...)"⁴. That virginity will be given to the one who asks is the view of St Jerome. And John Chrysostom in corroboration states that: "He that is able to receive it let him receive"⁵. Indeed, the fathers of the church believed strongly that the consecrated life is a gift, an invitation from God to those who can, to share in the life of His incarnate Son. It is given only to those who can live it. To this end, Pope John Paul II explains that: "In the consecrated life, individuals commit themselves to the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. Their lives testify to the values of the Kingdom of God. The profession of chastity, poverty and obedience rejects the idolatry of anything created and points to God as the absolute good"⁶. By way of explanation, the phrase individuals commit themselves to the evangelical counsels connotes that the consecrated persons are driven as it were by some invincible force to stay faithfully engaged to the life of Sacred solitude for the sake or the kingdom. Certainly, based on personal reflection and spiritual experiences, the fathers in their wisdom made a categorical observation; that the consecrated life is not open to all rather only to those God has called to this way life. The question often asked today is; why are people consecrated? Why waste so much time and human resources when there is a lot of charity work to do? In fact some go so far to ask, what for? To what avail?

³Cf. Constitutions of the apostles, book IV Sec II. <http://www.pathoflove.com/fathers-on-vocation.html> consulted on the 17th may 2018.

⁴ <http://www.pathoflove.com/fathers-on-vocation.html> consulted on the 22th May, 2018.

⁵Ibidem

⁶John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (VC),87-92 march 25th 1996

CONSECRATED FOR WHAT?

Already, God created us to know Him, love Him, serve Him in this world and to live happily with Him forever in the next. The purpose of this particular call in which one is consecrated is to respond to practically Christ and to live fully the gospel values in loving and dedicated service to God through His people. Consecrated to serve and bound by the evangelical councils of: obedience, poverty and chastity, every consecrated person is bound to live and to follow Christ's example by living faithfully these vows they freely made.

It is worthy of note that the consecrated life is as old as the church, because right from the earliest generation of Christians, particularly in the *judeo-christian* churches there were virgins, ascetics or the coenobites who lived consecrated lives without an institutionalised form. They lived lives of asceticism and celibacy without renouncing their normal social situation⁷. This does not deny the fact that there were those who lived already the life of the gospels in groups and under rigorous observation as virgins⁸ and strict asceticism, both men and women. Indeed, one is consecrated in response to the motivation of the spirit of Jesus Christ to imitate His life as seen in the Gospels and to the glory of God, popularly designated as the evangelical councils. And this is a radical departure from the habitual norm of amassing wealth, giving in to marriage and authority. One is consecrated to image Him the Christ, as the ideal model of perfect charity by living as he lived, showing love and compassion to those in different kinds of needs. One is consecrated to follow Christ "*in answer to his call to be a living and radical witness to his love on earth (...)*"⁹, and to keep these vows so as to be ennobled to live perfect charity and fraternal love in the manner that Christ lived them. The person is consecrated to a radical self challenge by way of living out practical love "*agapae*", reconciliation and forgiveness lived in community, mercy, and in constant loving communion with the Lord in prayer. Thus corroborating the new code of the canon law which states that:

The consecrated life is the form of a stable life by which the faithful (...) give themselves totally to God loved above all else (...) for the construction of the church and the salvation of the world "in order to achieve" the perfection of charity in the service of the kingdom of God and, having been made an outstanding sign in the church, foretell the heavenly glory¹⁰.

Consecrated therefore to a total self - offering to God and to love this God consciously and contentiously over and above all else, in a total self abnegation. One Consecrated to be different in a radical manner that refuses the world's style but tells the happy story of the glory of the children of God in the authentic witnessing to true love. The individual is consecrated not just to live mechanically the religious life. Rather to live a life that adapts to the changes and the challenges of the world

⁷Cf. Don Armand VIELLEUX, *Vie religieuse en général*, <http://www.scourmont.be/Armand/arm-fr-3.htm> consulted on the 16th April, 2018.

⁸Cf. Acts, 21: 8-9, the four virgin daughters of « Philip the Evangelist » who lived and prophesied in his house.

⁹ The formula for the vows in the congregation of the missionary sisters of Our Lady of Apostles

¹⁰"*The New Code of Canon Law*" 573§1. http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P1Y.HTM consulted on 28th April, 2018.

and the church. A person consecrated to enunciate a new paradigm, born of obedience, humility, care and compassion, positively influencing a confused, harassed and lost planet that is our world today. In our contemporary world at the moment, everybody is an authority and so it becomes very difficult to exercise or expect the virtues of obedience and humility¹¹. To the world, obedience kills, it humiliates! But by this vow, the consecrated not only offer themselves, but they offer themselves as burnt offering in a mysteriously positive/spiritual manner, making atonement for everyone else's sin of pride, just as Christ did from the *crèche* to the cross. "Unless the tree is pruned, it will bear no fruit in due season" said my mother to me. That is the work of obedience in the life of the consecrated person. Obedience prunes the consecrated of all the vices namely; pride, negative self esteem, narcissism, ambition, temper and all the vices associated with that which is not humble. This pruning engenders newness of life in all its ramifications; piety and honesty, joy and self control, availability and generosity, humility and charity, sacrifice and joy, fraternal love in community life etc. Indeed, obedience is the mortal enemy of pride in the life and spiritual battle of the consecrated person. Consecrated at baptism as children of God, why does one have to be consecrated again and why are we called? Why the choice of an individual?

WHY ARE INDIVIDUALS CHOSEN?

There is a common saying that runs thus, I was looking for somebody to do something, till I realised I was somebody¹². Isn't it typical of all of us? We would wish it were someone else but, not me. Is it that God has not gifted me as much as those others, to be challenged too?

Am not sure God chose one from the midst of one's family, siblings, friends or kindred for his or her outstanding qualities, nor for his or her goodness, least of all, not even for his or her fidelity to God! No, God chose you and consecrated you gratuitously to make you holy for He our God is holy¹³. It is you that God wants to have offered as a living and fitting sacrifice, dedicated and acceptable for His service¹⁴. Consecrated to give up all claims on one's life but rather put oneself completely in His hands. He picked you, purified and consecrated you because He wants you to bring His name to the remotest parts of the earth and to those who have never heard His name¹⁵. He desired that you be the one to bear witness to His unconditional love through enduring pain, persecution, suffering and even death¹⁶. That through your endurance many will come to know, believe in Him and be saved. One is consecrated that through the profession of the evangelical councils, the wounds inflicted by the original sin may receive some care and perhaps healing.

¹¹In a display of utter disobedience and pride, a young doctoral student dressed in bikini to present her thesis. She did not resonate with her professor who corrected her for dressing off the normal cooperate code set for thesis presentation by the institute.

¹²Cf. Lily TOMLIN, https://www.brainquote.com/quotes/lily_tomlin_386397 consulted on the 26th may 2018

¹³Cf. Lev, 19:2

¹⁴ Cf. Rm, 12:1

¹⁵ Cf. Acts, 9 :15

¹⁶ Cf. Acts 9 : 16

These vows governed by obedience as it were, are in opposition with the sin of Adam and Eve which was their rejection of God's authority over theirs. For John Paul II, the wounds inflicted by disobedience receive therapy through the continued attempt and committed efforts of the consecrated persons¹⁷. They, by the application of a contrary force, contradict the arrogance of the enemy of our humanity and thus bring hope and soothing to an otherwise broken humanity. He consecrated you above all, to be the sign of a radical contradiction to the world. To this end, Akinwale in defining the religious /consecrated life explains that: "*the religious is a sign of contradiction, one who believes in God, one who believes that God is love and who freely and prophetically detaches himself or herself from things most valued in this world in order to be free to bear witness to the fact that God is love*"¹⁸. A sign of contradiction; living contrary to the post-modern world, its life styles and expectations. Called to live a radical sign, an expression and a foretaste of the eschatological kingdom of Christ where conjugal life does not exist¹⁹. It is choosing a life of poverty in place of riches, pleasure, and money at all costs. One is called to a life of chastity instead of a life of promiscuity, of debauchery, of lust and orgies. The individual is chosen for a life of obedience instead of disobedient pride; insisting on my way, on my will and on my decision as the absolute. The consecrated person is offered the life of humility, meekness and of opprobrium, instead of a life of arrogance and power, pride and dissension. The person called is consecrated to follow the Gospel Jesus Christ in His choice of the cross and of all that it represents. Called to an active participation in the life of his Son Jesus the chaste, poor and obedient one (Mtt.8:20; Phil. 2:8) and that the immeasurable reaches of his mystery may be present in our world and possibly draw everyone towards the kingdom of God. It is worth noting that the cross of Christ stands not only for pain and passion, it also stands for joy and victory over evil beginning with the repentant thief²⁰ whose response to the taunts of his non-God fearing companion must have put a smile on Jesus' blood stained face. As such, one is consecrated to help the people of God, "*the men and women of this present time to recognise the traces of God in the beauty of their existence*"²¹. In effect, one is consecrated to bear witness to the truth of the Resurrection, singing the *Alleluia* in honour of the Risen Christ, through their communal fraternal life. And like the Samaritan woman of John chapter 4, and the two to Emmaus, announce their joy at their reception of the good news and at the breaking of bread while bringing the same good news to those in the shadows. In this way, they live out their vocation as missionaries, constantly discerning and re-discerning their missionary vocation in the light of what the Lord desires of those whom He has consecrated. The consecrated life without the Eucharist is empty. To buttress this, Pope John Paul II opines that:

¹⁷Cf. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 87.

¹⁸Anthony AKINWALE, *Charisma and contradiction Theological reflections on consecrated life*, Ibadan, 2016, P. 9

¹⁹ Cf. Mk. 12: 24-26

²⁰ Cf. Lc. 23:39-43

²¹Cf. José Maria ARNAIZ, "Introduction" in *Passion for Christ Passion for Humanity, acts of congress on consecrated life*, Nairobi, Kenya, 2005, p. 30

The secret of this spiritual ardour is the Eucharist, it is the inexhaustible source of fidelity to the Gospel, for in this sacrament, the heart of ecclesial life, the deep identification and total conformation with Christ to which consecrated persons are called, is completely fulfilled. In the Eucharist all forms of prayer come together, the Word of God is proclaimed and received; relationships with God, with brothers and sisters, with all men and women are challenged. It is the Sacrament of filiation, of communion and of mission²².

Briefly put, the Eucharist the life artery of the consecrated life lived in community, the visible sign of Christ's presence in their midst.

VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

Christians in general are called initially by baptism to become perfect and holy children of God. Our prime vocation in this regard is God's call to us to be holy for "I, Yahweh, am holy"²³, what Lumen Gentium (LG) called the "Universal call to Holiness"²⁴. This initial call to holiness extended to all God's children is deepened by the choice we make to remain celibates for the glory of God, for the service of the Church in perfect charity and for the salvation of our eternal souls. This we could name our secondary vocation which is an avenue to live practically a life in consonance with who we are made to be, "holy" as we indicated above. Vocation then is a call, "vocare". A call from God your creator, the Father who loves you and traces a way for you, a plan for your eternal happiness which is hidden in the service of others as Christ did. For Cleary believes that; the fullness of the human being is realised in one's availability and total self-giving²⁵. This could be realised through self-giving in an audacious and a radical replicate of the life of Christ, who emptied Himself for the love and life of His creatures; (*notre model par excellence de la vie caritative*) our model of perfect charity par excellence. Vocation is not therefore simply an ordinary invitation to a life other than that which we are used to, it is rather an invitation received from God and at the same time a response to collaborate with God (who initiates the call) for the furtherance of his kingdom here on earth and for the salvation of our eternal souls. Suffice it to say that the Divine needs the collaboration of the mortal to reach and save the mortal. This Divine call is therefore a reality which affects the whole Church²⁶. We have been called, each to a particular way of life pattern or particular vocation. It is to this way of life that one after discernment orients one's gifts and talents for a higher good.

Vocation in a larger sense is limitless, involving all works of life engaged in by individuals or groups for their personal and or common good: teaching, nursing, engineering, medicine, agriculture, etc. But the Christian / Catholic understanding

²²Pope John Paul II, Special message for World Day of Consecrated life, 2 Feb. 2005

²³ Lev. 20:26; "Be consecrated to me, for I Yahweh, am holy and shall set you apart from these peoples, for you to be mine".

²⁴ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium* (LG), 40

²⁵Cf. William CLEARY, *Spiritual life and mission since Vatican 2*, wipf and stock, suite 3, Eugene, USA, 2018, pg.39

²⁶Cf. VC n° 3, Op. Cit.

of vocation, is synonymous to; vocation to the married life, to the religious life and or to the priesthood. And the two often spoken about are vocation to the priesthood and to the religious life.

Does one truly have a calling, an invitation, or a vocation to the consecrated life? It is a question to be pondered over a period of time. Vocational discernment to the consecrated life is not a day's journey. When one senses the tingling or sensations or strange emotions at the sight of a consecrated person, a liking to approach, be noticed; be with, etc, it is not to be glossed over. For many invitations, vocations and calls engendered from such emotions and should be explored and tested²⁷. The love of God and the love of God's business are the driving forces or factors in these feelings enumerated above. And since God speaks through pure human media, the church advocates and admonishes that these interior sensations, feelings or movements mustn't be treated with kids' gloves, but rather be examined, questioned, dialogued with, explored or discerned. How then can we describe vocational discernment?

Judging from personal experience and formation in various areas, I will say that discernment is the process of making careful and wise selections, choices, options or decisions between two or multiple choices for a higher or greater good which is the choice to serve God in a particularly deeper and more profound relationship. It is an intimacy which does not exclude anyone. Rather creates room for a better, freer relationship with all irrespective of their creed, social status or history. In effect, the feelings we call openings to an invitation, to expand our hearts to love God and His world differently in (*perfectae caritatis*) perfect charity from sexual love common in the world in which we live are important sensations to be discerned as perspective invitation to consecrated life or service. In response to the call of Christ with the zeal to enhance the holiness of the fundamental call, and to be a living witness to His love, the faithful take further steps of consciously relating more intimately with God in Christ. Since both the Apostles and the Fathers of the Church observed that the consecrated life is not given to all, as stated above, the need for discernment is imperative to avoid taking confused or wrong steps.

DISCERNMENT

Discernment in this regard is different from a professional decision or for a mundane style of life. It is discernment to choose (*entre deux biens apparent*) out of two positive options or choices. In one hand, to follow and live intimately the ministerial priesthood of Christ and so become a *pontiff*, an *alter Christi*, become all things to all peoples, bringing the gospel message to the extreme bounds of the world or to choose the sacrament of matrimony. On the other hand, a choice to respond to the invitation to the consecrated life, sharing the intimate union of the virginal, poor, obedient and prayerful life of Christ who gave his life for the salvation of his subjects or choosing matrimony. No matter what choice is made, an

²⁷Cf. 1 Jn : 4, 1

honest vocational discernment is near impossible if it is not heavily anchored or engrained in prayer, listening, liberty/freedom, dialogue, truthfulness etc.

- God initiates in us the particular desire to serve him and we respond. Here he is involved through the medium of prayer at the beginning of and through life as consecrated persons in our vocational discernment.

- We journey with him to diagnose what His will and purposes are for us, always under the guidance of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity.

- While discerning our vocation, we must not forget that vocation is two dimensional. God calls us so that we by our exemplary life style will bring His message to the ends of the world. Making consecrated persons the apostles of the modern world, receivers and bears of Christ's message to His people by word and deed.

- We must free our minds of all dissension, duress and prejudice while discerning our vocation. It must be noted that God respects our liberty and so we are to respond in full freedom.

- Vocational discernment must be done under the supervision of (*un accompagnateur spiritual ou une accompagnatrice spirituelle*) an experienced spiritual director or directress, who must consider themselves as only witnesses to the meeting between God and His child. To this, self knowledge on the part of the discernor is imperative.

- The place of Christ in this exercise as the way, the truth and the light cum the life we desire to embrace must not be tampered with or compromised.

- That the need for interior quiet is necessary and is achieved by acquiring exterior silence is essential. It is of utmost importance to gradually cut off from the noise surrounding us, to find a quiet corner amidst the noisy melody of life's daily routine for prayer.

- That honesty in vocation discernment is of great value and as such, every movement of the spirit, feeling of uncertainty and of excessive confidence etc must be reported.

- That vocational discernment is ongoing even after so many years of living the consecrated life, discernment is still the only tool we are equipped with in making choices for the mission and for the common good. These qualities and more in the process or vocational discernment form to a large extent, bases for a solid response to the call to consecrated life and as an apostle of our day.

The consecrated person today is urged not to be contented with being just an apostle; her /his mission today is to actively and eloquently challenge her/his world with the combined audacity of the apostle and of the prophet of old. In a world bedevilled by the whirlwind of change, where does the mission of the consecrated person find its place?

MISSION TODAY

The mission of consecrated life today remains that of a distinctive sign of prophesy in the face of new and hydra headed societal, sociopolitical, ideological as well as moral religious changes and challenges, be they good or bad.

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In the face of these challenges, the consecrated person has the responsibility to lead the people of God as the prophets of the day, not permitting her or himself to be swept off the ground by the whirl wind of change. The evangelical councils through which they are apostles, stand them out and firmly rooted to rise up to any challenges. Thus modeling their lives on their masters' example, they respond to the needs of the time. Convinced as the charismatic leaders they are by the Gospel values which is already their way of life, they rebuke the storm and bring calm to the troubled and uncertain soul²⁸.

Religion today is tending towards becoming a private affair as predicted by Weber over a century ago as cited by Bell²⁹, God has a fifty/ fifty place in what most people do and or engage in. It is almost as though he were dead as Nietzsche claimed³⁰. The gospel of relativism is preached in every nook and cranny, nothing is good or bad, only thinking matters since "God is dead". Man therefore tries to replace God; he is the "superman, spider man, cat woman, axe men" etc, who brings the offender to book and reward or vengeance to the just and oppressed. In the same vane, he justifies all age long anomalies contrary to moral, ethical and natural laws and values like legalisation of same sex marriage, conception outside the uterus, abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia, harvesting of human organs, organised prostitution, sale of arms etc. In the face of such attack, the mission of the consecrated person is to stand up as the conscience of the world. Drawing strength spiritually from the community, offering her resources of spiritual and mystical dimensions deeply rooted in the human heart by the Creator; as stated in Jr. 31: 33.

It behoves the consecrated person to intensify efforts in the mission through their apostolate to teach and act godly, honestly living like open bibles in charity, respect for human life, fear of God, practical love (*agapae*), continence, all for the glory of God and for the evangelisation of his people and their eternal salvation. Sanctity is reinstated via teaching the children, the young and the innocent and this is done better by example. To this end therefore, it is imperative that the holistic education of these cadre must not be minimised. All natural, moral, societal as well as the Christian values must be inculcated through the education apostolate. The values of recognising the Supreme Being; God and the creator of the universe, prayer the means of communicating with Him, respect for God and all that He made, respect for human life, love, generosity, justice, selflessness and others must continue to be proclaimed without compromise. These Gospel values are never out modeled nor are they to be relativised nor compromised.

Though the world and its ideologies are fast changing and largely in a manner that ruins, the gospel moral values that Christ taught will never change and Christ's (*paroussia*), the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is real. "He will come again in glory, to judge the living and the dead (...)" as we pray in the Apostles' Creed. In today's mission, the consecrated persons must act as practical custodians of the

²⁸Cf. Mk. 4 :39

²⁹Cf. *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Peter SCOTT & William T. CAVANAUGH (editors) Blackwell publishing, Malden, USA, p 462, 2004.

³⁰Cf. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/.../nietzsche-god-is-dead-americans> (consulted 7th June, 2018).

Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus as custodians of Christian values, they have the mission to protect and to preserve the world in their milieu from destruction via corruption, violation of human life, dishonesty and all forms of vices contrary to the spirit of the Gospels bedeviling the world today. They are a reflection of the light of Christ and the salt of the earth³¹ and are to influence their community, their world unobtrusively, quietly creating positive changes in every sphere of life they encounter on daily basis. The mission of religious life is to live in the world as a fundamental sign of the reign of God's kingdom which Jesus Christ initiated; they have the responsibility to cooperate with Grace to bring it to fruition.

In imitation of Christ who came to establish the kingdom of God on earth, consecrated persons are called to serve the church in her mission of evangelization. The mission today calls for consistency in prayer more than ever before. In order to fulfill the reason for their existence as consecrated persons (*"leur raison d'être"*), they are to remain attached to Christ and be strengthened by prayer, making it a habit to spend time with him in the sacraments, participating daily in the Eucharistic celebration, reporting past events and drawing strength for the unknown future. Should they fail to do this, they will not only find themselves to be tasteless and cut off from the Vine, but dead as we read from; Jn. 15:1, 5; *"for cut off from me you can do nothing"*. The mission of the consecrated can never be realised if it is not rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

The consecrated life is an invitation initiated by God, a mysterious call to share in the life of Christ through the evangelical councils of chastity, poverty and obedience lived in community. A radical overturn of the normal ways of the human life pattern, an eschatological sign of the reign of the kingdom of God as we stated above. The consecrated life is God's call to His children to sanctity via a life style contrary to the world's style of life. By the vows, the consecrated persons reject the fame and honour of this world for the cross of Christ whose life style they are imaging, living intensely in their bodies and in their spirits, the life that Christ lived. Invited to be transfigured like Christ by professing the evangelical poverty, chastity and obedience even while still here on earth. They are called to live perfect charity through life in community and by their availability to all and sundry.

The consecrated life is a journey in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ just as He had it. But more importantly like the fiat of the blessed Virgin mother of God. Without a lively faith which enables the consecrated to continue to see meaning and reason everyday, the consecrated life will then cease to bring hope to the hopeless and voice of the voiceless. If the consecrated persons do not steep themselves in prayers and in faith, they will have nothing to offer the world and will be possibly submerged by the world.

The women and men of our world today are called and consecrated because Christ believes in their ability to preserve the Gospel as well as the Christian values

³¹Cf. Matt. 5 :13

hidden in the vows. These vows give worth to the Church and only those who can live the challenges of the vows are invited to be consecrated, and they receive support from their life in community, living together as one family and companions on the same journey, breaking Bread and sharing love.

Irrespective of the fact that the consecrated life is confronted by a lot of challenges in the mission today, the changes in the world today have no doubt affected the consecrated. Rescission in vocation, the geometrical rate of technological advancement: the iPod, nokia android 7.2, different applications; whatsapp, viber, twitter, skype to list just a few. The attraction to different sleek car brands, elegant sleek shoes, wet lips dripping oil, so many reports of sexual scandal and other distractions. Yet, the fact still remains that the mission of consecrated persons today is more than ever before very relevant, especially in a world where the institution of the orthodox family is viciously attacked and the safe lieu of the foetus has become his /her gibbet. When the vocation has been honestly and prayerfully discerned, despite the personal challenges within, it stands out like a light house on the sea shore. There is no gain saying that consecrated life is still guided and directed by the Holy Spirit, their life style challenges the existing world order by their general simplicity of life style, particularly the vows which is in direct contrast with the world's value for power, riches and sex. The consecrated life ideals will ever remain the conscience of the world, a prophetic sign, the radical fulfilment of the Gospel of Christ.

May all who have been consecrated to Christ continue to find reason to strive each new day after Him till He brings us to final unity in His Kingdom.