

**RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE ORIENTATIONS OF THE CHURCH: THE  
CHALLENGES OF FORMATION IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Although expressed in different manner, the Consecrated life is often presented, essentially, as a beautiful and precious treasure, a calling and way of life rooted in our baptismal vocation and founded on the Triune God. The desire of those who are called is to follow Jesus Christ more closely by loving and serving God and fellow human persons, according to the spirit and charism of the Founder/Foundress. In order to faithfully achieve this aim, the Institutes of Consecrated life endeavour to form or educate its members. The Church has constantly showed concern and encouraged the formation of consecrated persons. She offers guidelines and directives in response to new questions and emerging difficulties, and changing situations both in the Church and in society. The article presents some orientations of the Church and, then, the challenges that face formation in religious life in an African country (Nigeria) today. Notwithstanding the real challenges, the formation in consecrated life is a call to commitment and witness to Christ in the church and in the world today.

**Key words:** Catholic Church, Consecrated Life, Formation, Nigeria

**Introduction**

*“Consecrated life is beautiful, it is one of the Church’s most precious treasures, rooted in baptismal vocation. Thus it is beautiful to be its formators, because it is a privilege to take part in the work of the Father who forms the heart of the Son in those whom the Spirit has called. At times one may feel this service to be a burden, as if it detracted something more important from us. But this is a mistake, it is a temptation. The mission is important, but it is equally important to educate for the mission, to educate in the enthusiasm for proclaiming, to educate in that passion of going to whatever place, to every periphery, to tell everyone of the love of Jesus Christ, especially to those who are distant, to communicate it to the little ones and to the poor, and to let oneself also be evangelized by them. All of this requires a firm foundation, a strong Christian framework*

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*and character which today even families are rarely able to provide. This increases your responsibility.”<sup>2</sup>*

These words of Pope Francis, addressed to Formators, are both heartening and challenging. They succinctly underline the importance of formation and its relation to mission. They point to the requirements for and attitude toward formation, the need for a firm foundation, and the consequent responsibility of formators. In spite of the temptations, formators are encouraged to joyously carry out the ministry of educating young people for the consecrated life.

Consecrated Life is not always understood or appreciated. The Church’s directives and the guidelines of the Institutes of Consecrated life regarding formation of candidate are necessary and helpful resources. Their implementation, however, require determination and patience, willingness, perseverance and encouragement. Formators and candidates in formation also need to frequently refresh their familiarity with the orientations of the Church and their respective Institutes on Consecrated Life, particularly the formation process. In this regard, a periodic reassessment and fraternal sharing and evaluation of experiences may be helpful.

Such efforts show the richness of the teachings of the Church on Consecrated life and the wisdom and insight of its formation process. But they also open us to a greater awareness of the challenges that formation to consecrated life and to priesthood faces. Some of these challenges are partly due to the changing circumstances and new developments in the Church, in cultures and societies, in various sciences and, especially, in the practical experiences acquired overtime by formators on the field. Not surprisingly, new questions frequently arise and await responses, which the appropriate authorities and some scholars and experts try to offer. In other words, some aspects of the understanding and practice of Consecrated life and of Religious formation in the Church do change in some ways. Hence, the Church and Institutes of Consecrated Life sometimes need to update and adapt to them.

At the same time, in the midst of the ongoing changes and transformations, the Church is mindful to ensure the preservation and promotion of the essential elements, the constant values, of Consecrated life. The Consecrated Life, especially in Africa, wants to promote and strengthen “*life*” and “*family*”, not only among members of one’s own Institute, by living its values. With the first African Synod, even amidst the problems confronting Africa, consecrated persons can say: “Christ, our Hope, is risen. He has met us, has walked along with us. He has explained the Scriptures to us. Here is what he said to us: ‘I am the First and the Last, I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold, I am alive for ever and ever and I hold the keys of death and of the abode of the

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<sup>2</sup> *Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis To Participants Of A Meeting For Formators Of Consecrated Men And Women Sponsored By The Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life. (Saturday, 11 April 2015)*

dead”<sup>3</sup>. Through its witness and mission Consecrated Life in Africa, too, “want to say a word of hope and encouragement to you, Family of God in Africa, to you, the Family of God all over the world: Christ our Hope is alive; we shall live!”<sup>4</sup>

This study is in two main parts. The first, after a glance at the significance and sources of Consecrated life, reflects on “formation” as a constant concern of the Church and highlights some of the major issues that are part of the solicitude of the Church in the area of formation in Religious Life. The second part focuses on some of the challenges of formation in Religious life in Nigeria. Religious formation is not an end in itself; thus, as human agents, to be responsible for or to undergo formation is a call to commitment and witness to Christ, to love and serve brothers and sisters in the Church and in the world of our time according to the spirit and charism of one’s own Institute.

## 1. SIGNIFICANCE AND SOURCES OF CONSECRATED LIFE

When Pope St. John Paul II visited Nigeria in 1982 he responded to a basic question on identity and mission: Who are Consecrated persons?. Addressing Consecrated persons, he states: “You are ambassadors” for the Church<sup>5</sup>. As ambassadors, he says, it is their role to show everyone the way to holiness, to advance communion and cooperation. Consecrated life are called to not only indicate to all the call to holiness but also to witness to fraternal life in community<sup>6</sup>.

Consecrated Life has deep-rooted foundations. The *Ecclesia in Africa* and *Vita Consecrata* offers a beautiful approach to the Christological, Trinitarian, and Ecclesiological sources of Consecrated Life. The First African Synod explained the approach of the *Vita Consecrata*: ‘Christ our hope is alive; we shall live!’<sup>7</sup>. This conviction implies that at the heart of our lives there is Jesus Christ, that he is in us, and that he walks with us. To evangelise is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ: He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Therefore, according to *Ecclesia in Africa*, the new evangelisation should be centred round the encounter with the living person of Christ<sup>8</sup>. Similarly, *Vita Consecrata* teaches that the gospel foundation of consecrated life is to be sought in:

- the existential relationship woven between Jesus and some of his disciples during his journey on earth;
- the search for the perfect life, abandoning the world, leaving everything, and offering one’s own life at the service of God and the advancement

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<sup>3</sup> Apoc. 1:17-18; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* (henceforth abbreviated: EA), 13

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Address of John Paul II to the Religious Men and Women*. Ibadan (Nigeria). Monday, 15 February 1982 (Nigeria), n.1, In: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1982/february/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19820215\\_religiosi-nigeria.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1982/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19820215_religiosi-nigeria.html) (Accessed: 15/9/2018)

<sup>6</sup> EA, 94.

<sup>7</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 1995 (Henceforth, abbreviated: EA), nn.13, 57

<sup>8</sup> EA, 57.

of one's brethren;

- And in the close imitation of the form of life that Jesus chose for himself<sup>9</sup>. This form of *sequela Christi* (the following of Christ), which originates in the Father, appears as a call, an election and a mission. It has 'an essential Christological and pneumatological meaning'<sup>10</sup>. This initiative, a call from the Father, awaits a devoted response from those he has chosen<sup>11</sup>. However, it is the Holy Spirit who brings forth the desire for a full response. He accompanies the growth of this wish. It is He who shapes and moulds the spirit of those who are called, configuring them to the chaste, poor and obedient Christ. Thus, there is the Trinitarian dimension of consecrated life.

In this sense, the *Ecclesia in Africa* and *Vita Consecrata* meet each other in the great theme of the centrality of Christ in the existence of consecrated people. In practical terms the Church teaches that the Christian, and *a fortiori* Consecrated persons, should centre themselves increasingly in Jesus Christ:

"Make your life a long conversion with Jesus as he makes himself known in the Gospels. Do not skimp on time given to prayer, to meditation on the Word of God, sharing with your brothers and sisters this word that gives life'. To sum up, make Africa the 'second homeland of Christ' (Pope Paul VI).

Moreover, Consecrated life is a sign of communion in the Church<sup>12</sup>. Institutes of Consecrated Life have the responsibility to nurture a sense of communion between peoples, races, ethnic groups and cultures and to bear witness to it<sup>13</sup>. For this reason, Consecrated persons are asked to:

(a) Be true experts of communion and to practise the spirituality of communion: "witnesses and architects of the plan for unity"<sup>14</sup>;

(b) Be true experts of communion and to practise the spirituality of communion "by the very fact that the manifold charisms of their respective Institutes are granted by the Holy Spirit" for the good of the entire Family of God, whose up-building they must serve;

(c) Be true co-workers of bishops in the harmonious development of diocesan pastoral care, according to the guidelines of Paul VI's *Mutuae relationes*; and

(d) To "face in a creative way the challenge of inculturation, while at the same time preserving their identity"<sup>15</sup>.

In a word, the Consecrated life was a great help and support for the Church in the past, but it is even more also a precious and necessary gift for the present and future of the Family of God, since it is an intimate part of her life, her

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<sup>9</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, 1996 (Henceforth abbreviated: VC), 14; Mt 19:21

<sup>10</sup> VC, 14.

<sup>11</sup> VC, 17.

<sup>12</sup> VC, nn.46-62

<sup>13</sup> VC, 51

<sup>14</sup> VC, 46

<sup>15</sup> VC, 51

holiness and her mission<sup>16</sup>. Hence, the Church entrusts to consecrated persons the task of developing the spirituality of communion at three levels: in their own institutes; in the ecclesial community; and in the world, in constant dialogue, cultivating the noble dialogue of charity in truth.

Important is also the place and role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Consecrated life and in formation of candidates<sup>17</sup>. John Paul II's *Vita Consecrata* recognises it, for "the consecrated life has always been seen primarily in terms of Mary – Virgin and Bride"<sup>18</sup>. She is the first disciple, who willingly put herself at the service of God's plan by the total gift of self. Every mission begins with the attitude expressed by Mary at the Annunciation "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38)<sup>19</sup>. The *Vita Consecrata* presents the Virgin Mary as model of consecration and discipleship<sup>20</sup>. Members of Religious Institutes are aware that, "following in the footsteps of Mary, the New Eve, consecrated persons express their spiritual fruitfulness by becoming receptive to the Word, in order to contribute to the growth of a new humanity by their unconditional dedication and their living witness. Thus the Church fully reveals her motherhood both in the communication of divine grace entrusted to Peter and in the responsible acceptance of God's gift, exemplified by Mary"<sup>21</sup>. John Paul II's prayer of Invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary<sup>22</sup> aptly summarizes the vital place and mission of the Virgin Mary in the journey of Consecrated Persons towards eternal Blessedness.

In sum, Consecrated life appears as a call from Holy Spirit to seek God alone, to give oneself totally to God the Father through the vows and to follow Jesus, under the guidance of the Blessed Virgin Mary, by witnessing to Truth and Mercy through love and service in the Church and in the world with faith and reason.

In addition, Consecrated persons know that the contemporary world and the society to which they called to mission today are undergoing rapid and profound changes at different levels. The Church as well experiences reforms. Even new forms of Consecrated life are emerging today that were hardly none in times past<sup>23</sup>. The scenario of vocations is making a drastic geographic shift; this is a motive of hope and new opportunities but it also poses new questions and challenges<sup>24</sup>. Generally, in her concern for consecrated life, the Magisterium of the

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<sup>16</sup> VC, 3

<sup>17</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, "The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation. . ." (1988); Conference of Mons. Norberto Rivera, *The Blessed Virgin Mary In The Life And Ministry Of The Priest* (Yamoussoukro, Wednesday 9 July 1997)

<sup>18</sup> VC, 34

<sup>19</sup> VC, 18

<sup>20</sup> VC, 28

<sup>21</sup> VC, 34

<sup>22</sup> VC, 112

<sup>23</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n.919, Bishops will strive to discern new gifts of consecrated life granted to the Church by the Holy Spirit; the approval of new forms of consecrated life is reserved to the Apostolic See. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn.915-930

<sup>24</sup> Several Church documents refer to the background or context of present challenges of vocational discernment and formation and recommend guidelines to address them. For example, Cf. *Pastores dabo vobis*

Church has proved and called all to be aware of both the importance of a formation that is adapted to the changes and transformations in the church and in the society so as to meet the present-day challenges, and also acutely conscious of the necessity of faithfulness to the essential elements of consecrated life.

## 2. A CONSTANT SOLICITUDE

The Church has always show solicitude for the formation of consecrated persons and clergy, a concern that increased since Vatican Council II (1962-1965)<sup>25</sup>. The Council gave doctrinal principles and general norms in Chapter VI of the dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* and in the decree *Perfectae caritatis*. Pope Paul VI reminded Consecrated persons that, whatever the variety of ways of life and of charisms, all the elements of a religious life should be directed toward the building up of "the inner man"<sup>26</sup>. Pope John Paul II frequently addressed matters of consecrated life and of religious formation, also during his pastoral visits to Africa<sup>27</sup>; the Code of Canon Law indicates in precise norms the exigencies required for a suitable renewal of formation<sup>28</sup>. Pope Benedict XVI encouraged formation to Consecrated life<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, since the beginning of his pontificate, and in numerous discourses Pope Francis speaks about Consecrated Life and formation<sup>30</sup>.

On its part, in 1969 the Congregation for Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) published the instruction *Renovationis causam*, which expanded certain canonical dispositions then in force, in order to make a better adaptation of the entire formation cycle not only to the mentality of younger generations and modern living conditions, but also to the present demands of apostolic mission, while remaining faithful to the nature and the

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(1992), Nos.41-69; *Vita Consecrata* (1996), Nos. 63-65; *Starting Afresh from Christ* (2002), Nos. 16-18; Congregation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes* (1990); Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation. Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (8 December, 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Enchiridion della Vita Consecrata: Dalle Decretali al rinnovamento post-Conciliare (885-2000)*. EDB/Ancora, Bologna (2001).

<sup>26</sup> *Evangelica Testificatio* 32; cf. 2 Cor. 4.16; Rom 7.22; Eph 4.24.

<sup>27</sup> John Paul II in Porto Alegre, 5 July 1980: IDGP III.2, 128; in Bergamo, 26 April 1981: IDGP IV.1, 1035; in Manila, 17 Feb. 1981: IDGP, IV.I, 329; to the Jesuits in Rome, 27 Feb 1982: IDGP, V.1, 704; in Nigeria, 15 February 1982: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1982/february/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19820215\\_religiosi-nigeria.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1982/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19820215_religiosi-nigeria.html) (Accessed: October 1, 2018); to the Capuchin Masters of Novices in Rome, 28 Sep 1984: IDGP VII.2, 689; in Lima, 1 Feb 1985: IDGP VIII.1, 339; to the UISG in Rome, 7 May 1985: IDGP VIII.1, 1212; in Bombay, 10 Feb 1986: IDGP, IX.1, 420; to the UISG, 22 May 1986: IDGP IX.1, 1656; to the Conference of Religious of Brazil, 2 Jul 1986: IDGP IX.2, 237.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. CIC 641-661

<sup>29</sup> *Address of Benedict XVI to participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for Catholic Education*. (7 February, 2011); Benedict XVI, *Letter to Seminarians* (18 October 2010)

<sup>30</sup> For example, Pope Francis, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants of a Meeting for Formators of Consecrated Men And Women Sponsored by the Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life*. (Saturday, 11 April 2015; Pope Francis, *Address of his Holiness to Participants at Meeting with the Students of the Ecclesiastical Roman Colleges*. Paul VI Hall, Friday 16 march 2018.

special aim of each institute<sup>31</sup>. In 1990 CICLSAL published the "Directives On Formation in Religious Institutes", a document addressed to Major Superiors of religious institutes, and to the members of their Institutes in charge of formation. The threefold purposes and reason of this document are to: help Religious Institutes to elaborate their own programs of formation (*Ratio*); recognize that Consecrated persons have the right to know the position of the Holy See on the present problems of formation and the solutions which it suggests for resolving them; and help newly established Religious institutes and those Institutes which presently have few means of formation and information at their disposal. Subsequently, in 1996, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, was published. These last two documents – the *Directives* and the *Vita Consecrata* – are landmarks and continue to play a fundamental role in the formation of consecrated persons, being among the most important reference points for formation in Consecrated Life since Vatican II. The present study therefore frequently refers to them.

Other documents published later by the Vatican Offices do not deal directly with formation in Religious life, but they nonetheless touch it under one or another important aspect. For instance, there are the "Mutual Relations" published in 1978<sup>32</sup>, "Religious and Human Promotion" (in 25-28 April 1978), "The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life" in 1980<sup>33</sup> and "The Essential Elements of the Teaching of the Church on Religious Life" in 1983<sup>34</sup>. While the cited documents concern specifically Religious Institutes and Religious life, there have also been exhaustive instructions concerning diaconate and priesthood on the part of the competent Vatican Offices, "which instructions are also pertinent to religious who are to be ordained for these ministries"<sup>35</sup>. Among these instructions are, for example, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March, 1992), and the Congregation for the Clergy's "The Gift of the Priestly Vocation": *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (8 December 2016). Formation houses and seminaries will find it useful to refer to these different documents, "since the formation of religious must be given in complete harmony with the pastoral directions of the universal Church and of particular Churches, and in order to assist in the integration of 'interiority and activity' in the lives of men and women religious dedicated to the apostolate. Activity 'for the Lord' will thus not fail to lead them to the Lord, the 'source of all activity.'"<sup>36</sup>

Several Episcopal Conferences and local churches have, at different forums and levels, addressed questions relating to the Consecrated Life and its related challenges. Noteworthy are the interventions and pastoral orientations of

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<sup>31</sup> Instruction *Renovationis Causam*, Introduction AAS 61 (1969) 103 ff.

<sup>32</sup> CRIS and the Congregation for Bishops, AAS 70 (1978) 473 ff.

<sup>33</sup> CRIS, EV 9.181 ff.

<sup>34</sup> CRIS, EV 7.414 ff

<sup>35</sup> *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes* (1990), n.5

<sup>36</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, n.3.

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Catholic Bishops in Africa on this theme<sup>37</sup>, as also the growing reflections of African scholars<sup>38</sup>, and the contributions of many Conferences of Major Superiors of institutes of Consecrated Life in Africa themselves which share experiences and periodically undertake reflections and promote meetings, studies and researches. The *Ratio Institutionis* of each Institute specifies how the formation of its members is to be carried out in the light of the Church's teachings and directives.

At the level of structures, various initiatives are taken at different levels to promote, albeit with differing approaches and contexts, the initial and ongoing formation and training for Consecrated persons and clerics. At the African continental level, the Confederation of Conferences of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar (COMSAM)<sup>39</sup> does it through its Formation Commission<sup>40</sup>. In Nigeria, CMSN and NCWR jointly run the *Institute for the Formation for Formators*, in Du, Jos, and the *Formators Association of Nigeria*. In Nairobi, Kenya, there is the Psycho-Spiritual Institute (PSI) founded by the *Lux Terra Leadership Foundation*

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<sup>37</sup> For example: Uganda Episcopal Conference, A Situation of Priestly Formation in Eastern Africa (October 1990), in: *The African Enchiridion*, Edited by Oseni Ogunu, vol.III [EMI, Bologna: 2006]:1902-1903; Episcopal Conference of Zaire (now DR Congo), La formation des Prêtres dans le circonstances actuelles. Cas du Zaire”, *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III: 1843-1845; Episcopal Conference of Zaire (now DR Congo), “La Formation des Seminaristes au Zaire”, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III: 1899; Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, Commitment to the Formation of Priests today (October 1990), in : *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III: 1899-1990; Episcopal Conference of Tanzania, “Celibacy and Christian Family”. In: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III: 1904-1905

<sup>38</sup> For instance: Vicente Carlos Kiaziku, *Consecrated Life in Bantu Africa*. Pauline Publications-Africa(2007); Benezet Bujo: *Religious Life: A sign of Contradiction*. Paulines Publications Africa. (2017). Prof. Fr. Jacques SIMPORE, *Consecrated Life In Africa: The Challenges Of The Third Millennium*. In: <http://www.camilliani.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/simopre-inglese.pdf> (Accessed: 28 Sept.2018); Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR, *When You Leave Religious Life, What Then? Accompanying Persons In The Process Of Discontinuation From Religious Formation*, in: <http://www.internationalunionsuperiorsgeneral.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/when-you-leave-religious-life-what-then.pdf> (Accessed: 29 Sept.2018), also In: *Religious Life Review*, Volume 55, Number 300, September/October 2016. . *The Catholic Voyage* itself, in pursuit of its aims, publishes articles concerning on formation in Consecrated Life. For example, see: Dr. M. Nkechinyelu Ezeanyino, DDL. “The Place And Role of the Family in the Formation And Mission of Priests and Consecrated Persons”, in *The Catholic Voyage*, vol.12 (2016); Rev. Fr. Festus Ejiofor, MSP, “Responsibility For The Finances And Economic Growth Of The Religious Community: From The Formation of Candidates to the Living Witness Of Professed Members of the Institute”, in: *The Catholic Voyage*, vol.12 (2016); Rev. Fr. Emmanuel N. Ogu, OP, Ph.D, “Religious Formation: A Call To Radical Following Of Christ”, in: *The Catholic Voyage*, vol.12 (2016); EHJ Novitiate Community (Nigeria), “Religious Community Life as a Family Life: The Contributions of candidates in formation in advancing family values, and the experience of mercy and healing, within the Religious community life”, in: *The Catholic Voyage*, vol.13 (2017) 119-131; Fr. Jude A. Ossai, OSA, “The Charism of the Institute of Consecrated Life and the Personal Charism and Talents of its Members: Divine Gifts, the Tensions and Paths to Harmony for the Common Mission.”, in: *The Catholic Voyage*, vol.14 (2018) 16-23; Rev. Sr. Dr. Nkechinyelu Ezeanyino, DDL, “The Study of Consecrated Life in Diocesan Seminaries And Institutes For Theological Formation: The Value, Urgent Need And Implications”, in: *The Catholic Voyage*, vol.14 (2018) 156-165; Sr. Josephine Enenmo, OLA, “Mercy in the Dynamics of Religious And Priestly Formation.”, in: *The Catholic Voyage*, vol.14 (2018) 167-185

<sup>39</sup> According to its website, the Confederation of the Conferences of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar (COMSAM) is composed of Regional and National Conferences of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar. It is a juridical and international organism of pontifical right. Founded during the Constitutive Assemble held in Cotonou (Benin) from 3rd to 8th May 2005, the Confederation was erected by the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) through the approval of its statutes. (<http://comsam.aecoltd.com/en/history/>).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. <http://comsam.aecoltd.com/en/formation/>

(Nigeria), in collaboration with *Missio Aachen* (Germany), with the stated aim of “training and graduating experts in Psycho-Spiritual Therapy and Christian Counselling for English-Speaking African Countries”, as its website states, and it is open to members of institutes of Consecrated Life.

The essential elements of the Church’s teachings on the religious life<sup>41</sup> and her directives on formation are an invitation to keep in mind the scope and stages, content, challenges and the stages of an integral formation, which includes vocational discernment. To highlight some aspects of these, let us now turn to the Church’s orientations on formation in Religious institutes.

### 3. THE CHURCH’S ORIENTATIONS ON FORMATION IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

#### 3.1. Promotion of Vocations and the Vocational Discernment

The promotion of vocations<sup>42</sup> and the discernment of vocations are crucial and related needs that involve the whole Church. The outcome in these areas can impact, positively or negatively, the future, the quality and effectiveness, and the life and apostolate of an Institute of Consecrated Life.

##### a) *The promotion of vocations*

It is true the mission and the vitality of Consecrated Life depend on the faithful commitment with which consecrated persons respond to their vocation. However, consecrated persons have a future to the extent that still other men and women generously welcome the Lord's call. In some regions, great energies are being expended in the promotion of vocations but the results do not always match expectations and efforts. In Nigeria, as many other parts of Africa, vocations to the consecrated life and priesthood are flourishing, while vocations are, generally, not increasing in countries that were traditionally rich in vocations<sup>43</sup>. In either case, this difficult situation put consecrated persons to the test. In some regions institute ask themselves questions such as, “Have we perhaps lost the capacity to attract new vocations?”: the Church, therefore, encourages them to have confidence in the Lord Jesus and entrust themselves to the

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<sup>41</sup> For example, Cf. Sacred Congregation For Religious And For Secular Institutes, *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching On Religious Life As Applied To Institutes Dedicated To Works Of The Apostolate* (31/5/1983)

<sup>42</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n.64

<sup>43</sup> According to the latest edition of the “Church’s Book of Statistics” published (updated to 31 December 2016) regarding members of the Church, church structures, healthcare, welfare and education, “The number of major seminarians, diocesan and religious decreased this year, they are globally 683 units, reaching a total of 116.160. Increases occurred in Africa (+1.455) and in Asia (+9) [...]Religious Seminarians increased only in Africa (+396), while decreased in America (-1.139), Asia (-301), Europe (-583) and Oceania (-55). [http://www.fides.org/de/attachments/view/file/Dossier\\_Statistiche2018\\_FIDES\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.fides.org/de/attachments/view/file/Dossier_Statistiche2018_FIDES_ENG.pdf) ( Accessed 4/10/2018)

Holy Spirit. The regions with flourishing and fertile vocations feel as well, even palpably, the need for discernment in the screening, selection and admission of candidates. Religious institutes deal particularly with questions of screening and selection process, many of them desiring and aiming more at quality during recruitment and accompaniment of vocations. In this, too, we need the help of the Holy Spirit to see and accept those whom Jesus has called to consecrated life in the spirit and charism of the respective religious institute. Even when and where there is “vocation boom”, there is still need for prayer for vocations – for good and holy vocations--; however, it is equally essential to act, by means of explicit presentation and appropriate catechesis. The aims of such catechesis are to: (a) encourage in those called to the Consecrated life a free, willing and generous response to the grace of vocation heard from the Lord; (b) present the attraction of the person of the Lord Jesus and the beauty of the total gift of self for the sake of the Gospel. Hence, it is encouraging to see in many dioceses in Nigeria the organization of “vocation rally” or similar initiatives to sensitize, enlighten and educate prospective aspirants to Religious Life and priesthood. One of the consequences is that the consecrated persons have the responsibility to propose with courage, by word and example, the ideal of the following of Christ, and then to support the response to the Spirit's action in the heart of the aspirants who are called. The enthusiasm of the initial meeting with Christ is followed by constant struggle of everyday life.

Thus, various means are used in the work of vocational promotion, for example the spiritual accompaniment (or spiritual direction), to nourish that personal response of love of God. The flourishing of vocations justifies optimism and hope. Nevertheless, to prevent this from become a nightmare, a “vocation doom”, turning out to be a source of lasting crisis and damage, a greater care need to be taken not to fall into the temptation of practising neither unjust and discriminatory screening/selection criteria -- even if unwritten and covert – nor lax and unwise recruitment.

b) *Discernment*

Discernment is a time-honoured practice in the Christian tradition. In essence, discernment is a decision-making process that honours the place of God's will in our lives. It is an interior search of the individual or the community that seeks to align our own will with the will of God in order to learn what God is calling us to. Every choice we make, no matter how small, is an opportunity to align ourselves with God's will. For this, tools are sometimes made available to help people concerned<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> For example, see <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/discernment-tools.cfm> ; <https://www.marquette.edu/faith/ignatian-principles-for-making-decisions.php> (accessed 12/9/ 2018)

Discernment is a practice rooted in the Sacred Scriptures. The great Catholic traditions of discernment testify to the value of this practice. In recent years, however, a greater attention has been drawn to it particularly thanks to the Magisterium of Pope Francis, who often highlights the importance, role, necessity, scope and attitudes required of discernment in various areas of the life of individuals and of Christian communities. Vocations are one of the areas that need continual discernment. According to Pope Francis:

Vocational discernment is important: everyone, all the people who know the human personality – be they psychologists, spiritual fathers, spiritual mothers – tell us that the young who unconsciously sense they have an imbalance or some form of imbalance or of deviation, unconsciously seek strong structures that protect them, to protect themselves. That is where discernment lies: knowing how to say ‘no’. Do not send them away: no, no. I am accompanying you, go on, go on, go ahead.... As one accompanies the entry, accompany the exit too, so that he or she may find the path in life, with the necessary help. Not with that defence that is bread for today and hunger for tomorrow.<sup>45</sup>

Vocational discernment is a necessary part of a holistic education to enable, in freedom, respond to God’s call to know the truth and to love and service. As Pope Francis puts it: “Initial training, this discernment, is the first step of a process intended to last a lifetime, and young people should be formed in the humble and intelligent freedom of letting oneself be educated by God the Father every day of one’s life, at every age, in mission as in fraternity, in action as in contemplation.”<sup>46</sup>

Vocations are a gift which we must receive with gratitude to God and a cause for renewed joy and hope. It seems Africa’s turn, its *kairos* moment, to partake in the enjoyment of this divine gift and blessing. Still, considering the growing populations and the scope and demands of pastoral and missionary care, we should, frankly, continue to earnestly pray to the Lord for more labourers in his vineyard; we also must do our part to further promote vocations to Consecrated life. There is, also, a growing conviction that more important than quantity is the *quality* of the vocations accepted into the formation houses and seminaries as well as the quality of those entrusted with the responsibility of serving as formators.

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<sup>45</sup> Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis To Participants Of A Meeting For Formators Of Consecrated Men And Women Sponsored By The Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life. Saturday, 11 April 2015; Congregation for Clergy, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation* (Dec.8, 2016) speaks extensively about “discernment” through the various stages of formation

<sup>46</sup> Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis To Participants Of A Meeting For Formators Of Consecrated Men And Women.

Hence it is not surprising that the necessity and importance of vocational discernment is frequently emphasized<sup>47</sup>. No one wants the “vocation boom” to turn into “vocation doom”, the blessing to be turned into a curse. The First African Synod offers some guidelines, in part a recap of the directives found previous church documents. First, it recognizes the necessity to foster religious vocations to the contemplative and active life but it also insists that such fostering should be done, above all, by screening and choosing them “with great discernment”. Secondly, the candidates must receive an integral formation that includes the human formation, spiritual and doctrinal, apostolic and missionary, biblical and theological dimensions. Thirdly, this formation is to be faithfully and regularly updated<sup>48</sup>. In the *Ecclesia in Africa*, St. John Paul II recalls that, in addition to the major challenge of marriage and family life, another fundamental responsibility which the African Synod Fathers highlighted “is concern for vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. It is necessary to discern them wisely, to provide competent directors and to oversee the quality of the formation offered. The fulfilment of the hope for a flowering of African missionary vocations depends on the attention given to the solution of this problem, a flowering that is required if the Gospel is to be proclaimed in every part of the Continent and beyond.”<sup>49</sup>

In other words, in the formation for Consecrated life and priesthood, discernment is decisive. “Discernment is crucial”<sup>50</sup>, for several reasons. First, because, as Sr. Ezeani explains, unlike matrimony, the priesthood and consecrated life do not enjoy the natural pull or attractions that draw men and women together. Why? It is because Consecrated life and priesthood “exist because of the Incarnation. Only Christ the High Priest gives legitimacy to a celibate priesthood and makes becoming a priest a justifiable option for a young man. There is no such thing as a natural inclination or yearning towards remaining celibate.” Secondly, it is necessary to be attentive to identifying candidates who are unsuited to a specific congregation, but also where else a particular candidate might be better suited, happier and well-adjusted<sup>51</sup>.

At the same time, it is necessary to consider that in relation to young aspirants who apply to enter religious life (and these, in Nigeria, are generally between 17-25 years old), the work of vocational promotions demand that

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<sup>47</sup> On vocational discernment and preparation of formators, see, for example: Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines For The Use Of Psychology in the Admission And Formation Of Candidates For The Priesthood*, nn.1-12

<sup>48</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n.94

<sup>49</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n.50

<sup>50</sup> Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR, *When You Leave Religious Life, What Then?*

<sup>51</sup> Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR, *When You Leave Religious Life, What Then?* Cf. R. Cessario, ‘Thomas Aquinas and Vocational Discernment’, *Religious Life Review*, volume 54, number 291, March/April 2015, p. 70. Sr. Ezeani goes on to suggest some questions that could be helpful in this regard, and concludes that “Formation directors need therefore to ensure that they are personally attuned to the voice of the Spirit in their day to day living. They are to assist those they are guiding to equally progress in attentiveness to God speaking through the daily experiences of themselves, the whole of life and the actual work with them. Discernment ‘allows the Spirit of God to shape not only our actions but also our ‘hearts’, the centre from which those actions flow. By responding in daily life to the call of the Spirit, we are allowing God’s will to be done in us...”

vocations directors and formators must know and take into account, during the discernment process, the multiple contexts the young people are coming from. In fact, “The sensitivity of young people profoundly affects their perception of the values of justice, non-violence, and peace.”<sup>52</sup> The Final Document of the recent XV Ordinary General Assembly Synod of Bishops on “Young people, Faith and Vocational Discernment”<sup>53</sup> and the Vatican’s directives on formation present some traits and the social-cultural and ecclesial contexts of your young people<sup>54</sup>. The variety and complexity of the human background unveil the problems posed for vocation promotion and for formation. Regarding the discernment of vocations, the intention or motives of the aspirant seeking admission do matter. In some countries, some candidates for the religious life present themselves because of a more or less conscious search for social gain and future security; others look upon the religious life as an ideal place for an ideological struggle for justice. Finally, there are others of a more conservative nature who look upon the religious life as if it were a place for saving their faith in a world which they regard as being hostile and corrupt. These motives represent the reverse side of a number of values, but they need to be corrected and purified.”<sup>55</sup>

In the so-called developed countries, there is perhaps above all a need of promoting a human and spiritual balance based on renunciation, lasting fidelity, calm and enduring generosity, authentic joy and love. Here, then, is a demanding but necessary program for those religious who are charged with vocation promotion and with formation.

Discernment is sustained through prayer, which is one of the authentic criteria for discerning what is happening. “Prayer is always a return to the first call. Any prayer, perhaps a prayer in need, but it is always a return to that Person who called me. The prayer of a consecrated man or woman is a return to the Lord who invited me to be near him. A return to the One who looked me in the eye and said to me: ‘Come. Leave everything and come.’. [...]. Seek the Lord, the One who called you. Prayer. Not just in the morning.... Each one must find how to do it, where to do it, when to do it. But do it always, pray. One cannot live the consecrated life, one cannot discern what is happening without speaking with the Lord.”<sup>56</sup>

In sum, with Sr. Ezeani we say that, “the journey, not the arrival, matters; the voyage, not the landing”, and that “For those accompanying them and for the individual as well, the love of Christ and the courage to make the journey are the

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<sup>52</sup> John Paul II, *Christifidelis Laici*, n.46

<sup>53</sup> See “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 Ottobre 2018), nn.5-20, and 21-31, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018). The provisory translation of this document from the original text in Italian, as used in this article, is by the present author.

<sup>54</sup> Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, nn. 86-89

<sup>55</sup> Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, n.89

<sup>56</sup> *Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis To Participants In The Conference Organized by the Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life*. Paul VI Audience Hall. Friday, 4 May 2018

root of all endeavours in the formation process and the exercise of discernment.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, “the most authentic way to support the Spirit's action is for Institutes to invest their best resources generously in vocational work, especially by their serious involvement in working with youth.”<sup>58</sup>

### 3.2. Religious Formation and Culture

The Church in Africa recognizes the necessity and importance of formation. According to the *Ecclesia in Africa*, in all areas of Church life formation is of primary importance. People who have never had the chance to learn cannot really know the truths of faith, nor can they perform actions which they have never been taught. For this reason “the whole community needs to be trained, motivated and empowered for evangelization, each according to his or her specific role within the Church”. This community includes the bishops, priests, consecrated persons, and all the lay faithful<sup>59</sup>. In the same sense, Pope Benedict XVI encouraged bishops and institutes of consecrated persons who facilitate the education of children, promote among Christians and young people the study of the educational sciences in view of transmitting knowledge of full truth and of life. They are also to “ensure that personnel in the Church’s educational institutions, and indeed all Church personnel, receive just remuneration, in order to strengthen the Church’s credibility”<sup>60</sup>.

The centrality and necessity for formation is especially evident in the Consecrated Life. The first African Synod insisted on the need for formation of candidates to Consecrated Life<sup>61</sup>. John Paul II’s *Vita Consecrata* asserts that formation is of “decisive importance”<sup>62</sup>

#### 3.2.1. Purpose of Formation

The Church’s teaching on Consecrated life and priesthood rightly insists on the integral formation that includes the whole person and every aspect of his personality.<sup>63</sup> The immediate aim of the formation of candidates is to introduce them to religious life and make them aware of its specific character within the Church-as-Family of God. It primarily aims at assisting consecrated men and women to realize their unity of life in Christ through the Spirit, by means of the harmonious fusion of its spiritual, apostolic, doctrinal, and practical elements<sup>64</sup>. In other words, the objective of the formation process “is to prepare people for the total consecration of themselves to God in the following of Christ, at the service of the Church's mission”, for the person called by the Lord has the inescapable

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<sup>57</sup> Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR, *When You Leave Religious Life, What Then?*

<sup>58</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 64.

<sup>59</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n.75.

<sup>60</sup> Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, n.134

<sup>61</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 53

<sup>62</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 65;

<sup>63</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, No. 65, *Pastores dabo vobis*, nn.43-59.

<sup>64</sup> *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, nn.1, 6

duty “to say “yes” to the Lord's call by taking personal responsibility for maturing in one's vocation”<sup>65</sup>. That is to say, the candidate who is called is an agent of her/his own formation, a process in which other agents will participate. Hence, he/she must be open to the action of the Holy Spirit with attitude of generosity and faith. Consequently, the expectation is that formation should have a profound effect on the individuals in formation. The principal and non-negotiable purpose of formation, as indeed for Consecrated life itself, is “the conformity to the Lord Jesus in his total self-giving”<sup>66</sup>. This is a path of gradual identification with the attitude of Christ. This growing in the sentiments of Jesus is growing in the freedom to love and give oneself up for others.

Taking the purpose of Consecrated Life into account, the African Synod Fathers recommend that the manner of preparing for Consecrated Life “should include and express the character of wholeness”. This means that initial formation must be integral: “Formation should involve the whole person, in every aspect of the personality, in behaviour and intentions”<sup>67</sup>. To ensure this complete in the formation process implies that it must include every aspect of Christian life. Since it aims at the transformation of the whole person, the commitment to formation is a continuous effort. Thus, consecrated persons should be offered opportunities to grow in their commitment to the charism and mission of their Institute. Therefore, it must provide a human, cultural, spiritual and pastoral preparation: all these aspects should be harmoniously integrated. Moreover, it is recommended that sufficient time should be reserved for initial formation, which is a process of development which passes through every stage of personal maturity – from the psychological and spiritual to the theological and pastoral.

### 3.2.2. *The Role of Formators and pedagogy of formation*

Formation is a sharing in the work of the Triune God. God in three Persons is the educator *par excellence* of those called to Consecrated Life and to the priesthood. However, he uses some *human agents* by putting mature women and men to accompany as formators those He calls. In this regard, the role and qualities of formators need to be kept in mind. Formators should:

- Be familiar with the path of seeking God, so as to be able to accompany others on their journey.
- be able to point out obstacles in their journey which are less obvious;
- disclose the beauty of following Christ and the value of the charism by which this is accomplished;
- Combine the spiritual wisdom with the human means, which is helpful both in discerning the call and in forming the new candidates, until they are genuinely free. Among these instruments, special attention is given to personal dialogue, “a practice of irreplaceable and commendable effectiveness”<sup>68</sup>. The *Vita*

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<sup>65</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 65

<sup>66</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 65

<sup>67</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, 65

<sup>68</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n.66.

*Consecrata* also recommends the establishment and sustenance of appropriate structures for the training of the persons responsible for formation and suitable directors of formation.

Granted the primary role of the Holy Spirit in this growth process, realistic and holistic pedagogy of formation, requires the following:

(a) Clear objectives in each principal dimension of life -- human, spiritual, intellectual, charismatic, pastoral -- in relation to the progressive stages of formation, namely, Aspirancy / Candidacy/Pre-Postulancy, Postulancy, novitiate, Temporary Vows, Perpetual Vows/Solemn Vows<sup>69</sup>;

(b) Strategies or methods suited to each aspect of formation to reach its proper objectives;

(c) Different mediators are needed who can assist and accompany the candidates in formation in their formative itinerary. The formator himself/herself needs to be equipped for accompanying the formandi and be supported by the expertise of therapists, spiritual guides and counsellors. Such a collaboration calls for clarity of goals, roles and the boundaries proper to each role.<sup>70</sup>

Concerning the qualities of the formators, Pope Francis offers some insights into some traits of formators for Consecrated Life:

“One of the qualities of a formator is that of having a great heart for young people, to form in them great hearts capable of welcoming everyone, hearts rich in mercy, full of tenderness. You are not only friends and companions of the consecrated life of those who are entrusted to you, but real fathers, real mothers, capable of asking and of giving them the best. To generate life, to give birth to a religious life. This is possible only through love, the love of fathers and mothers.”<sup>71</sup>

Another major agent of formation is the *community* of the person in formation: “Initiation into the hardships and joys of community life takes place in the community itself”<sup>72</sup>. Through the fraternal life in common each one learns to

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<sup>69</sup> Though the names and duration of the phases can vary, there are similarities among the stages of formation in a religious congregation. Much of the formation of religious is governed by Canon Law as well as by the Constitutions and Norms/Directory of the Congregation or order.

<sup>70</sup> Mathew Vattamattam, CMF, *Challenges of Formation For Priestly And Consecrated Life Today*. In: <http://www.claretianformation.com/challenges-of-formation-for-priestly-and-consecrated-life-today/> (Accessed: 14 August, 2018). From the viewpoint of themes, the author echoes generally some elements in the directives of pertinent Church documents. Cf. Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation in Religious Institutes* (1990), nn.126-132, 133-135, Part III (“The Stages of Religious Formation”) ; John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis; Vita Consecrata*, nn. 66-68; Cf. Timothy Costello, “Integrating Formative Roles” in Alessandro Manenti, Stefano Guarinelli and Hans Zollner (eds.), *Formation and the Person*, Peeters, Leuven, 2007, pp. 241-256.

<sup>71</sup> *Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis To Participants Of A Meeting For Formators Of Consecrated Men And Women Sponsored By The Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life. Saturday, 11 April 2015*. In: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/april/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150411\\_raduno-formatori-consacrati.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/april/documents/papa-francesco_20150411_raduno-formatori-consacrati.html) (Accessed: Sept.3, 2018).

<sup>72</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n.67.

live with other members of his/her community. In this process, he/she accepts their positive traits together with their differences and limitations. The candidate in formation learns to share the gifts received for the building up of all, because "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). At the same time, from the moment of initial formation, community life must unveil the essential missionary dimension of consecration. Hence, the Church recommends that during the period of initial formation, Institutes of Consecrated Life, along with their Formation houses, should provide practical experiences which are prudently followed by the formators; these pastoral works enable candidates to test, in the context of the particular society and local culture, their skills for the apostolate, their ability to adapt and their spirit of initiative.

The formation process is not a static one-way exercise nor must it encourage a passive attitude, as if the candidate was a mere consumer of goods. Rather, consecrated persons need "gradually to develop a critical judgement, based on the Gospel, regarding the positive and negative values of their own culture and of the culture in which they will eventually work." Conversely, "they must be trained in the difficult art of interior harmony, of the interaction between love of God and love of one's brothers and sisters; they must likewise learn that prayer is the soul of the apostolate, but also that the apostolate animates and inspires prayer."<sup>73</sup>

### 3.2.3 The *Ratio institutionis*

The *Vita Consecrata* called upon all institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life to draw up "a complete and updated" *Ratio institutionis*,<sup>74</sup> that is, a formation programme inspired by their particular spirit and charism. This *Ratio* should present clearly and in all its stages the course to be followed in order to assimilate fully the spirituality of the respective Institute. The *Ratio* is needed, firstly, in order to pass on the Institute's spirit so it will be lived in its integrity by future generations, in different cultures and geographical regions. Secondly, because it explains to consecrated persons how to live that spirit in the different stages of life on the way to full maturity of faith in Christ. Formation is a dynamic process by means of which "individuals are converted to the Word of God in the depths of their being and, at the same time, learn how to discover the signs of God in earthly realities. This Plan of formation has a twofold importance: it leads consecrated persons to continue to "see" God with the eyes of faith in the world, as well as to be effective in making God's presence in some way "perceptible" through the witness of their charism<sup>75</sup>. The *Ratio* must be adapted to the cultural and social milieu of the region where the formation is taking place.

### 3.2.4. On-going Formation

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<sup>73</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n.67.

<sup>74</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n.68.

<sup>75</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n.68.

Evidently, the formation process is not limited to the initial phase, though this paper is concerned primarily with this phase. Continuing formation “is an intrinsic requirement of religious consecration.” It is “very important” for every Institute to provide, in its *ratio institutionis*, a precise and systematic description of its plan of continuing formation. The *Vita Consecrata* explains the major purpose of this plan of formation, namely: “to provide all consecrated persons with a programme which encompasses their whole life”. For just as no one is exempt from the obligation to grow humanly and as Religious, so also no one can be over-confident and live in self-sufficient isolation<sup>76</sup>. Formation reveals itself as an essential element of Consecrated life.

### 3.2.5. Agents and Stages of Religious Formation

Religious Institutes enjoy a diversity of gifts – a variety which is explained by the diversity of the “charisms of their founders,”<sup>77</sup> -- to be cultivated and maintained. However, there are in every Institute aspects that are common to all stages of religious formation. Among these aspects are the agents and environment of formation, the Human and Christian dimension<sup>78</sup>, asceticism<sup>79</sup>, and sexuality and family<sup>80</sup>.

Members of the Religious Institutes to which the candidate belong and those of the diocese, the local Church where the formation of candidates is taking place all share responsibility for the formation of candidates in Consecrated Life and in the priesthood at different levels and according to different ways and competencies. So, the agents of formation and environments include the Major Superior of the Institute (or his/her Delegate), as the moderator of the life and mission of the institute in that region; the Diocesan Bishop, as the pastor responsible for the diocesan community; the Community of the formandi, who provide spiritual and pedagogical formation<sup>81</sup>; members of the Religious Institute, the Community of Formators or Instructors (Superiors and other persons

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<sup>76</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n.69. *Vita Consecrata* nn.70 and 71 go on to speak of the constant search for faithfulness throughout one’s life in Consecrated Life, and of the dimensions of continuing formation.

<sup>77</sup> *Evangelica Testificatio* n.11; The “Charisms of their founders” “appears as ‘an experience of the Spirit,’ transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth. ‘It is for this reason that the distinctive character of various religious institutes is preserved and fostered by the Church’ “ (*Mutuae Relationis*, n.11). Therefore, there is no uniform way for observing the evangelical counsels, but each institute is asked to define its own way “keeping in mind its own character and purposes.” (CIC 598.1) This is true not only for what refers to the observance of the counsels, but also with regard to all that concerns the style of life of its members (Cf. CIC 598.2).

<sup>78</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, nn.33-35

<sup>79</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, nn. 36-38

<sup>80</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, nn. 39-41; Congregation for Catholic Education, *Directives on Formation of Seminarians Concerning Problems relating to marriage and family* (19 March 1995); Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n.203; Cf. Pontifical Council For The Family, *Vademecum For Confessors Concerning Some Aspects Of The Morality Of Conjugal Life*. (12 February, 1997).

<sup>81</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n.67

Responsible for Formation), Professors, who provide intellectual support and make integral formation possible; the administrative personnel, professionals and Specialists, who contribute their own witness of faith and life, and provide assistance in various particular fields; and, finally, the candidates in formation themselves, as the protagonists of the process of reaching integral maturity, along with their family, parish and other ecclesial communities, the collaborators from other institutes of Consecrated life/Diocesan clergy and Laity<sup>82</sup>. The candidate is called to a journey of on-going growth in human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral areas, taking into consideration his own personal and family background. The candidates in formation are bound to demonstrate, both in external behaviour and in interior convictions and attitudes -- that they have internalised authentically the way of religious life proper to his/her Institute, in love, humility and service to others.

Let us focus a bit on one of the agents of formation on which the Church frequently speaks in recent times: the family. The influence and role of the family in the formation process of candidates for religious life and priesthood must be acknowledged<sup>83</sup>. Many African bishops and Christian communities emphasize it. On the one hand, there is the consciousness that vocation usually grows within the context of a community, in which the candidate has had a significant experience of faith. Both the family and the parish of origin, or the parish to which he or she belongs, or other ecclesial communities, contribute to sustenance and nourishment of the vocation of the person called to the consecrated life or to the priesthood<sup>84</sup>. In fact, according to the Catholic Bishops of Rwanda, the sustainment and encouragement the families of the candidate in formation are necessary in order that the formation for the priesthood – or the Consecrated life – may yield expected results. Describing the decisive role in the priestly or religious vocation, they acknowledge that “the family is the first nursery of vocations for priests, religious and laity”<sup>85</sup>; the Tanzanian Bishops similarly describes the Christian family as “cradle of genuine vocation”<sup>86</sup>. Along this line, Pope Francis teaches that, “Family bonds are essential for reinforcing healthy self-esteem. It is

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, nn.19-32; Congregation for Clergy, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation*, Chapt.VI, pp. 54-63;

<sup>83</sup> The theme of formation in relation to the family is recognised as particularly important. “The Synod fathers repeatedly called for a thorough renewal of the Church’s pastoral practice in light of the Gospel of the Family and for replacing its current emphasis on individuals. For this reason, the synod fathers repeatedly insisted on renewal in the training of priests, deacons, catechists and other pastoral workers with a greater involvement of families.” (June 2015 *Instrumentum Laboris on the Family*, 87)

<sup>84</sup> Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n.68

<sup>85</sup> Episcopal Conference of Rwanda, “La famille et la formation au sacerdoce” (Intervention by Bishop Thadée Nsengiyumva in the name of the Episcopal Conference at the Synod of Bishops, Vatican City,1990)). In: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, p.1901.

<sup>86</sup> Episcopal Conference of Tanzania, “Celibacy and the Christian Family” (An intervention presented in the name of the Episcopal Conference “under the auspices of AMECEA” by Bishop Amedeus Msariki). In: *The African Enchiridion*, vol. III, p.1905. This intervention focuses on the situation of celibacy after priestly ordination.

important for the family to be part of the seminary process and priestly life, since they help to reaffirm these and keep them well grounded in reality"<sup>87</sup>.

At the same time, formation must elicit and nourish inner freedom, which allows proper autonomy in the exercise of apostolic mission, and a healthy distance from the expectation that the family may have, for the call of the Master requires us to "place the hand on the plough without looking back". (Lk.9:62).

So, formation houses and seminary should not only undertake an educational enterprise with the candidates in formation, but also a true engagement with their families. Candidates should know how to recognise and accept their own family situation realistically and with human and Christian maturity. They must also know how to deal with the problems that may arise and, wherever possible, how to share with the family their vocational path. The pastoral engagement with the families of the candidates ought to contribute to their own Christian development. It should also help them to accept the vocation to the Consecrated life or the priesthood of one their members as a blessing to be valued and supported all through life.

Moreover, it is to be noted that the formation for consecrated life and priestly training is specific in so far as it is distinguished from training from secular professions, even though the academic part of formation of Religious and clergy follow the pattern of any other training. According to Vattamattam, we must consider a major distinction of training religious and clergy from other professions. He argues, for example, that while training in other professions is largely focussed on information and skills needed to perform tasks external to the person, the central focus in religious training is the transformation of the subject, the whole person of the formandi. Besides, "another serious limitation of priestly and religious formation in comparison to training for secular professions is the lack of adequate and systematic pedagogical methods consistent with the objectives of formation"<sup>88</sup>. The distinct character of the formation for consecrated life also permits us to appreciate the need for an integral or holistic approach to the formation of candidates for this form of life.

### 3.2.6. **Integral Formation**

Although Consecrated life is confronted by disconcerting challenges in formation,, there are also trends that give hopes for better responses to these challenges. For instance, there is the trend of openness of secular sciences and theological disciplines for mutually enriching dialogue. The interdisciplinary approach to deal with human issues by a fruitful collaboration of psychology, theology and spirituality is particularly beneficial for integral human formation. Formation for Consecrated life and priesthood has much to gain from this rapprochement of different disciplines. Consecrated persons are dedicated and

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<sup>87</sup> *Amoris Laetitia*, n.203

<sup>88</sup> Matthew Vattamattam, *Challenges Of Formation For Priestly And Consecrated Life Today*.

committed to various areas of evangelisation. They teach, educate, train, accompany, provide care and work for social development in the name of Christ, of the Church, and for the Church. Still, as the AMECEA Bishops teach, "in our changing world Religious have to be enabled to read and respond effectively to the signs of the times, so as to be credible and authentic agents of change and promote Gospel values in today's society." Therefore, the Bishops conclude, the formation of Religious should "be integral and inculturated and formators be carefully chosen and prepared, so as to form men and women able to radiate God's love and compassion among our people".<sup>89</sup>

### 3.2.7. Formation and Culture: Towards an inculturated formation

Inculturation of Consecrated life, hence inculturation of religious formation, is no longer a "new" but a recurrent, persistent frequently asked question. There is an affinity between religious life and culture.

The concept of "culture" has many meanings.<sup>90</sup> In its general sense, the Vatican Council II's *Gaudium et Spes* describes it as "all those factors by which man refines and unfolds the manifold spiritual and physical qualities that enable him to master his condition and his destiny"<sup>91</sup>. For this reason, culture may be said to be "that by means of which the human person becomes more human," and that "it is always situated in an essential and necessary relationship with what the human person is."<sup>92</sup> However, "while the profession of the evangelical counsels involves the renunciation of goods that undoubtedly deserve to be highly valued, it does not constitute an obstacle to the true development of the human person, but by its nature is supremely beneficial to that development."<sup>93</sup> Consequently, there is an affinity between the religious life and culture.

In practical terms, this affinity calls attention to certain points. Jesus Christ and his Gospel transcend all cultures, even if they are entirely penetrated by the presence of the risen Christ and of his Spirit<sup>94</sup>. On the other hand, every culture should be evangelized, that is to say, purified and healed of the wounds of sin. At the same time the wisdom which culture contains has been surpassed, enriched, and perfected by the wisdom of the Cross<sup>95</sup>.

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<sup>89</sup> AMECEA, "The Formation of Agents of Evangelisation for the Church as a Family of God" (8/8/1999), n.12, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol. IV, p.3208

<sup>90</sup> Kroeber, A.L. and Kluckhohn, Clyde, *Culture: A Critical review of concepts and definitions* (Vintage books, New York, 1963); Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An introduction to Faith and Culture* (Paulist Press, 2003), pp. 173-176

<sup>91</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, II, Ch. II, nn. 53-62, here at n.53

<sup>92</sup> John Paul II to UNESCO, 1980, nn. 6-7. For a short anthology of meaning of "culture", see: Michael Paul Gallagher, S.J.: *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (New York: Paulist Press 1997), pp. 173-176, and for Gallagher's clear discussion on "Cultural discernment", see pp.129-144 of this same book.

<sup>93</sup> Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, n.80

<sup>94</sup> International Theological Commission, *Faith and Inculturation*, 8-22: cf. *La Civiltà Cattolica* 140.1 (1989) 159-177.

<sup>95</sup> Idem; see also John Paul II, *Christifidelis Laici*, n. 44.

It is therefore recommended that, in every region, Religious Institutes and formators should:

- be attentive to the level of general culture of the candidates, without forgetting that one's culture is not limited to the intellectual dimension of a man or woman;

- see how religious men and women succeed in inculturating their own faith within the culture of their origins and to assist them to do so. The purpose of this is not to transform a house of formation for the religious life, or a Seminary, into a kind of laboratory of inculturation. Nevertheless, those responsible for formation cannot neglect being concerned with this in their guidance of those who have been entrusted them. Since it is a question of personal education in their faith and of its taking root in the life of the whole person, they must remember that the Gospel frees the ultimate truth of the values contained in a culture, and that the culture itself expresses the Gospel in an original manner and reveals new aspects of it. Faith must become culture: "Faith that does not become culture is not wholly embraced, fully thought or faithfully lived"<sup>96</sup>

- to initiate religious who are living and working in a culture that is foreign to their own native culture into a knowledge and esteem for this culture, in keeping with the recommendations of the conciliar decree *Ad gentes* n. 18.<sup>97</sup>

### **3.2.8. Religious life and Ecclesial Movements: Avoiding confusion and divided loyalties**

In Church communion the various states of life are bound together among themselves, by being ordered one to the other. They all share in the deeply basic meaning of being the manner of living out the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love. They are different yet complementary, in the sense that each of them has a basic and unmistakable character which sets each apart, while at the same time each of them is seen in relation to the other and placed at each other's service.<sup>98</sup> In fact, religious and members of the laity have the actual experiences of sharing of work but also sometimes in prayer and at meals. As regard the relations between religious and the laity under the specific aspect of ecclesial movements, the "Directives on formation in Religious Institutes" offers helpful orientations. It recognizes that Ecclesial movements have always been manifest in the Church-Family of God, inspired by a desire to live the Gospel more intensively and to announce it to others: Some of these Ecclesial movements are closely connected with religious institutes, and share their specific spiritualities. An increasing number of new movements appeared more independent of the structures and style of the

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<sup>96</sup> *Address Of His Holiness John Paul Ii To The Plenary Assembly Of The Pontifical Council For Culture, n.1* (Consistory Hall, Friday, 18 March 1994); cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Italian National Congress of the Ecclesial Movement for Cultural Commitment*, 2 [16 Jan. 1982]).

<sup>97</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, n.91.

<sup>98</sup> *Christifidelis Laici*, n.55

religious life than in the past. Their beneficial influence on the Church is frequently recalled, provided that they observe a certain number of criteria of ecclesiality<sup>99</sup>.

In order to retain a positive relationship between these movements and religious institutes, and “all the more so because numerous religious vocations have come from these movements”, the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life established three fundamental requirements and the concrete consequences Religious men and women, namely:

a) It is necessary to be aware of and maintain the patrimony and identity of the Institute. An Institute - as intended by its founder and approved by the Church - has an internal cohesiveness which it receives from its patrimony (namely, its nature, its end, its spirit, its character, and its traditions). This whole patrimony (Cf. CIC 578) and the unity of life is a divine gift: This gift of the Spirit to the Church does not admit any interference or any admixture. Consequently, a dialogue and sharing within the Church presumes that each institute is well aware of what it is.

b). The Candidate depends solely on the legitimate Superiors and formators of his Religious Institute under which they have freely placed themselves when they entered the novitiate. “Therefore the candidates cannot simultaneously be dependent upon someone apart from the institute to which they now pertain, even though they belonged to this movement before their entrance.” “This is a matter of the unity of the religious institute and the unity of life of its novices.”

c) These exigencies remain after the religious profession, so as to avoid appearance of divided loyalties, either on the level of the personal spiritual life of the religious or on the level of their mission. The reason is that “if these requirements are not respected, the necessary communion between religious and the laity risks degenerating into confusion on the two levels mentioned above”<sup>100</sup>.

### 3.3. Evangelical Counsels

Among the essential elements Consecrated Life<sup>101</sup> the evangelical counsels -- chastity, poverty, and obedience -- appears prominently. Hence, they cannot be

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<sup>99</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifidelis Laici*, n.30

<sup>100</sup> Congregation For Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies Of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes* (1990), nn.92-93

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*; Vatican Council II, *Perfectae Caritatis*; Congregation For Religious And For Secular Institutes, *Essential Elements In The Church's Teaching On Religious Life As Applied To Institutes Dedicated To Works Of The Apostolate* (31 May, 1983) ; John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, nn.41-58. The Vatican document on “*Essential Elements*”, n.4, succinctly lists some of the essential elements of religious life in the following way (and the document subsequently confines itself to a clarification and re-statement of these essential elements):

“Religious life itself is a historical as well as a theological reality. The lived experience, today as in the past, is varied and this is important. At the same time, experience is a dimension which needs to be tested in relation to the Gospel foundation, the magisterium of the Church, and the approved constitutions of an institute. The Church regards certain elements as essential to religious life: the call of God and consecration to him through profession of the evangelical counsels by public vows; a stable form of community life; for

ignored during formation process<sup>102</sup>. John Paul II reminds that Consecrated chastity has great witness value in a world rampant with selfishness and the misuse of sex. In his address to the Religious women and men in Nigeria, he acknowledges that, for the African, “the sacrifice of fatherhood or motherhood is no small matter”<sup>103</sup>. On their part, African Catholic Bishops reiterate value of chastity. Recognising that chastity is a baptismal demand and the different faces of this virtue, Bishop Barthelemy Batantu (Diocese of Brazzaville, Congo) proposes some means of living chastity<sup>104</sup>. For Bishop Jean-Baptiste Some, the vow of “obedience, far from being an organizational and disciplinary disposition, finds in the African concept of the family a stepping-stone: indeed in the organization of its African Family, the members obey under the authority of the chief, but always in the supreme interest of the whole; this mode of obedience, which does not necessarily imply a prior consultation of the individual, does not exclude also a dialogue with the individual”<sup>105</sup>. Pope Benedict XVI’s *Africae Munus* teaches that,

“Through the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, the life of consecrated persons becomes a prophetic witness. Hence they can be examples in the area of reconciliation, justice and peace, even in circumstances marked by great tension. Community life shows us that it is possible to live as brothers and sisters, and to be united even when coming from different ethnic or racial backgrounds (cf. Ps 133:1). It can and must enable people to see and believe that today in Africa, those men and women who follow Christ Jesus find in him the secret of living happily together: mutual love and fraternal communion, strengthened daily by the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours”<sup>106</sup>.

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institutes dedicated to apostolic works, a sharing in Christ's mission by a corporate apostolate faithful to a specific founding gift and sound tradition; personal and community prayer; asceticism; public witness; a specific relation to the Church; a life-long formation; and a form of government calling for religious authority based on faith. Historical and cultural changes bring about evolution in the lived reality, but the forms and direction that the evolution takes are determined by the essential elements without which religious life loses its identity”. On its part, the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (nn.41-58) presents the “permanent values” of consecrated life under the following titles: In the image of the Trinity; Fraternal life in love; The task of authority; The role of the elderly; In the image of the apostolic community; "Sentire cum Ecclesia" (*Communion with the Church*); Fraternity in the universal Church; The consecrated life and the particular Church; Fruitful and ordered ecclesial communion; A constant dialogue animated by charity; Fraternity in a divided and unjust world; Communion among different Institutes; Coordinating bodies; Communion and cooperation with the laity; For a renewed spiritual and apostolic dynamism; Associates and lay volunteers; The dignity and role of consecrated women; New possibilities of presence and action.

<sup>102</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, nn.11-15

<sup>103</sup> John Paul II, *Address To The Religious Men And Women*, n.1.

<sup>104</sup> Barthelemy Batantu, *La Chasteté Chrétienne: exigence du Baptême*. (Lettre Pastorale, 1990).In: *The African Enchiridion*, vol. III, 1925-1926.

<sup>105</sup> Jean-Baptiste Some (Bishop of Diebouyou, Burkina Faso), “L’Obéissance et le Concept Africain de la Famille” (Intervention at the Synod of Bishops on Consecrated Life 1994), in Oseni Ogunu, *The African Enchiridion*, vol. IV, pp.2747-2748

<sup>106</sup> Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, n.117; Cf. 7. *Message to the People Of God of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops*, n.21

### 3.4. Apostolate

The mission of the Church is to evangelize, following the mandate and example of Jesus. Religious men and women are consecrated for mission at the service of God and humanity. The evangelizing mission of Church-as-Family is a co-responsibility that is at the heart of Consecrated life. Apostolate is an essential, non-negotiable element of Consecrated life. In many and diverse ways Consecrated Persons are called to exercise apostolate, that is, to collaborate in the cause of evangelization. Through a whole network of ecclesial initiatives Consecrated persons “pursue the definitive aim of catechesis (...)”<sup>107</sup>; they serve in the fields of education, health care and medicine, care of orphans and elders, immigrants and migrants, Social communication, promotion of family and life, social justice and human rights advocacy, science and technology, the world of arts and culture, etc. But whatsoever the form of apostolate, John Paul II adds, “prayer and union with God always remain the soul of your apostolate”<sup>108</sup>.

In sum, it is appropriate to here recall the resolutions of the AMECEA Bishops on Formation of Religious which are still valuable and relevant today. They confirm some of the concerns and needs discussed in the preceding sections:

“For members of consecrated life to play their prophetic and evangelizing role, we resolve that:

1. There shall be proper screening of candidates for consecrated Life, involving the parishes, schools and local Christian communities with a view of discerning their true motivations and their suitability.
2. Formation shall be integral taking into consideration the human, spiritual, cultural, intellectual, pastoral and social dimensions.
3. There shall be a personalised and inculturated approach to formation to form mature, committed and responsible religious who are capable of coping with the realities of today’s life.
4. Mature and suitable religious shall be identified, trained and appointed for houses of formation”<sup>109</sup>.

The concern of the Church for the Formation in Institutes of Consecrated life was expressed at recent Synod of Bishops on young people (2018). What did this Synod of Bishops say the formation of consecrated persons?.

## 4. THE SYNOD ON YOUNG PEOPLE (2018): INSIGHT AND CONTRIBUTION TO FORMATION IN CONSECRATED LIFE

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<sup>107</sup> *Address Of John Paul II To The Religious Men And Women*, n.2

<sup>108</sup> *Address Of John Paul II To The Religious Men And Women*, n.2. Also, cf. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, nn.38-39

<sup>109</sup> AMECEA, “The Formation of Agents of Evangelisation for the Church as a Family of God. Resolutions”, n.9, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.IV, p.3206

The Final document of the Synod of Bishops on “Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment”, frequently refers to consecrated life and consecrated persons, mostly in relation to formation/education and mission. The Synod Fathers expressed their gratitude to consecrated persons and all the clergy and laity, and offer some reflections and propositions concerning formation, accompaniment, and the value and prophetic mission of Consecrated life, keeping in mind the situation and contexts of young people and the challenges of youth apostolate in the world and in the church today<sup>110</sup>.

#### *4.1. Gratitude and Encouragement*

The Synod Fathers thank and encourage Consecrated women and men, along with lay men and women and the bishops. Gratitude, because, in general, they “with honesty and dedication commit themselves to the service of young people. The Synod expressed its gratitude, in particular, to those who have courageously denounced evil immediately<sup>111</sup>. They are, in this way, encouraged to persevere in their honesty and dedication to service and in the courageous denunciation of evil.

#### *4.2. Value of the gift of Consecrated Life and its prophetic mission*

The Synod Fathers reiterate the prophetic value of Consecrated Life as a joyous witness of the gratuity of love. When the religious communities and new foundations authentically live fraternity they become school of communion, centres of prayer and contemplation, a place of witness of intergenerational and intercultural dialogue and a place of evangelization and charity. “The Church and the world cannot do without this vocational gift, which constitute a great resource for our time”<sup>112</sup>

#### *4.3. Formation*

Listening is a key moment in the ministry of pastors and evangelizers, who must also teach. The Synod speaks of the “necessity” of the preparation of consecrated persons and lay people, men and women, who are competent to accompany young people. The accompaniment of young people involves “listening”, a form of ecclesial service which the Synod describes as “charism” that the Holy Spirit offers to some members of the community<sup>113</sup>.

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<sup>110</sup> Cf. “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), nn.5-20, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018); Cf. Final Document from the Pre-Synodal Meeting (Rome, 19-24 March 2018), Part 1, nn.1-5.

<sup>111</sup> “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n.31 in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

<sup>112</sup> “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n. 88, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

<sup>113</sup> “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n.9 in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

The Synod highlights especially personal Spiritual accompaniment, in which one recognises, interprets and chooses in the prospective of faith, listening to what the Spirit suggests within everyday life<sup>114</sup>. The Synod Fathers, therefore, suggest and desire that there should be a “rediscovery”, in the sphere of personal spiritual accompaniment, of great regenerative resource of the consecrated life (particularly female) as well as of lay people –adult and young – that are well formed<sup>115</sup>.

#### 4.4. Formation House and Seminary

The Synod Fathers describe the Formation House and Seminary as places of “great importance” for the deepening of vocational choice and maturation of the following of Christ. At the same time, contrary to certain past experiences, these environments of formation should adequately take into account the past experiences of the candidate, rather than undermining their importance. These must not exclude their family experiences<sup>116</sup>. Not taking them into consideration “blocks the growth of the candidates and risks leading to the assumption of formal attitudes instead of the development of the gifts of God and the profound conversion of the heart”<sup>117</sup>.

#### 4.5. Accompaniment in the formation to the Ordained Ministry and Consecrated Life

As regard the welcoming of young people into the Seminary and formation houses, the Synod proposes we keep in mind certain criteria. Among these, it urges institutes to verify a sufficient rootedness of the aspirant:

- 1) in a community
- 2) in stable relationship in the friendship with his/her peers
- 3) in commitment to study or work
- 4) in contact with the poor and suffering.

In spiritual accompaniment, the Synod recommends that those responsible for formation should initiate the young man or woman into prayer and into the work of interior life, learning discernment first of all in his/her own life, even through renunciation and ascetics. According to the Synod Fathers, we should better understand:

- celibacy as a gift to be recognized and verified in freedom, joy,

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<sup>114</sup> Cfr. Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium*, nn.169-173

<sup>115</sup> “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n.97 in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

<sup>116</sup> Cf. “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n.87, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018): Concerning the roles, experiences, environment, situations, problems and possible contributions of the family, see nn. 10,19, 25, 27, 32,34, 38,42, 43, 72,87, 120, 128, 132, 138, 143, 162, 164.

<sup>117</sup> “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n.20, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

gratuity and humility before admission to Holy Orders or to first religious profession;

- the contribution of psychology as a help towards affective maturation and integration of personality to be inserted into the itinerary of formation;
- the figure of the rector or the person responsible for formation as important for the unification of the formative journey in order to arrive at a realistic discernment, consulting all those involved in the formation process and to make decision concern eventual interruption of the formative journey of the candidate.

The Synod Fathers goes on to draw attention to the need for permanent formation and for the accompaniment of priests and consecrated men and women, especially the younger ones<sup>118</sup>.

Finally, the Synod emphasizes the importance of what it calls the “Synodal form” of the Church. The Synodal form is important, it says, for the proclamation and transmission of the faith. One of the characteristic trait of this Synodal way of being a Church-Family of God is the valorisation of the charisms the Holy Spirit gives according to the vocation and role of every one of her members, through a dynamism of co-responsibility. In this sense, the Synod Fathers speak of a participative and co-responsible Church. In this context, therefore, the Synod recognises and welcomes the rich contribution that female and male Institutes of consecrated life and the lay faithful bring into the Church, a family of God, and into the world<sup>119</sup>.

#### *4.6. Formation of seminarians and of consecrated men and women*

Concerning the integral formation of candidates for the priesthood and consecrated life, the Synod Fathers highlight some of the points emphasized during the Synodal Assembly, namely:

a) The choice of formators: “It is not enough that they be culturally prepared; it is necessary that they be capable of fraternal relations, empathetic listening and seeing, and of profound interior freedom”;

b) Accompaniment: For an adequate accompaniment of the aspirants and candidates, it is necessary to have a serious and competent differentiated educative team-work, which must include female figures.

c) Purpose of formation: Formation must aim at developing in future pastors and consecrated persons the capacity of exercising their role of guide in a way that is authoritative but not authoritarian, educating the young candidates to give themselves in the community. In this regard, particular attention is to be paid to some formative criteria, namely: overcoming the tendency to clericalism; capacity to work in team; sensibility toward the poor; transparency of life; and the availability of letting oneself to be accompanied.

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<sup>118</sup> “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n. 100, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018).

<sup>119</sup> “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n. 123, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

d) Initial discernment: The seriousness of initial discernment is decisive. Before welcoming the aspirants it is necessary to sufficiently know them and undertake a rereading of their story;

e) Numerical consistency of the formation house: this should neither be too large (so as to avoid the risk of depersonalization of the formation journey and of inadequate knowledge of the young persons in the journey) nor too small (so as to avoid the risk of being suffocated and subjected to the logics of dependency). In these cases, the Synod proposes the establishment of interdiocesan seminaries or houses of formation shared by two or more religious provinces, with clear formative projects and well-defined responsibilities<sup>120</sup>.

Finally, the Synod made three proposals in favour of the renewal of formation of young people, particularly in formation houses and seminaries: at least two of these proposals explicitly involve Institutes of consecrated life. The first proposal calls for a “joint formation of lay people, consecrated persons and priests”. Young people and young candidates in formation should be permanently kept in contact with the daily life of families and of community in such a way that the formation will be rooted in concreteness of life and characterised by a relational trait capable of interacting with the social and cultural context. Secondly, the synod proposes the insertion of a specific preparation for the pastoral care of young people into the curriculum of preparation for the priesthood and consecrated life. The third proposal calls for an evaluation of the possibility of verifying the formative journey of candidates in the experiential and communitarian perspective within the context of an authentic discernment of persons and situations according to the vision and spirit of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*<sup>121</sup>. As to this last proposal, it is up to the Conferences of Bishops to establish the formula and modality of such verification, according to their national *Ratio*.

We have looked at some of the concerns and orientations on the formation of candidates for consecrated life. Every religious institute strives to form its members on matters of the apostolate or ecclesial mission and on other dimensions of its spirit and charism in the Church and in the world. Members of the Institute will endeavour, it is hoped, to carry out their mission with a new ardour, new methods and new expression. Much fruit is born from the evangelizing efforts. At the same time, we cannot ignore the other face of the reality that confronts consecrated life, especially the formation process it involves, namely, the challenges or difficulties that are dangers and threats. What are the main challenges of formation in Religious life today in Africa, particularly in Nigeria? In other words, what are the points that threaten the formation process and ultimately, vocation and mission of consecrated life? What

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<sup>120</sup> “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n. 163, in: *Bollettino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

<sup>121</sup> “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n. 164, in: *Bollettino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

opportunities do the challenges offer? In the following section, let us turn attention to some of the main challenges of formation that many religious institutes are confronted with, albeit in differing ways and degrees.

## **5. THE CHALLENGES OF FORMATION IN CONSECRATED LIFE**

In Consecrated Life, as in other professions, there are temptations and obstacles. However, even amidst the obstacles and difficulties in witnessing and mission, consecrated persons are called to be a leaven, a light of the world and salt of the earth. As a people of resurrection and hope, as a community or individually, consecrated persons try to identify, acknowledge and confront the challenges that emerge, seeking solutions to overcome or at least reduce them or, better still, to prevent them, where and when possible. Such efforts ought to begin early, at the period of initial formation, though it, obviously, continues to after profession. The following section outlines some of the challenges of consecrated life, particularly religious formation, drawing from experiences, researches and testimony of religious formators.

### **5.2. The challenge of Vocation and Formation**

The question of formation and vocation presents particular challenges and testing situations. The formation of young people and, above of all, of Consecrated persons raises many questions. In this dynamic world of changing ideas and behaviour, what kind of formation should be offered to consecrated people so that they do not lose their identity? Prof. Jacques Simporé, a Camillian priest and scientist from Burkina Faso, rightly calls attention to some of the key, if not recurrent, questions:

“How can they receive formation that directs them towards witness to Christ in a world that is no longer Christian? What civic, philosophical, theological and spiritual formation can be offered to them? How can ongoing courses of formation and updating be organised for religious who have been active for a long time in the field of ministry? There is a need for criteria for an authentic choice at the level of formation. Our world also needs consecrated people who are specialised in some fields of the religious and ‘profane’- secular sciences: in both these fields our institutes need providers of formation for the men and women who are receiving formation, for teachers of the postulancy, of the novitiate, and of initial and ongoing formation. But we have to pose some questions to ourselves. Do these men and women providers of formation love and cultivate a sense of belonging to their institutes? Do they really know the charism and the spirituality of their Congregations so as to be able to transmit it and provide formation to young people in the spirit of their founders? Did they live – at least for two or three years – experiences of ministry and apostolate that are specific to their institute before entering the field of formation? Do we really need a piece of paper to provide this service? At times, a young religious, after his studies, slams the

door and goes elsewhere: who is to blame for this? Discernment is not always easy and can be a source of conflict within institutes. There are so many questions, so many difficulties and so many challenges: what should be done? Those who do not risk, obtain nothing. Today we have specialisations within specialisations. Should we keep up with the world, applying to ourselves the same rhythm of the world, or do we prefer, with a false modesty, to give up?"<sup>122</sup>

A consecrated person who is dead to the world, when he or she obtains a specialisation, does not enter a competition for diplomas: for a consecrated person, specialisation should be a work necessity, a question of greater efficiency and competence in his or her ministry. Hence, in "individual institutes the formation of all the members is to be continued after first profession so that they lead the proper life of the institute more fully and carry out its mission more suitably"<sup>123</sup>. The required *Ratio* (plan of studies) "is to be systematic, adapted to the capacity of the members, spiritual and apostolic, doctrinal and at the same time practical. Suitable degrees, both ecclesiastical and civil, are also to be obtained when appropriate"<sup>124</sup>. Consequently, we must invest young forces in formation, for today's sacrifice is the wealth of the future<sup>125</sup>.

The challenge of vocation involves a consideration of some important matters arising:

(a) *Sustenance of the formation Community and the openness to other peoples*

The Religious Institutes, including those of new foundation or of recent presence in the country, need to renew, intensify and proactively increase its initiatives to seek and explore more effective, productive and enduring ways of economically providing for and sustaining its Formation House and its personnel as well as the sustenance of its apostolic mission. In the Formation Houses, in fact, lies to a large extent the hope of continuity of the Institute and its apostolic mission themselves.

For some institutes there is temptation of closing themselves in that one nation even after many decades of pastoral presence and formation of candidates. The "closure" expressed either in an indeterminate postponement, if not refusal, to admit candidates from other African countries; or in form an "allergy" and sustained, even if passive, resistance to open a community in other African countries. Reasons can always be readily adduced, whether real or concocted.

It is necessary also avoid the danger of intentionally, surreptitiously or inadvertently creating, for lack of better word, a total predominance and hegemony of solely one national, say Nigerians, Kenyans, Congolese, who happened to be perhaps the sole or almost 100% majority members of the institute

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<sup>122</sup> Prof. Fr. Jacques SIMPORE, *Consecrated Life In Africa.: The Challenges of The Third Millennium*. In: <http://www.camilliani.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/simopre-inglese.pdf> (accessed 12/10/2018)

<sup>123</sup> *Code of Canon Law* (henceforth abbreviated: *CCL*), 659 §1.

<sup>124</sup> *CCL*, 660 §1.

<sup>125</sup> Prof. Fr. Jacques SIMPORE, *Consecrated Life In Africa*, §3.1

in that nation at this time. At first, such predominance may appear psychologically *albeit* momentarily satisfying, comforting and arousing pride, somehow massaging our collective ego as it were. However, it may reveal itself short-sighted, ultimately self-destructive in so far as it may boomerang, like time-tomb, on the relations between, say, the Nigerians and the other Africans to be, someday, eventually admitted perhaps decades later; by this is meant that, it may become a source of prolong and persistent tensions and conflicts between the numerically dominating members and new members arriving from other African countries. Certainly, I don't want to sound alarmist. Such conflicts or crisis need not *necessarily* happen. In fact, there could be other mitigating factors or mediations – be these religious, social cultural or others - in the course of time, known only to the Lord of life and history, which might be favourable and prevent such avoidable conflicts. However, some institutes have suffered consequences of the tendency to closing in on oneself, not outgoing, but were decades later forced by circumstances beyond their control to admit candidates from, or to open a community, in other African countries. Thus, I wanted here to simply draw attention to the need for openness, to foresee the risks of undue or unnecessary delays in admission of other Africans candidates. An analogous case could be made within one country about overpopulating the Formation house and the Institute with persons almost entirely from one ethnic group, result of tribalism or a distorted notion of the worth and appraisal of one's own ethnic group. A balanced sensibility and critical approach involves the disposition and readiness to admit applicants from other ethnic groups, if they qualify or meet the established requirements. It is sometimes in feared that too many people from the same ethnic group, could create a big problem for the Institute in the country, as had already been experienced in some religious congregations in Nigeria. The formation team should not only be of different ethnic groups (where possible), but also be open and disposed to welcome into the formation house qualified candidates from diverse tribes, giving the equal opportunity during the screening, selection and admission processes. Formation houses of Religious institute in Africa can in practice contribute, in their own milieu, to advance unity, peace and progress among peoples in Africa. For example, the Vocations Director(s) and other persons responsible for the process of admission of aspirants need be detribalized persons. Admission would not be based on tribal sentiments.

*b) Need for a clear process of screening, selection and admission processes*

The formation house must have a clear and specific process (or modality of procedure) approved by the Superiors for the screening, selection and admission of new aspirants into the Postulancy and Seminary and into subsequent main stages of initial formation<sup>126</sup>. The corresponding functions of the main players involved in these phases is a particularly important and delicate matter in

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<sup>126</sup> Cf. Jorge Carlos Patron Wong, Candidates for the Priesthood and Religious Life. Selection, Screening and Formation, in: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/resources/upload/PatronWong-Selection-Screening-Formation.pdf>

the context of places where individual's bond to his/her place of origin (ethnic group or tribe, diocese of origin) tend to be deeply felt, though this in and of itself is certainly not bad thing. There is, however, the temptation of abuse, of being too personally or "dangerously" attached or involved, or to have a too personal interest or "agenda" in the admission of this rather than the other particular aspirant. It becomes important, therefore, to avoid eventual conflict of interest, and to have in this process a few teams for the decision-making in each of the main phases of the screening, selection and admission process. The members and the role or function of each of these phases will need to be clearly defined from the outset, taking into account the current directives of the Church, the orientations of the Constitutions and Norms and the *Ratio* of the Institute concerned.

The procedures regarding the processes of screening, selection admission should:

(1) Allow greater objectivity and effective participation of all the persons within the Institute directly responsible for formation, that is, the persons responsible at different levels of initial formation in the entire process of discernment and evaluation that leads to and includes the admission or acceptance of aspirants;

(2) Help to radically avoid or mitigate the risk of possible favouritism or "conflicts of interest" (or, perhaps, "conflicts of loyalty") by the Director of Postulancy or by the Vocations Director or by Superiors (of the Community of the Formation House, Delegation or Region or Province) in the event that it was up to solely him/her to decide which applicant to admit or not admit;

(3) Ensure a significant sharing and lightening of the weight and burden of responsibility for decision placed on one person's shoulder, concerning decisions about the admission of new applicants who aspire to enter the Congregation. The procedure ought to ease and balance the pressure and the stress often placed on the Vocations Director, or the Director of Postulants, the Superior, or any single individual that admits who, therefore, will be perceived as the "right" person, the "who is who", the "kingmaker", or key persons to lobby;

(4) Clarify and define better the roles and functions of the various persons and their respective teams who are responsible for the various main offices involved in the formation process, namely: the Vocations Director, Directors of Postulancy, of Novices, of Temporary Professed and other Formators and the Local Rectors in the formation house, and Major Superior and his/her Delegate;

(5) encourage justice and fairness, and favours a more collegial approach, and forestalls - or at least radically attenuates - the danger of an authoritarian approach in the admission or acceptance of aspirant into the Institute. It thus helps to avoid or reduce unnecessary disputes and tensions, rivalries, suspicions and gossips, envies, the quest for power and dominion or control attitudes, all because of the desire to see "my boy"/"my girl", or more of "my people" enter into the Institute.

The admission itself effectively ought take place *after* an initial contacts and accompaniment of the aspirant, the examination of written requests for

admission, the interviews, the common vocational discernment, and the initial selection of the aspirants made jointly by members of the Vocation Team.

In sum, the above suggestion emphasizes: decisions not based on tribalism and favouritism; the need for justice or fairness in the process; giving equal opportunities to all applicants and aspirants; and favouring quality, rather than quantity, in the selection of aspirants. All things be equal – in terms of the aspirants' quality and meeting the requirements – an Institute can admit the number of candidates it can financially afford to accept, accommodate, train and sustain.

To give equal opportunity to all applicants in each of the phases of the process implies that, among other things, all aspirants who apply are subject to and examined with the same criteria, requirements, and given equal opportunities during the entire process, without discrimination and bias or favouritism. An applicant, consequently, may not be admitted nor denied acceptance into the Formation House or Seminary simply on the basis of stifling, ambiguous and discouraging blockages, dangerous pre-requisites, which in some cases attend to be ideological and ill-advised interests, even when bogus claims are presented under any guise or camouflage with religious or spiritual tones. Such biases, often undeclared, include the desire and temptation to admit aspirant to a formation house or a seminary on basis of, for example: ethnic or tribal considerations; his diocese or state of origin; whether the young man had attended a Minor Seminary, a Catholic school, or another kind of secondary school – be this government or private/mission owned (as if the young aspirant has fault in being born or raised up in that place or choosing that school); financial condition or contribution of the aspirant; aesthetic appearance (handsomeness or beauty) of the applicant. If Christian vocation to Religious Life and Catholic Priesthood is a call by the Holy Spirit to freely respond and follow Christ, which it is, then we cannot afford to impose these kind of provisos, additional burden or preconditions, that tend to direct, indeed dictate *where or what* the Spirit must focus on and call a person from. Such bias attitudes or practice appear frequently arbitrary, arrogant, unreasonable and, for the applicant, humiliating or/and unjust. Sometimes with the good intention, say the desire to reduce the number of candidate admitted after a honest assessment of the situation and considering an objective and serious persisting problems ( e.g. scarcity of funds, or lack of sufficient formation personnel).

The onus is on the initial Formation team and the Superiors to discern, verify and accompany in truth and justice whether the voice of God was actually heard by the aspirant or candidate who knocks at the door of the Congregation (through its Formation House), and claims to be called to the service of God and Humanity by entering a Consecrated life. In case where necessary, the Superiors and the formation team may need to discern and determine whether their own Institute is the place for this particular aspirant and is able to accept this applicant and help him/her to nourish and fulfil his/her vocation. This discernment process demands a lot of labour, energy, time and, not infrequently, financial expenses. Unfortunately, there are the favouritism, and sometimes the lack of courage to

decide and directly and honestly inform aspirants that they cannot be admitted. And so, the temptation is to resort, in practice, to unhelpful short-cuts, illusory personal agendas, subterfuges or arbitrary criteria, all just in order to, as they say, “weed-out” the “unwanted” applicants. Those responsible for admission must find ways to honestly and discreetly inform applicants they are not admitted, even if it were simply to cut down the number of affordable intakes at all cost. We must be careful not to present vocation discernment and formation simply as a ‘weeding out’ period. Vocation discernment requires an openness and attention to the candidate’s interior movements and his motivations. The initial verifications of the objective requirements and the dispositions required, and the guidelines offered for screening, selection and admission, the criteria for discernment and the requirements are usually indicated in the Constitutions/Norms and the *Ratio* of Institutes. In general, it should suffice to follow not only by the Universal Church but also those established by the Constitutions/Norms and the *Ratio* and/or approved by the appropriate authorities of each Province or Delegation of the Religious institute.

The persons involved in the screening, selection and admission processes, therefore, must be willing and ready to take the pains, spend energy and time to thoroughly undertake the discernment in the various phases of the formation process. This helps, also, to overcome the temptation to seek and clutch on facile, momentary, ultimately deceptive assurance in the admission of an aspirant. The work of the Formation team is to responsibly and humbly co-operate with Holy Spirit, not replace Him or play God, in the carrying out of the process of admission, for the good of the Church and the Congregation and for the greater glory of God.

Any admission process is not invulnerable. Mistakes can and may sometimes happen: “Errors in discerning vocations are not rare, and in all too many cases psychological defects, sometimes of a pathological kind, reveal themselves only after ordination to the priesthood. Detecting defects earlier would help avoid many tragic experiences”<sup>127</sup>. However, such errors will probably be involuntary<sup>128</sup>. So, it is important to encourage and strengthen the trust placed on the members of the team of Vocation ministry, the formation team, and the admission team; however, these should not see themselves nor be treated as being above fraternal corrections and the policies of the Institute.

### 5.3. The Challenge of the Evangelical Counsels

The evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience present a distinct set of challenges. They impel the Church-Family, and consecrated

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<sup>127</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines For The Use Of Psychology In The Admission And Formation Of Candidates For The Priesthood* (29/06/2008), n.4, citing Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy* (11 April 1974), n. 38.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Oseni Ogunu, “Growing in the Spirit of and Charism of the Congregation: The Oblate Contributions, Challenges, Lessons and Prospect in Nigeria”, in: *Lanterianum* Dec.2017, pp.149—161

persons in particular, to clarify and testify to the profound anthropological significance of the counsels. They are the same challenges as ever, posed in new and diverse ways, and perhaps more radically, by contemporary society and cultures, at least more forcefully in some regions of the world. The decision to follow the evangelical counsels do not involve an impoverishment of truly human values: it leads instead to their transformation. The evangelical counsels should not be considered as a denial of the values inherent in sexuality, in the legitimate desire to possess material goods or to make decisions for one. Insofar as these inclinations are based on nature, they are good in themselves. However, human beings, since they are weakened by original sin, run the risk of acting on them in a way which transgresses the moral norms. The profession of chastity, poverty and obedience is a warning not to underestimate the wound of original sin; while affirming the value of created goods, it also relativizes them by pointing to God as the absolute good. In this way, while those who follow the evangelical counsels seek holiness for themselves, they propose a sort of spiritual "therapy" for humanity, because they reject the idolatry of anything created and in a certain way they make visible the living God. "The consecrated life, especially in difficult times, is a blessing for human life and for the life of the Church."<sup>129</sup>

However, questions are asked, albeit in different social and cultural contexts and with varying intensity, about the possibility and opportunity of reviewing the vows of the consecrated persons. How should the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience be understood and lived in a world that is increasingly secularised and disconnected? In what way should inculturation of the vows of poverty and obedience be practice?<sup>130</sup>.

### 5.3.1. *The Challenge of Consecrated Chastity*

One major challenge in this sphere is that of a hedonistic culture. This separates sexuality from all objective moral norms, often treating it as a mere diversion and a consumer good, and justifying a kind of idolatry of the sexual instinct. The results are evident: transgressions of every kind, with resulting psychic and moral suffering on the part of individuals and families. The consecrated life respond to this challenge through, above all, the joyful living of chastity, understood as a witness to the power of God's love shown in the weakness of human condition. The consecrated person attests that in Christ it is possible and liberating to love God with all one's heart, putting him above every other love. This testimony is necessary today because many people do not believe in, and there is little understanding of the meaning of celibacy in the world, including in "an Africa thirsting for fertility"<sup>131</sup>, though in itself this thirst is not totally exclusive to Black

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<sup>129</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n.87

<sup>130</sup> William Reiser, S.J., "Should We Reformulate the Religious Vows?", in: William Reiser, SJ, *Getting to Know the God We Believe in Some Lessons from Religious Life*. (Chapter 13), 2016; Also in: *Review of Religious Life*" 54, 4 (July-August 1995); Vincente Carlos Kiaziku, *Consecrated Life in Bantu Africa*. Paulines Editions (2007), Chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>131</sup> Matumgulu Marcel, *Les consacrés de l'an 2000*, as cited in: Prof. Fr. Jacques SIMPORE, *Consecrated Life In Africa. The Challenges Of The Third Millennium*, §3.2.1

African societies<sup>132</sup>. People do not always understand the vow of chastity, at least as it is presented to them. To some extent, this is also true of celibacy and its Christian motivation, which, according to Michael Coleman, “is simply not understood and misinterpreted by our society. The whole idea is often foreign to African culture and is seen as an encouragement for psychologically immature and fringe people to apply for seminary training”<sup>133</sup>. In addition, the shallow and at times irresponsible behaviour of some consecrated people suggests that religious play at being hypocrites. We must recognise this challenge. In a word, this testimony is more necessary than ever today because it is so little understood by our world. On the other hand, even when there is clear conceptual understanding of what is the Church’s official doctrine and theology on the “vow of chastity” for Consecrated Life (at least in the Latin Rite Church), there are pondered claims and reiterated appeals that there are more than one ways of understanding and expressing the evangelical counsels, vow of chastity included, which in Africa today largely still need to be inculturated in Consecrated Life<sup>134</sup>.

The testimony of chastity is offered to everyone – young people, engaged couples, husbands and wives and Christian families – in order to show that the power of God's love can accomplish great things precisely within the context of human love. Finally, it is a witness which also meets a growing need for interior honesty in human relationships. The consecrated life must present to today's world examples of chastity lived by men and women who show balance, self-mastery, an enterprising spirit, and psychological and affective maturity. Thanks to this, human love has as a stable point of reference the pure love that Consecrated persons draw from the Trinitarian love revealed to us in Christ. Consecrated persons are, thus, capable of a radical and universal love; this love gives them the strength for the self-mastery and discipline so as not to fall under the domination of the senses and instincts. Consecrated chastity in this way “appears as a joyful and liberating experience.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> It has been noticed, for example, in China Cf. P. Hugh O'Donnell C.M, “Inculturating the Vincentian Charism: Vows and Virtues in the Congregation of the Mission”, in *Vicentiana*, Volume 40, Number 4 Vol. 40, No. 4-5 Article 8.

<sup>133</sup> Michael Gower Coleman (Bishop of Port Elizabeth, South Africa), “The formation of Seminarians in the Context of the Local Culture” (Intervention during the Synod of Bishops, Rome, 1 October 1990). In: Oseni Ogunu (Ed.), *The African Enchiridion*, Vol.III, p.1990. Coleman’s intervention proposes the “Africanisation of Christianity in the specific sphere of seminary formation, including the area of celibacy. In his view, “It is essential, in our situation especially that student formation be far more contextualised and redesigned to integrate with the indigenous culture”; haven giving some examples -- relating to the power of oral tradition with a history of deference for the spoken word, celibacy, and the basis of moral behaviour of candidates in formation –, Coleman concludes: “The great challenge facing the Church is how to shed the image of being a borrowed reality which has barely begun to reflect the riches and value of African creativity. In terms of the impetus given by Vatican II we aim at the Africanisation of Christianity.”

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Aylward Shorter, *Celibacy and African Culture*, Paulines Edition-Africa, (1998); Aylward Shorter, *Religious Poverty in Africa*. Paulines Publications-Africa (1999); Joan F. Burke, *These Catholic Sisters are all Mamas!: Towards the Inculturation of Sisterhood in Africa, an Ethnographic Study*. Leiden – Boston Kohl – Brill: 2001; Bénézet BUJO, *Religious Life: A Sign of Contradiction*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications-Africa. (2017)

<sup>135</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n.88

5.3.2. *The Challenge of Poverty*

There is the challenge of a materialism which craves possessions. It is unmindful of the needs and sufferings of the poor and weak; it has no concern for the balance of natural resources. As a response, the consecrated persons accept the profession of evangelical poverty. With a gratuitous, free and detached heart, a consecrated person offers his/her own hands that are engaged in life; this wants to signify that the poverty that she/he has embraced is not the life of a lazy person, a life of leisure. Rather, it is a life of work for ourselves but above all else for other people, for the needy and the poor.

Poverty in itself is an evil, it is a lack because it makes human person less a human. He is deformed. Poverty and riches are principal enemy of man in his search for God. But evangelical poverty "is a value in itself, since it recalls the first of the Beatitudes in the imitation of the poor Christ."<sup>136</sup> Evangelical poverty means to attest that God is the true wealth of the human heart. Consequently, evangelical poverty challenges the idolatry of money. The call of evangelical poverty is felt also among people who are aware of the scarcity of the planet's resources and who invoke respect for and the conservation of creation -- whether by reducing consumption, by living a more simple lifestyle and by placing a necessary brake on their own desires.<sup>137</sup> Consecrated persons therefore are called to bear an evangelical witness to self-denial and restraint, in a form of fraternal life inspired by principles of simplicity and hospitality. Following the footsteps of Jesus, evangelical poverty in fact leads to humility, to simplicity, appreciating small things, directing them and aiming them at the apostolate. This witness must be accompanied by a preferential love for the poor and will be shown especially by sharing the conditions of life of the most neglected.

Evangelical poverty can be lived in different ways and is often expressed in an active involvement in the promotion of solidarity and charity. For example, Consecrated persons devote themselves to education, training and professional formation, preparing young people and the elderly people to become builders of their own future. Consecrated persons dedicate themselves in the service of the poor, marginalized, and the migrants and refugees; they work to train future educators and leaders of society. They fight to overcome hunger and its causes; they inspire the activities of voluntary associations and humanitarian organizations; and they work with public and private bodies to promote a fair distribution of international aid. In these various and complementary ways, the consecrated life shares in the radical poverty of the Lord Jesus, and fulfils its specific role in the mystery of his Incarnation and Death<sup>138</sup>. Therefore, "nations truly owe a great deal to these enterprising agents of charity, whose tireless generosity has contributed and continues to contribute greatly to making the world more human"<sup>139</sup>.

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<sup>136</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 90

<sup>137</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n. 90

<sup>138</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n.90

<sup>139</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n.89

However, challenges confront the vow of poverty in various regions of the world. In African context, in those environments where most people are poor, it is asked: how can Consecrated person understand the concept and practice of the “vow of poverty”? Prof. Simpoire, highlights some of the issues involved:

“Which goods can or should young candidates forgo before their religious profession? What is the meaning of the concept ‘forgoing-abandoning’? Could religious life not appear to some a form of promotion, given what is abandoned by religious vows compared to what will be obtained thereafter? Other practical questions are posed in various institutes: should religious who are on holiday have money in their pockets? How much money should they have? What form of transport should they use to move about? Does the institute have the duty to build a house for the family of a religious? What are the dynamics of the African family? The danger for religious is having to live in their communities as places to ‘plunder’ for themselves, with the pretext of helping their families in an African sense. And yet we do not become religious in order to bring with us our families. It is certainly the case that a religious cannot ignore his family but the help that is given must be offered, in agreement with his Superiors, in a spirit of humility, of simplicity and of poverty. When a community is erected in deep Burkina Faso, whatever is decided, a solid house of cement is built, there are forms of transport, and the standard of living of the religious will always be greater than the people who live in the same village. How can one speak about a vow of poverty, of voluntary forgoing, if these consecrated people already see themselves at the highest level of the common life of the people! This is the challenge. Can one speak about the same form of poverty in Paris, in London, in India and in Peru as in Ouagadougou?”<sup>140</sup>

As *Vita Consecrata* itself recognizes, there are many communities which live and work among the poor and the marginalized; they embrace their conditions of life and share in their sufferings, problems and perils<sup>141</sup>.

At the level of poverty one of the great challenges today is the financial self-reliance or self-sustenance, that is to say, the economic autonomy of religious institutes in Africa. Western Europe has made great sacrifices to support us. But now, with the problems of Eastern Europe, and the dwindling population and/or decrease involvement of the faithful in Church’s sacramental life, together with the growing secularisation it is suffering, the difficulties are many in number. “It

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<sup>140</sup> Prof. Fr. Jacques SIMPOIRE, *Consecrated Life In Africa. The Challenges Of The Third Millennium*, §3.2.2

<sup>141</sup> *Vita Consecrata* 90

is therefore urgent that the particular Churches in Africa have the objective of providing for their own needs as soon as possible, thereby assuring their self-sufficiency”<sup>142</sup>. This has direct economic and financial implications for the training and sustenance of candidates in formation houses and other formation and pastoral projects. Generally, “in Nigeria, as elsewhere, a formation house depends for its sustenance almost entirely on the financial support from the authorities of the religious Institute and the contributions from benefactors and donors”<sup>143</sup>. Religious women and men in Africa must not expect manna to fall from on high. Rather, they should learn to become increasingly responsible, creative and committed, taking necessary initiative. Were this not to happen, this dependency syndrome would create the temptation to live almost permanently above what they can afford and thus not to favour the management of the communities themselves. But how should the religious Institute behave? Each institute needs to find its own strategies to maintain a balance without compromising its charism and its religious identity. This is difficult because it requires discretion, though it is the path to follow towards shared and balanced solutions. It requires a certain clarity (about each institute’s vision and mission), boldness and foresightedness and addressing issues. A sharing of ideas and practical experiences in the sphere of poverty may be mutually helpful. In any case:

We should fundamentally redefine the way of living poverty today in the Church and in the Church in Africa, taking into account the relationship of the consecrated person with his family, his culture and the relationship of every consecrated person with his milieu of apostolate. With regard to the relationship with the family two pitfalls are particularly to be avoided: the grip of the family on the life of the consecrated person and the radical break with his family. To meet the challenge of poverty, we must resort to the Gospel; Religious men and women, the diocesan priests and lay people must come together and commit themselves to the struggle of the poor for life. For this, it is necessary: to deepen the sense of welcome by the constitution of communities that are more welcoming; to develop a sense of solidarity and sharing in the African context; to promote actions in favour of the poor in order to help them to free themselves from their misery. These efforts involve frank and lasting collaboration between religious institutes, the laity and the local Church.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, n.104.

<sup>143</sup> Oseni Ogunu, “Growing in the Spirit and Charism of the Congregation”, 139

<sup>144</sup> Basile Mvê Engone, S.D. (Bishop of Libreville) “Le défi de la Pauvreté Consacrée”, in; Oseni Ogunu (Ed), *The African Enchiridion*, vol.IV, p.2748; also in: *Synodus Episcoporum* 1994, Bolletino Edizione Plurilingue, 2-29 October 1994, Vatican City, Bulletin 19, p.13

5.3.3. *The Challenge of Freedom in Obedience*

A Consecrated person forgoes 'himself' in order to carry out the will of God through the guidance of his Superiors. Obedience requires that we have a clear vision of faith as regards our Superiors, and esteem, always in faith, for authority: "we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace amongst yourselves"<sup>145</sup>. Obedience helps us to adopt the attitude of Jesus and of Mary: 'Lo, I have come to do your will' (Heb 10:9); 'I am the handmaiden of the Lord' (Lk 1:38). Obedience, the Vatican Council II notes, "far from lessening the dignity of the human person, by extending the freedom of the sons of God, leads it to maturity"<sup>146</sup> A Religious should not think in the following terms: 'fortunately, we have Superiors who think for us!' Superiors should never think for us! Like a brother or sister, a Superior helps you to interpret and discover the will of God for you. Religious, "under the motion of the Holy Spirit, subject themselves in faith to their superiors who hold the place of God. Under their guidance they are led to serve all their brothers in Christ, just as Christ himself in obedience to the Father served His brethren and laid down His life as a ransom for many"<sup>147</sup>.

In reality, the challenge of obedience at the present time arises from a conflict between two models: the traditional *African model* according to which authority has always had an important role in clans, in families and amongst the elders, but which in Africa, today, is losing ground; and, on the other hand, the *modern model of criticism* on all fronts and protest. It is thus necessary to return to a renewed and inculturated understanding of the theological and Christological meaning of obedience in religious life: the Superior who commands is Christ. A religious who obeys is also Christ himself. Everyone should see each other as Christ and act according to the supreme law of charity. The great challenge remains, therefore, the mentality of conversion. Obedience becomes difficult to live for a consecrated person if he or she has not understood that the model of obedience is not a merely human model. Obedience must flow from the union of the will of Christ towards the Father and also from respect for authentic cultural values and human dignity and rights.

The challenge of obedience comes also from those notions of freedom which separate this fundamental human good from its essential relationship to the truth and to moral norms. In fact, the promotion of freedom is a genuine value, closely connected with respect for the human person. But it is easy to see the aberrant consequences of injustice, oppression or discrimination and even violence, in the life of individuals and of peoples, to which the distorted use of freedom leads. To respond to this situation consecrated person profess the vow of obedience. This obedience re-proposes the obedience of Christ to the Father and testifies that there is no contradiction between obedience and freedom. By

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<sup>145</sup> 1Th 5:12:13.

<sup>146</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis*, 14,2.

<sup>147</sup> PC, 14

obedience the consecrated persons intend to show: their awareness of being children of God the Father, hence they wish to take the Father's will as their daily bread (cf. Jn. 4:34), as their rock, their joy, their shield and their fortress (cf. Ps 18:2). Thus they show that they are growing in the full truth about themselves, and therefore offering this consoling message: "The lovers of your law have great peace; they never stumble" (Ps 118:165).

The evangelical counsels can and should be inculturated and liberating, and the formation of consecrated persons needs to facilitate this experience in view of a more effective and credible evangelization:

"Inculturation of the evangelical counsels as an essential element in the following of Christ constitutes an essential part of full evangelization in the Church. The great number of priests and religious men and women in the young churches shows that the Spirit has been and still is powerfully at work. In this domain, consecrated chastity has raised and continues to raise questions. This is not the place to treat of these issues. For the missionary, it is important to sustain the action of the Spirit and to make the call of the Lord heard by his fidelity to his vocation, as well as by making manifest the joy and the freedom it gives. This is not always easy to do. The missionary must be up to living his vow in the context of cultures, mentalities and customs which can vary considerably from what he is used to."<sup>148</sup>

#### **5.4. The challenge of the Religious community, a Family of God in dialogue**

The central idea of *Ecclesia in Africa* to give vigour to evangelisation is symbolised by the concept of the Church-as-family of God. This symbol "emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust"<sup>149</sup>. Consecrated life has its vital place and role in the Church-as-Family of God. make a great contribution in the field of solidarity, dialogue and forgiveness.

But the question, today, is: Are individualism and the mass media capable of appreciating and valuing this task of dialogue in the religious community as understood and live in the Church-Family? In the face of a widespread and growing anti-life mentality and initiatives, the appeal of the African Bishops is: "Do not allow the African family to be ridiculed on its own soil!"<sup>150</sup>. Just as the African family is to be saved, so must we save the religious community, albeit at a different level and ways, so it can in its own way advance its promotion of the spiritual values in favour of a life, health and family experiences within the Institute, such that it leads to justice, peace, reconciliation and development. Thus, the great challenge for a community is dialogue. According to the *Ecclesia in Africa*,

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<sup>148</sup> Hans Josef Trumper, "Chastity", in: <https://www.omiworld.org/lemma/chastity/#fifth> (Accessed 11/10/2018)

<sup>149</sup> EA, 63.

<sup>150</sup> EA, 84.

“Openness to dialogue is the Christian's attitude inside the community”<sup>151</sup>; “dialogue is the new name of charity”<sup>152</sup>. The worst offence for a fellow religious is to be ignored. The religious women and men of Nigeria in our time are meeting the challenge of community life in order to give true value to evangelisation. Rather than fleeing from community, an attempt will be made to build a small Bethany. A community, says Jean Vanier, “is not a community when a majority of its members achieve a move from the community to me, but when I convert, moving from myself to the community”<sup>153</sup>.

### 5.5. The challenge of inter-ethnic community life

Many Institutes of consecrated life have a life in common. They want to make present in our world the union of charity. And yet Africa is lacerated by multiple economic, political, ethnic, social divisions. Life in common requires us to live together quite apart from our differences and oppositions. How will it be possible to be stronger than the spirit of the world by which the pressures of family, of history, and also of today's society, can enter our communities and divide us? Community life requires a climate of trust and frankness, the willingness to help one another, and overcoming the practice of holding one another "under judgement" and of discarding gossips. How can consecrated persons live, and manifest these attitudes in their relation with lay people, with collaborators in the apostolate?. What concrete modalities can a religious community find to relate evangelically with the poor?. The community awareness of doing something for poor persons can enrich community life itself. It is helpful to keep in mind that the way with which we deal with the persons working in our communities as employees or volunteers is already a testimony of justice and of respect. The challenge, therefore, is to live together with the same love, making it visible from outside as well. The men and women around us need this witness.

### 5.6. The challenge of inculturation

The proclamation of Christ "is the permanent priority of mission" and is directed towards conversion, that is, to full and sincere allegiance to Christ and his Gospel. The process of inculturation has a role to play in the missionary activity. “The challenge of inculturation ought to be taken up by consecrated persons as a call to fruitful cooperation with grace in facing cultural diversity.”<sup>154</sup> This presupposes a serious personal preparation, mature gifts of discernment, faithful adherence to the criteria of doctrinal orthodoxy, moral integrity and ecclesial communion. Consecrated persons must approach cultures other than their own

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<sup>151</sup> EA, 65.

<sup>152</sup> Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam* (6 August 1964), AAS 56 (1964), p. 639.

<sup>153</sup> Vanier Jean, *La communauté, lieu du pardon et de la fête* (Paris, Fleurus, 1979), p. 7, 31, as cited by Simpore.

<sup>154</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, n.79

with the attitude of Jesus, who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil 2:7). Besides humility, it also requires patient and courageous efforts to initiate dialogue, to establish contact with the most diverse peoples, proclaiming to all of them the way of salvation. Today, as in the past, many consecrated persons can and should seek and find in the history of individuals and of entire peoples the traces of God's presence. For African consecrated persons themselves such a search is advantageous in the sense that the values discovered in their different cultures can in fact prompt them to deepen their own understanding of the Christian tradition of prayer and contemplation, community sharing, hospitality, respect for persons and attention to the environment, way living the evangelical counsel, and so on.

A genuine inculturation requires attitudes of love and meekness, following the example of Jesus. In this sense the consecrated life makes its members well suited to face the complex work of inculturation, because it accustoms them to being detached from things, even from some features of their own culture. Applying themselves with these attitudes to the study and understanding of other cultures, consecrated persons can better discern the real values in them, and the best way to accept them and perfect them with the help of their own charism. However, it must also be noted that in many ancient cultures religious expression is so deeply ingrained that religion often represents the transcendent dimension of the culture itself. In this case true inculturation necessarily entails a serious and open interreligious dialogue with African Traditional Religion<sup>155</sup>

In truth, scope of inculturation is extensive, as the Nigerian bishops made clear in their reflection on the commitment to and the major areas of inculturation to be explored and actualised<sup>156</sup>. In Africa, many regional Episcopates (e.g. IMBISA, AMECEA, AECAWA[now integrated into RECOWA] and national Episcopal Conferences have on different occasions and levels presented the theme of inculturation, highlighting its necessity, scope and urgency and pleading for its implementation<sup>157</sup>. The Church in Zimbabwe expressed this commitment to inculturation:

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<sup>155</sup> Cfr. *Vita Consecrata*, n.79

<sup>156</sup> The Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, *The Church in Nigeria: Family of God on Mission - Lineamenta for the First National Pastoral Congress*, nn.141-152 Lagos, 1999: Also in: Oseni Ogunu (Ed.), *The African Enchiridion*, vol. IV, pp.3290-3292. Also, at a practical level, the final Report of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Synod of the Catholic Diocese of Enugu (Nigeria) offers pastoral insights into the necessity and importance of inculturation, convinced that: "We owe a duty to our people to seek to preserve, promote and transform the riches of our culture in all their varieties. We realize that if the Church's presence is to be felt in our Diocese, and in fact, the whole of Igboland, inculturation should be expended to embrace both theological thinking and moral behaviour" and that "the spirit of inculturation should permeate our Homily and talks". Catholic Diocese of Enugu (Nigeria): "A Report on Inculturation", in: Oseni Ogunu (ed.), *The African Enchiridion*, vol. IV. p.3547

<sup>157</sup> For example, Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA), *Inculturation. The Faith that takes roots in African Cultures. A Study Document on Inculturation for IMBISA 3rd Plenary Assembly* in Gweru, Maputo, February 1992. In: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III. pp.2277-2291; Gregory Ochiagha Ordlu Diocese, Nigeria), "Faith Transforms Culture", Lenten Pastoral Letter, 1992, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III. pp.2303-2304. See Denis Chidi Isizoh, *The Attitude of the Catholic Church Towards*

“We will work towards ways of expressing our Christian life and Christian faith in a more African manner: We need to discuss and work out ways to understand better the message of Jesus and to make it a genuine part of our daily life. The Church, the family of God, must become more relevant to all people, so that more and more people will be attracted to follow Jesus together with us. We must also challenge our culture where it is wrong and unjust, so that it is transformed by Gospel Values in the light of the death and Resurrection of Jesus”<sup>158</sup>.

The question is: How can Institutes of Consecrated Life inculcate their charisms in a society and live in the present the ideal of life that was proposed in the past by their founder/foundress? “The most urgent task”, according to Sidebe Sempore, ‘is to create conditions so that the gospel, the whole of the Gospel, is rooted in hearts and our customs’<sup>159</sup>. Inculturation is often misunderstood. For some people, inculturation is placing culture to the fore, replacing Christian liturgies with local rites, with the establishment of one’s own culture, with the justification of a purported Asian, American or European ‘morality’ in the Pacific or in Africa, according to the environment in which one finds oneself. The process of the insertion of the Church in cultures requires a great deal of time – it is not a simple exterior adaptation. By inculturation ‘is meant the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through the integration of Christianity, of the various human cultures’<sup>160</sup>. This integration must be experienced by the people of God, including Consecrated persons, who are called to dedicate themselves and their communities to creating a synthesis of the human sub-stratum with Christ.

From this point of view, the Church embodies the Gospel in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples and cultures into her own community; she transmits her values, starting from the sound assumptions that are in them, renewing it from within. The challenge of inculturation in Africa lies in forming disciples of Christ who know increasingly fully how to assimilate the gospel message<sup>161</sup>.

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*African Traditional Religion and Culture: 100 Excerpts from the Magisterial and Other Important Church Documents*. Lagos: Ceedee (1998). *Passim*.

<sup>158</sup>Episcopal Conference of Zimbabwe, “You are my witnesses to make Christ known”, (Pastoral Letter, Advent 1996), in: Oseni Ogunu, *The African Enchiridion*, vol.IV, 2928

<sup>159</sup> Jacques SIMPORE, *Consecrated Life In Africa. The Challenges Of The Third Millennium*, §3.5

<sup>160</sup> Extraordinary Synod for the twentieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council, final report voted by the fathers, 7 December 1985. “The process of inculturation may be defined as the Church's efforts to make the message of Christ penetrate a given sociocultural milieu, calling on the latter to grow according to all its particular values, as long as these are compatible with the Gospel. The term inculturation includes the notion of growth, of the mutual enrichment of persons and groups, rendered possible by the encounter of the Gospel with a social milieu. "Inculturation [is] the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church." (International Theological Commission, *Faith and Inculturation* (1988), n.11; Cf. John Paul II, *Slavorum Apostoli* (2 June 1985), 21.

<sup>161</sup> EA, 78.

*The inculturation of the consecrated life*

For its part, the consecrated life itself is the bearer of Gospel values; where it is authentically lived, it can make an innovative contribution in meeting the challenges of inculturation. Inculturation can elicit a positive reaction in people's consciences. Inculturation serves as a Gospel leaven within a culture, purifying and perfecting it. The Gospel way of life is an important source for proposing a new cultural model. In fact, Communities of Religious Institutes and of Societies of Apostolic Life can offer concrete and effective cultural proposals. They do this when they bear witness to the evangelical manner of practising mutual acceptance in diversity and of exercising authority, and when they give an example of sharing material and spiritual goods, of being truly international, of cooperating with other Institutes, and of listening to the men and women of our time. The manner of thinking and acting of Consecrated Persons gives rise to a true and proper point of reference for culture; it serves to point out all that is inhuman; it bears witness that God alone strengthens and perfects values. In turn, a genuine inculturation will help consecrated persons to live the radical nature of the Gospel according to the charism of their Institute and the character of the people with whom they come into contact. This fruitful relationship can give rise to ways of life and pastoral approaches which can bring enrichment to the whole Institute, provided that they are consistent with the founding charism and with the unifying action of the Holy Spirit. In this process, which entails discernment, courage, dialogue and the challenge of the Gospel, a guarantee of being on the right path is offered by the Holy See<sup>162</sup>. Without allowing oneself to be paralyzed by fear of errors, but rather animated by deep sense of commitment, perseverance and hope, the first step in this process is to begin it.

*5.7. The challenge of witness: Become the voice of - and give voice to - the voiceless*

In relation to the African peoples' insistent demands for the recognition and promotion of human rights and freedoms, the John Paul II confirms the convictions of the African Synod Fathers, saying that:

“the Church in Africa, faithful to its vocation, stands resolutely on the side of the oppressed and of voiceless and marginalized peoples. I strongly encourage it to continue to bear this witness. The preferential option for the poor is ‘a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole Tradition of the Church bears witness ... The motivating concern for the poor – who are in the very meaning of the

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<sup>162</sup> VC, n.80

term 'the Lord's poor' – must be translated at all levels into concrete actions, until it decisively attains a series of necessary reforms'<sup>163</sup>.

The Church must continue to perform her prophetic role and be the voice of those without a voice.<sup>164</sup> Evangelisation necessarily does include development and liberation. "Development" refers to the development of every person and the whole person. Evangelisation means the proclaiming the Good News, but it also includes denunciation: evangelization must denounce and combat all that degrades and destroys the person. But proclamation is always more important than condemnation, and the latter cannot ignore the former<sup>165</sup>. To achieve her prophetic role and be the voice of the voiceless effectively, the Church must be an energetic witness to justice and peace in her structures and in the relationships among her members.

The Church in Africa is also aware that, "insofar as their own internal affairs are concerned, justice is not always respected with regard to those men and women who are at their service. If the Church is to give witness to justice, she recognizes that whoever dares to speak to others about justice should also strive to be just in their eyes. It is necessary therefore to examine with care the procedures, the possessions and the life style of the Church"<sup>166</sup>.

As a part of the Church-Family of God, how can consecrated persons be the voice of those without a voice -- the voiceless persons, families and the poor and marginalised -- and indeed give back the voice to them, so they can be organized, liberated, speak out for themselves and advance in their pursuit of justice, development and peace? In relation to the voiceless people, how can Consecrated persons contribute to the actualisation of the appeal and hope that the Church addressed to everyone: "In the name of God: respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life! Only in this direction will you find justice, development, true freedom, peace and happiness!"<sup>167</sup> The promotion of life and integral human liberation of the voiceless persons and peoples, which are closely connected, advance and express the profound desire and quest for life and to "have it more abundantly" (John 10:10b). On the threshold of the twenty-first century, which is full of contradictions, how can consecrated people fight for the rights of humans and peoples, the rights of families, of minorities, or fight against torture, the death penalty, human trafficking, the principal endemic diseases, social injustice and arbitrary imprisonment? More specifically, how can consecrated people be the voice of those without a voice in Nigeria or other African society today? How can they push international agencies, the NGOs and States to create solidarity funds for the vulnerable, the marginalised and those at risk, people with AIDS or chronic illnesses? How can they help orphans,

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<sup>163</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 44

<sup>164</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, nn. 70, 106

<sup>165</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, 70.

<sup>166</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, n.106

<sup>167</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), n.5

immigrants, people with handicaps, victims of child prostitutions, refugees, elderly people without resources? How can they promote the culture of life, combating all that contradict life such as abortion, contraception, euthanasia, the death penalty? 'Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel' (1Cor 9:16) proclaimed Paul of Tarsus.

More than times past, Consecrated people are called to act, to comfort, to heal, to listen, to accompany the wounded...in front of their Teacher who whispers in their hearts: "you give them something to eat' (Mt 14:16); 'do not be afraid, I have defeated the world'; 'they will change their swords into ploughshares' (Is 2:4). No more wars! How can we promote and maintain peace and justice in the land of Africa, the cradle of Homo Sapiens? These are some inevitable challenges. Are we ready to meet them? May the Almighty help us!"<sup>168</sup>

### **5.8. Authenticity, Consistency and Accountability**

The emerging global culture and fast growing communication media offer us opportunities as well as challenges in the area of formation. The spirit of inquiry and scrutiny has reached all areas of human life with its investigation and research. Some of these queries focussed public attention on the private living of publicly professed consecrated persons and Christian leaders: it has exposed sometimes the inconsistencies of the clergy and the religious. It had double effect: it has demoralized the clergy and scandalized the people in some contexts or regions; also, it has resulted in honest efforts to bridge the gap between the ideal and the actual situation and to look for effective and adequate pedagogy for formation. In this regard three aspects of the challenges in formation may be highlighted: the challenges of authenticity, excellence, and fidelity. The last two items will be discussed later.

Authenticity, consistency and accountability are always necessary in the formation and mission of consecrated life and priesthood but they are increasingly keywords and demands above all since the last few decades. "To be joyful witnesses of the Gospel it is necessary to be authentic and consistent"; authenticity "is a primary responsibility of all adults, of formators. And it is your responsibility, you formators who are here: to set an example of consistency to the youngest. Do we want consistent young people? Are we consistent? On the contrary, the Lord will say to us what he said to the People of God about the Pharisees: "Do what they say but not what they do!". Consistence and authenticity! However, you too, in turn, seek to follow this road."<sup>169</sup>

In Africa many cultures hold the religious man and woman in high esteem and look to them for moral and spiritual guidance. Religious symbols and people in religious garb elicit reverence from people. But many economically and technologically advanced societies critically look at religion and are outspoken

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<sup>168</sup> Jacques Simpore, *Consecrated Life in Africa. Challenges of the Third Millenium.*

<sup>169</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130706\\_incontro-seminaristi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130706_incontro-seminaristi.html) (Accessed: 12/09/2018).

about the aberrations and inconsistencies in religious life. The episodes of sexual abuse by clergy and religious in some countries have done much harm to the Church. People no longer accept pulpit proclamations unless they are backed by authentic life of the preacher. The global acclaim of the lives of Mother Theresa and Pope John Paul II are clear manifestations of the world's appreciation for authenticity and need for gospel mystique.

Most institutes of consecrated life live the pain of having a certain percentage of immature members whose lack of integrity and emotional balance drain much emotional and apostolic energy and at times cause serious economic burden on their institutes. Sometimes, it happens that promising missionary ventures or certain pastoral projects suffer serious setbacks due to the immaturity and lack of apostolic zeal of the Religious. Various forms of compromises in radically living evangelical counsels can erode the vitality and enthusiasm of the religious communities. The future of any institute depends on the quality of commitment of its members in accordance with their charism in the Church. An effective formation process should support and ascertain certain level of spiritual and emotional congruency, an affective maturity, in the candidates. When an authentic formative journey is not embarked, the longer years of formation seem to end up as seeds sown on rocky ground or among the thistles. It is after final vows or ordination that the mundane motivations, often unconscious, come to the fore and actively direct behaviour in seeking comforts, positions and power<sup>170</sup>. While expressing the joy of having crowded seminaries in some countries, Pope Benedict XVI insists on the need for proper discernment and cautioned against the dangers of mundane motives that may attract vocations<sup>171</sup>.

It is astounding to note that most formandi are not automatically formed to deal with their human passions and motivations which are central to meaningful living of the consecrated life even after many years of formation.

Another paradox observed in the formation process of candidates is the ample space for dichotomy between the topics studied and the life lived. A person who studies at a doctoral level in spirituality, theology, or scriptures can acquire a "summa cum laude" without being affected in their personal life by the topics studied, though these topics are meaningful precisely because of their significance for Christian life. The absence of the experiential dimension in the study of theological subjects remains a lacuna in the formation process. Initiation of people into consecrated life requires spiritual masters who have "touched and seen" what is being communicated, not solely 'teacher' who communicates knowledge. The golden periods of congregations are marked by the presence of saintly men and women who lived authentic lives and transmitted transcendental values to their followers. The strong reactions of the public to the limitations of clergy and religious on the one hand and high admiration of modern saintly figures on the other, seem to be the expression of a longing for authentic spiritual leaders in the world that is becoming more and more fragmented and violent.

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<sup>170</sup> For a critical look at vocations from the third world, Cf. Antony Malaviaratchi, "Religious life in the Third World, a Shangri-la", in *Review for Religious*, 65.1, 2006.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. *Address of Pope Benedict XVI to the clergy of Aosta*, July 25, 2005

“The context in which we live continually asks us to “account” in this way, and it is a good thing, because it helps us to take nothing for granted. Today we cannot take anything for granted! This civilization, this culture... we cannot. But it is certainly also demanding, it requires a good, balanced formation which combines all the dimensions of life, the human, the spiritual, the intellectual dimension with the pastoral. In your formation there are the four fundamental pillars: spiritual formation, that is, the spiritual life; intellectual life, this means studying “in order to account for”; apostolic life, beginning to go out to proclaim the Gospel; and fourthly, community life. Four. And for the latter, formation must be undertaken in community, in the novitiate, in the priory, in seminaries.... I always think of this: the worst seminary is better than no seminary! Why? Because this community life is essential. Remember the four pillars: spiritual life, intellectual life, apostolic life and community life. These four. You must build your vocation on these four elements.”<sup>172</sup>

#### 6.10 . *The Challenge for Excellence*

Every field of human activity makes rapid advancement through systematic formulation of goals and effective strategies to achieve them. All of us enjoy the fruits of this progress in every sphere of life. For example, the advancement in information technology in the past twenty years is incredible and the engineers in this field make their expertise tangible to the common people. Training of experts in different walks of life requires a few years of rigorous and methodical training and if they fail to render adequate service in his/her field of expertise, he/she will go out of business. A priest or religious does not have to undergo this ordeal.

Priestly and religious training of young men which takes about 10-14 years for initial formation is perhaps the longest formal training for any profession. Specialized training in most other professions takes less time, investment of personnel and probably money. Besides, the formandi are fully available for formation and even his personal time and holidays are structured within a project of formation. Some of the missionaries with additional specialization would have spent 16-18 years in education after joining religious life. The perplexing question is whether we can stand the test of quality in the field proper to us.

The world today looks for expertise and excellence from us in God experience, Word of God, Transcendent values, moral guidance, prophetic commitment and witness of religious truth. It is doubtful if many of those who come out of the formation centres after several years of formation can claim sufficient expertise in these areas. The challenge of formation is to move from mediocrity to excellence in the domain proper to us.

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<sup>172</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130706\\_incontro-seminaristi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130706_incontro-seminaristi.html) (Downloaded 2/9/2018)

### 6.11. Challenge of Faithfulness

Another challenge refers to faithfulness or fidelity<sup>173</sup>. This challenge comes from the global, consumerist and hedonistic post-modern culture that pervades all societies with the offer of very many false attractions. The mystery of the cross, renunciation, and values of evangelical counsels are held in disdain. The consumer culture plays on base emotions to thrive, but devours the victims for sensational news, especially when they are clerics and religious. When a person is not grounded enough in Christian values, it is easy to be caught up in the game and fall for the lure of money, easy life and immature affective adventures. For example, the lure of internet, in spite of being a great blessing, lure people into addiction by offering easy, accessible and affordable private world of substitutive gratifications in the present world. Analysing the departures from religious institutes, clerical state, and formations houses, it is found that a good number of the departures were due to questions of affective life, psychological problems and autonomy issues<sup>174</sup>. Economic security and independence seem to underlie the numerous secularizations of religious priests who hike into diocesan life.

Effective formative itinerary should necessarily take into account the human maturing process and empower the self-capacities of the formandi to live the vows and the renunciations involved in it without serious inner conflict. In a context where external structures are not very supportive of our life style, it is important to have solid internal structures to live joyfully our commitment.

### 5.9. Coherency between Faith and Life for a Credible Witness

According to Pope Francis, "it is necessary that the faith be reflected in the daily lives of Christians. Their lives must be coherent with the faith, that their witness may be credible; likewise, I invite you to arouse in your communities, at every level, an effort to deepen the faith in order to live it in an ever more vigorous way. This invitation is addressed first to the clergy and the consecrated. The priesthood and consecrated life are not means to social advancement, they are a service to God and humanity. Special attention should be paid to the discernment of priestly and religious vocations both in the dioceses and in the different Institutes of consecrated life. Chastity and obedience are to be held in high esteem, and it is left to you to remind others of this ceaselessly; these virtues must be presented and lived without ambiguity by formators in both seminaries and novitiates. The same holds true with respect to temporal goods and prudence in

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<sup>173</sup> Mathew Vattamattam, CMF, *Challenges of formation for priestly and consecrated life*

<sup>174</sup> 66<sup>o</sup> Semestral Convention of the Union of Superior Generals treated the issue of Fidelity and Abandonment in today's Consecrated life. An analysis of departures is presented by Fr. Luis Oviedo, "An Approach to Abandonment", in *Fidelity and Abandonment*, Litos, 2005, pp.47-65.

their management. Counter-witness in this area is particularly harmful because of the scandal it raises, especially in the face of a population that lives in poverty.”<sup>175</sup>

### 6.11. The Challenge of economic and financial self-sustenance (Self-reliance)

One of the major and excruciating challenges that some religious institutes in Nigeria, especially their formation houses, face is the financial constraints, the serious problem of availability of funds. Certainly, the availability of funds affects several other aspects, albeit to varying degrees: the thinking about or the planning for, and the execution of desired projects and other initiatives. Each religious Institute in Nigeria would have its own stories to share on their economic and financial challenges. However, some experience it harder and/or longer than others, more acute and agonizing way than others. Many Institute and formation houses experience the economic factor for what it is – as a vital issue, whose implications that are multifaceted and probably enduring; and therefore it needs the all-embracing attention for the good of all concerned.

Money is needed, of course, for the obtainment of many things. The problem of scarcity of funds impacts on almost every major sector of the life and activities of a Religious Institute, particularly its formation house and its programs. In Nigeria, as elsewhere, a Formation House depends for its sustenance almost entirely on the financial support from the authorities of the religious Institute and the contributions from benefactors and donors. So, serious and sustained lack or insufficiency of funds affects the capability and rate of admission and retention of applicants and the training and sustenance of candidates in the Institute as well as running of the community of Formation House in general. Financial constraints adversely affect the sustenance of members of a religious community who are entrusted with the administration of a new and/or poor parish or certain other special apostolate that can't sustain its pastoral workers. In the case of formation house or a seminary, some of the formators are tempted to regularly seek financially viable apostolate outside the community to augment whatever stipend they receive; and this risks decreasing their day-to-day presence in the formation community and the attention they dedicate to the accompaniment of candidates entrusted to him.

As a result of the financial limitations it may turn out not possible, for example, to adequately implement elements in the formation program as foreseen in the Constitutions and Norms and in the *Ratio* of the Institute. In addition, there is need for funds to carry out and adequately sustain the pastoral mission, and for the establishment and maintenance of the needed or existing structures. This is particularly the case in a situation where an Institute has no income-generating structures or projects to rely upon for its economic self-sustenance<sup>176</sup>.

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<sup>175</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/march/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140328\\_adlimina-madagascar.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/march/documents/papa-francesco_20140328_adlimina-madagascar.html)

<sup>176</sup> Cf. “Oseni Ogunu, “Growing in the Spirit and Charism of the Congregation, .138-140

In Africa, if the presence of Religious Institute is to continue to be significant and effective, the question of availability and stability of funds to sustain its members and its mission will need to be explicitly addressed; and adequate plans and initiative must be made to ensure the sustainability.

## **6.12. The Challenge of Dismissal and Departure: Preparation and accompaniment**

One of the largely skipped issue in the discussion about formation, and yet an important and delicate challenge, is the question of separation, that is to say, dismissal and departure of candidate from the institute's formation programme or from the seminary. Little seems to have been written about the accompaniment and preparation of persons for discontinuation from the Religious Institute during the course of the actual formation process. Ezeani describes the question of discontinuation – whether dismissal or free and voluntary departure – as a “crucial aspect” of religious formation, it is a ‘pastoral issue’<sup>177</sup>. Concerning the various forms of separation from the Congregation – whether temporary or permanent, whether voluntary or imposed – the norms of universal laws of the Church and the proper laws of the Congregation should be most carefully followed. It is uncertain, as Ezeani notes, how much attention seminary rectors, bishops, leaders of religious congregations and formators have accorded the issue of how persons leaving the seminary or houses of formation can be adequately prepared and accompanied to leave, living joyfully, and still continuing the practice of their faith.<sup>178</sup> Hence, it is suggested that more discussion and reflection are needed on “how to accompany persons humanely and creatively, who after they have entered formation, come to a point when indicators begin to surface as to the need to seek paths of the Christian journey other than the religious life or priesthood”<sup>179</sup>.

So, the following section, reflects on the issue of dismissal and departure as a challenge in the formation process, drawing from Ezeani's and other studies and from my experiences.

### *1. Possible Signs for Discontinuation*

It is not always easy to completely identify and enumerate the reasons why a person may need to discontinue her/his religious formation. This

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<sup>177</sup> Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR, “*When You Leave Religious Life, What Then?*” In the context of candidates for the priesthood, the recent Vatican document, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation*, 197, considers only the case of “dismissal” by the community of formators and, in this regard, recommended these general requirements: (a) consult the Bishop; (b) give to the decision in writing to the candidate, and keep a copy of it; (c) provide in the text a prudent explanation of the decision, at least in a summary but clear form, along with the discernment that led to the decision.

<sup>178</sup> Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR, *When You Leave Religious Life, What Then?* p. ....

<sup>179</sup> Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR, *When You Leave Religious Life, What Then?* p. ....

is because of the complexity of life and the unique spiritual nature of religious life. Religious Life is obviously not a perfect state for perfect persons. Therefore, it should not be about impeccability of a candidate. The religious formation and growth in Christian maturity is a process, and this implies that it is gradual and life-long. The religious formation and growth in Christian maturity is a process. However, certain criteria and levels of maturity are required of individuals at the beginning of the journey of religious formation. Some Institutes clearly states in their particular laws, the *Ratio*, Directories, or other relevant documents<sup>180</sup>. He or she should be found capable of assuming all of the obligations of the religious life, not immediately, but progressively<sup>181</sup>.

No one must be asked to discontinue formation merely at the whim of the formator, owing to tribal bias. or simply out of pure personal displeasure with an individual. One important aspect, which requires much patience, is suitable preparation of people before they are admitted to religious formation. Hurry or need to increase the number of candidates is not a good way to handle the admission of candidates for formation for consecrated life. But if issues that will warrant discontinuation from formation arise, in spite of all the initial preparations done, the candidates must still be adequately followed. Among the criteria required by many religious institutes are good health – both physical and psychological<sup>182</sup>; intellectual/academic qualification/competence, capacity to live community life; joylessness in a person in an early stage of religious formation; personal qualities and dispositions such as having the right intention and the moral integrity; spirit of prayer; closeness to the Church (especially through the Holy Eucharist); and direct experience in Parish societies and any Catholic association.

a) *Good Health*

Depending on the nature and charism of the group, the health requirements for applicants vary. For some, if a candidate has certain medical problems that could hinder fuller participation as a member and ability to engage in the ministry and the demands of the life, it could warrant letting the person go. The person might find a home with other groups with different health requirements, or else, seek another way of life altogether. In certain instances, an individual could conceal a serious matter in their medical history during the admission process and it is discovered later in the course of formation. When this

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<sup>180</sup> See, for example, *The Constitutions and Norms of the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary* (2017), Art.68; *The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus* (August 2012), Art.93; “Secular Institute Schoenstatt Fathers”, in: *Official Directory Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria*, p.131

<sup>181</sup> Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes* (1990), No 42.

<sup>182</sup> According to the Code of Canon Law, even though contracted after profession, a physical or psychological infirmity which, in the judgment of experts, renders the member in temporary profession unsuited to lead a life in the congregation, constitutes a reason for not admitting the member to renewal of profession or to perpetual profession, unless the infirmity was contracted through the negligence of the congregation or because of the work performed in the congregation (Canon 689 §2, but see the entire §§1-3).

happens, it can be very difficult for all parties. At times, the congregation might recommend withdrawal to that individual. Giving proper care to the person would be the first approach, and a charitable one. Afterwards, sound medical advice could be sought before making a decision about that person's future in the congregation. In the instance where a candidate would have to discontinue for health reasons, it might be helpful to bring the family into the picture so as to be prepared and plan on-going care of the person after his return home.

*(b) Intellectual Factor*

Intellectual/academic qualification and competence is required of religious. Unfortunately, in certain situations, because of pressure to get more members, some of those could be overlooked during the screening and admission process. Alternatively, a candidate might come in with a good enough paper qualification. However, in the course of the formation programme, it could be seen that he or she has considerable difficulty grasping the content of the programme. When this happens, it could warrant a decision either to advise the person to leave and update or otherwise seek other paths in life. Even if a person is not gifted intellectually, he or she can still make positive contribution to the society and to the Church in other ways.

*c) Capacity to live community life*

The aspirant must possess a capacity to live community life, sharing life with other individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds, personality and dispositions. Where one experiences almost unbearable discomfort and difficulty in accepting this reality, the better option might be a life style where one is not necessarily compelled or required to share life with others in such close proximity. There could also be the problem of 'fitting in' or struggles with emotional development. Formators and the person in formation need to be open to exploring also the question of honestly gauging in some way one's emotional maturity and ability to sustain a life where regular and consistent spiritual exercises are a prominent prerequisite. If such seems like a burden to a person, that might be an indicator for not 'fitting'. Would the candidate embrace and live celibate chastity without extraordinary difficulty and an unbearable burden?

*d) Be familiar with the requirements, context and mission of the Institute*

To be effective in the accompaniment and discernment in the formation work, those assigned to the formation ministry are to be familiar with the particular nature and requirement of their congregation, and with the realities of their context or mission. This will help to identify and be confident about whether a particular individual candidate's personality, gifts and disposition fit. Sometimes, a person may pass through serious inner struggle and considerable resistance to some necessary change required for the way of life that he or she is

being prepared to embrace and live. When a candidate tends consistently to utter statements like: 'You should accept me as I am, this is who I am, and there's nothing anyone can do about that'; 'I am used to this, and this is the way I function', there could be cause for concern. Statements such as the above can mask an unwillingness to transformation through the formation experience and exposure to new ways. Does the formation environment seem to stifle the individual and prevent him or her from living authentically as the person deems right? Discontinuation from the programme might be a healthier option for a person; for Jesus came that we might have life abundantly, not suffocated (cf. Jn. 10:10).

*e) Motivations/Intentions*

Human nature is complex. For this reason, it is not surprising to find that for some individuals, at the time of admission into the formation programme, there can be a confusion and mix-up of motivations. A young entrant might be motivated by youthful exuberant infatuation for some perceived ideal of life. It is hoped, however, that as the individual progresses in the spiritual journey, prior motivations can become clearer. Entering religious life, it is not unusual for one to have both conscious and sub-conscious motives for doing so. Almost always, the ideals can be quite high, but upon entry, they begin to discover that religious life may not be exactly as they had expected. Sometimes, a person is unable to reconcile their stereotyped notion of the religious life with the reality of the human condition, accepting their own human vulnerability in it all. This can adversely affect them in a way that warrants exit from the programme. For some, the initial enthusiasm for religious life can just wear out quickly. Spiritual stagnation can set in as a result, and there will not be much emotional stamina to engage fully in the formation process. For instance, a novice or seminarian can show signs of growth in gaining insight into some significant personal weakness. However, he or she can tend to glory too much in the growth, without showing a matching ability to progress to any further step of utilising the fruit of the self-discovery for change. More often than not, this can be simply a basic inability: A person's level of awareness is the door to change, but it does not mean that they will go through it. There are those who can't and those who won't but generally formators are dealing with blindness, not ill will'<sup>183</sup>

*f) Joylessness*

Another possible indicator is apparent visible joylessness in a person in an early stage of religious formation. Pope Francis maintains that Consecrated men and women can respond to the invitation to follow Christ in the Consecrated life first, by "being joyful": "Show everyone that to follow Christ and to put his Gospel

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<sup>183</sup> M. Drennan, 'Special Issues in Formation', in B. McGregor and T. Norris [eds], *The Formational Journey of Priests: Exploring Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Dublin 1994, p. 89.

into practice fills your hearts with happiness.” For him, this happiness should be contagious, and lead people to seek the reason for this joy, so that they too can share in it. It is indisputable that “Where there are religious, there is joy.” Hence, when a person in formation goes around with a long sullen face and infects everyone around with negative energy, it will be worth exploring with the person what is happening with him or her, and whether they are in the right place<sup>184</sup>.

At times, a candidate might simply have inner battles; like personal uncertainty and self-doubt about their suitability for the religious life or priesthood, although on the part of the formator, there might be no visible signs indicating serious concerns or unsuitability. In this case, it is helpful to engage in active discernment process with the person in order to help them choose correctly and be at peace with the outcome of the discernment. At times too, their inner struggle might corroborate the formator’s observation of their outward behaviour. In all cases, openness to discernment and the ‘voice of the Spirit’ remain vital.

### *2). Preparation of persons who are to separate*

Taking time humanely to prepare and accompany the individuals on their way out of the formation programme can be a strenuous process. As a matter of fact, it can be quite demanding. Therefore, there could be a temptation to seek an easy way out by avoiding full engagement in this difficult process. Certainly, many formators try their best in handling this crucial aspect of the formation ministry. Some may be simply ill-equipped for this difficult part of their work. The good news, however, is that help is available if one truly desires to be committed to this difficult aspect of formation work, and actually goes to seek help.

### *3). What Formators can expect<sup>185</sup>*

#### *3.1. Personal inner turmoil on the part of the formation personnel*

“While there is a good level of inner conviction of doing one’s work to the best of one’s ability, it is not unusual for formation personnel to agonise over this, worrying about the authenticity and accuracy of her or his decision to prepare a candidate to abandon the formation programme. The formator can experience self-doubt and guilt which crops up from inner wonderings if his or her personal bias is not blocking the process and journey of another fellow human being. There could also be fears that one might be making a mistake and ‘depriving another of their vocation’”.

#### *3.2 Reactions from companions of the candidate who departs*

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<sup>184</sup> Cf. *Apostolic Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, passim.

<sup>185</sup> Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR, *When You Leave Religious Life, What Then?*, pp.23-26

Considering the reality of peer affiliation and mutual support, it is understandable when companions in the programme of the particular individual in the process of leaving feel or react angrily to their formator who is 'sending away' their companion. Their reactions can also be ambivalent. With the sense that perhaps the person needed to leave anyway, they nevertheless struggle with fear for themselves who could be 'the next' to be asked to go. It is not uncommon too that in many cases, the other candidates had perceived the one going as the one who is really doing everything right in the formation. Hence, they wonder: 'If this person who seems so perfect is leaving, what could become of me?'

### *3.3. Reactions and judgment from other Members*

"It often happens, unfortunately, that usually those who are not the formators could be quite quick at judging the actions and decisions of formators. The same applies to those in leadership. When some persons are not the ones directly responsible for formation, they could feel themselves as knowing how best to treat the persons in formation. In addition, since some persons believe in numbers as a sure sign of the success of formation, when anyone leaves, irrespective of whatever reason, their reaction is usually negative, laden with criticism of those in the formation work. The formator could be accused of high-handedness and strictness with expectation of young people that are too high. When a candidate had been introduced to the congregation by a sister or confrere, it could become even more toilsome for the persons directly involved with the formation. In certain cases, the particular confrere or sister reacts very strongly to the said formator for 'expelling my candidate'. Added to the already present inner turmoil, there can be tremendous suffering for the formation directors. These are realities that formators could face if a candidate is leaving."

### *3.4. Resistance from the part of the Candidate leaving*

"In the discernment process, if a person tends to take the issue of religious vocation as a do-or-die affair, it is almost always a negative sign. This is not a good sign at all because authenticity and openness seem to be lacking. It can serve as an added indicator for a formator that this individual might be unsuitable for the religious life. Wherever unyielding stubbornness and insistence on one's perceived vocation no matter what anyone else sees or says come from, it is clear they do not come from the spirit of Christ, whose core disposition was always to do the will of the Father- "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work" (John 4: 34). Meeting with disappointment or events going against one's plan can be very challenging and difficult. Whether a candidate leaves of his own volition or is advised to withdraw, it can be a real loss - of a treasured way of life even if one has not yet made perpetual vows. Because some people are not really affected by a particular experience per se, but by the meaning they attribute to it, leaving can be taken as not merely a loss, but also a failure in

one's life project. This can threaten a person's sense of self and accomplishment. For some, it could also lead to a loss of faith and belief in the Church. Formation personnel can devise ways and processes to enable those who leave adequately to 'mourn' their loss and at the same time seek to find the faith and will to move on in life and embrace other opportunities and ways that Life will open up for them. One can only do this with a healthy letting go of what has passed, having honoured it as part of their graced life story/journey. The feelings experienced by those who leave can be comparable to those who lost their jobs. Formators need to pay attention to this and not take it for granted. The skills to facilitate this important process are greatly required on the part of the formators."

### *3.5) Reactions of the Family of the Candidate*

"This particular point might be shocking to some persons, depending on their cultural backgrounds and contemporary reality. In some cultures, leaving the seminary or convent could be seen as a sign of failure. It can be worse in the case where the particular individual is advised to leave. A feeling of hurt self-pride could be triggered in both the individual and his or her family. However, where a candidate is fortunate to come from a family that has openness and understanding of the human condition, always disposed to always welcome back their child, it can be much easier to handle, in case she/he discontinues definitively the formation process and comes home. This kind of family milieu can be highly supportive to an individual in formation to engage freely in the discernment involved. She is spared a heavy burden of untold fear and anxiety about the future and its outcome. In cases where the opposite is the case, that is, where family and relations consider quitting the seminary or convent as a failure and dishonour to their family or even the clan, it can be unduly difficult for a candidate who leaves to cope. To readjust and make a reasonable life for themselves becomes harder. In certain such instances, persons have been pushed to take their own lives as a way out of the predicament. It is helpful therefore to help them all to see that if one door closes, another can be allowed to open.

### **4). Some Strategies for accompanying candidates discontinuing from formation**

Be he/she a postulant or a novice who has not been long in the formation or an already professed member in temporary vows, the process of exiting from formation can be a very challenging one. When the decision to leave is the initiative of the person, it could be relatively easier, although there are still issues to be dealt with. For instance, the emotional letting go and parting from companions with whom one has shared life - joys and sorrows, faith and dreams. In addition, the future is uncertain.

Hence, it is likely there will be feelings of fear, apprehension and worry about what the future could bring. For all these reasons, significant consideration is required in finding adequate ways of accompaniment and care in handling the exiting process. It is very important that those who leave are accompanied to do so graciously, not with bitterness and ill feeling. Human beings are individuals and unique, so it is not easy to prescribe any single strategy to suit the needs and temperament of every candidate in the process of preparing to leave a religious formation programme. Nevertheless, since human nature is basically universal, there are certain values that might have a wide appeal irrespective of personality or context. Some of the possible strategies are as follow:

4.1. *Sensitivity and Empathetic accompaniment*

It is a very difficult time for the candidate leaving the formation community. This person had come into the formation programme with all intent to become a professed religious. It has come to a point, however, that they are to withdraw from the formation programme possibly because 'it was not working out' as anticipated, or that it is possibly 'not their calling'. It is often a very difficult experience for most persons who have to discontinue in the course of their formation programme; however, those who had chosen not to discontinue but were rather advised by their formators to leave, can experience more sense of failure and threatened self-esteem. Sensitivity and empathy are highly required in this case. The formator needs to tread gently on this holy ground. What can help one is to imagine oneself in the position of this person in the process of preparation to exit. The Gospel exhortation to 'do to others as you would have them do to you' (Mt 7:12; Lk 6:31) comes in handy in these circumstances. The formator ought to be empathetic. Empathy enabled Jesus' genuine concern for people, feeling their emotions and thoughts, which consequently moved him to loving action (Lk 7:11-16; Jn. 6: 1-14; Jn. 11: 33-35; Jn. 2: 1-11). Empathetic accompaniment is needed in order to be meaningfully with a candidate on the path of departure. Empathy is a true form of giving of one's own self, which is more than one's possessions. This is a challenge and an invitation to formators at this delicate time in the life of an individual, to really give of the self - time, care and attention - to this individual at a very vulnerable time in his or her life.

4.2. *Utmost care and Gentleness*

Irrespective of the reasons for discontinuing religious formation, the individual in question needs to be dealt with gently and humanely. Undoubtedly, the more tenderly and humanely persons are accompanied in the process of leaving, the more likely there will be positive results in terms of their personal response and equanimity. In other words, persons who are shown genuine love and consideration when it comes to helping them withdraw from the formation programme are more likely to have less resentment and strong negative reactions towards the formators and the congregation. It is likely that the necessary re-adjustments and finding their way in life will be easier for them. For this reason it

is more important to work hard at building up their esteem and self-appreciation, than repeatedly harping on their shortcomings. A strong temptation that a formator could face is highlighting the weaknesses of the candidate to justify the decision and assuage feelings of inner struggle and pain that often accompany such decisions. This way of coping with the situation would produce more negative thought and reactions. It is not enough to say, 'yes, I have warned her time without number that she is heading for the door if this carry-on continues!' Formation accompaniment and discernment are not about warning. Such threats are more likely to increase the fear or self-doubt of candidates, which can lead to compliance to avoid being 'sent home'. That a person does not fit in a particular congregation does not mean that he or she is no good and cannot make an excellent life in another setting or another congregation for that matter<sup>186</sup>. It is good always to bear this fact in mind.

#### 4.3. *Be aware of the Power of words used*

Words are powerful in the force of their influence on human beings. When candidates are in the process of leaving, they usually feel vulnerable and often unsure of themselves. At times like this, a person might tend to be more sensitive to little stimuli of all kinds than they would ordinarily be. That is why it is important to be attentive to the words one uses with them at this time. If a candidate seems unsuited to a particular congregation, it is only fair to accompany and redirect him or her instead of bombarding the one with negative condemnation, judgment and 'putting down'. This is not at the service of love. 'Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you' (Eph 4: 29).

Candidates exiting from religious formation process need to be sensitively cared for and counselled. However, it seems even more important to pay special attention to those in whose case the initiative to discontinue had not come from the individual but instead from their Religious Institute. This is crucial because of the possible inclination to link their being asked to leave as a personal failure which has shaken the very foundation of their ability as a person. Giallanza therefore wisely counsels formators to "take care that their message does not diminish the person's self image or self-esteem. The decision to tell a person to depart from the formation programme is never an evaluation of his or her worth,

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<sup>186</sup> As regard the admission of seminarians coming from other Seminaries or Institutes of Formation: Cf. Congregation for Clergy, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation*, n. 198; *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*, n. 16 says: "It is contrary to the norms of the Church to admit to the seminary or to the house of formation persons who have already left or, a fortiori, have been dismissed from other seminaries or houses of formation, without first collecting the due information from their respective bishops or major superiors, especially concerning the causes of the dismissal or departure. The previous formators have the explicit duty of furnishing exact information to the new formators", *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 25 (2011), 1284; cf. can. 241, § 3; *Instruction to the Episcopal Conferences on the Admission to Seminary of Candidates Coming from Other Seminaries or Religious Families*. In some Religious Institute, the particular laws stipulate the terms and conditions for the admission of candidate or perpetually professed coming from another institute of Consecrated Life: for instance, cf. *The Constitutions and Norms of the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary* (2017), Art.66.2

goodness or loveliness..."<sup>187</sup> This is crucial, as fairness and respect for the individual are at stake.

#### 4.4. *Honest and transparent Feedback*

Formation has to be carried out in a mature way; that in the day-to-day journeying with a person, he or she is aware of what is happening at a personal level. If such is the case, when it comes to advising someone to discontinue, it will not be 'a surprise' or seem like 'an act of meanness'. Letting the candidate be in the know of why she is being advised to withdraw is important. Respectful and sensitive feedback is a prerequisite for a healthy formation process. The reason is because preparation time for exiting is not meant to be a time when a candidate is given 'a list of faults' as reasons for departure. In ideal situations, the decision to ask someone to leave is never the decision of one sole person. While accompanying a postulant, novice or one in temporary vows, and it becomes increasingly evident to the formator that exiting might be a better option for the person, it is helpful to begin letting the individual know this. Ultimately, the formator will work this through with him or her, informing that they are not going to be given a recommendation to continue. Taking such a stance is more mature than pushing it to 'a higher authority' in the congregation like the regional, provincial or general council, and finally telling the person: 'they did not give you the votes for profession' or advancement to the next stage of formation. In the course of the formation accompaniment and daily living, one is to be made aware of what is happening and how one's progress and response to formation is viewed and assessed. Formators must take the time and be clear and fair as possible in explaining the decision that has been made and what led to it. Such honest transparency helps to build trust. It makes exiting easier when or if the candidate is ultimately going to be advised to discontinue. It is regrettable that sometimes, one encounters an ex-postulant, ex-novice, ex-brother/sister or ex-seminarian who claims that they never knew the real reason for discontinuation, and it was never brought to their awareness. These allegations or claims, unfortunately, cannot always be verified. Nevertheless, whatever the case, formators are to ensure sincerity with people they accompany in their day-to-day work with them.

#### 4.5. *Finding some 'Outside help' for the candidate*

Finding some sort of 'outside help' applies especially when the person is already a professed member although where necessary, such an opportunity can be given to a postulant or novice. Sometimes, the individual might prefer to talk to a person other than her formator who is directly involved with her formation. Possible negative feelings towards the formator, the Congregation, and others can be given vent to where an opportunity to meet with a competent spiritual director has been given. This can be very helpful. Such an alternative safe and holding

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<sup>187</sup> J. Gallianza, "The Ministry of Initial Formation", in *Human Development*, Vol. 10, number 4, 1989, p 7.

place often gives the person a chance to deal with their possible overload of emotions in these circumstances.

#### 4.6. *Care of the Peers of the one leaving*

Having shared life, faith, dreams, etc. with a person, we realise that every parting evokes myriads of emotions in people considering their own different backgrounds and prior experiences in life. When a postulant, novice, a seminarian or young professed religious is leaving, the other companions on the journey are usually affected in varying degrees. It is not only the person who is leaving who experiences some emotional upset. The other companions and confreres equally feel the impact. This is to be taken seriously. It is worth reassuring the companions that God has a plan for each person and leads each on his or her journey in a unique way; that the divine plans for each one are “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jer. 29:11). Creating a safe space for them to share their feelings is helpful.

#### 4.7. *Ritualising the Transition experience*

As part of the transition that is a core element in discontinuing from formation, depending on the suitability of the situation, formators can organise some form of ritual to mark and bless the process of leaving. This can be done on one to one with the candidate leaving, if he/she is open to that; and secondly with the group or community. Depending on the atmosphere and choice of the person leaving, it could include a prayer session and some symbolic acts of honouring the time/life shared with the group in a seminary, novitiate or community (mission), moving on and entering through another wide open door of a wide range of opportunities. This can be done with the discretion and creativity of the formator, and of course with the cooperation and approval of the person leaving. Where the person does not wish to have any of these, it is better they are not imposed. However, it can be noted that in certain instances, with some encouragement from the formator, the individual in transition sometimes comes around and in hindsight, is grateful for that ritual before their exit. The pain and agony of separation and goodbye can be a reason for the resistance of engaging in this kind of undertaking. Nevertheless, it has the potential of being a healing balm for both the one leaving and the group.

#### 4.8. *Family education and involvement*

It can be helpful to initiate discussion with the candidate in preparation on how and when they want to involve their families in anticipation of their imminent exit from the formation and return home. In addition, feelings can be processed with the candidate around this. In some congregations, before the start of initial formation, parents/families of the candidates are invited to a ‘family meeting’. At these ‘family meetings’, parents are educated on what

religious/vocation discernment entails and the need for them to give their son or daughter all the support he or she needs on the journey. The opportunity is equally employed to educate them on realistic expectations of their wards in this venture. This prior preparation has helped in getting parents and family members attuned to the realities of religious formation and discernment. For some, it had helped them to welcome back their son or daughter with open arms when discernment points them to other paths in life. This has in many cases gone a long way in motivating and empowering those individuals to engage in life and live it fully after their exit from formation.

#### 4.9. *Support for the Formator*

To be cared for, as well, is the formator, the one who accompanies the person in the process of leaving the formation. Unfortunately, it is not often easy to find much support from among confreres or one's community. They too might equally be angry with the formator, that a would-have-been member is leaving. Leadership needs to be attentive to this reality. Formators also are to be aware of their need for support, and seek appropriate ways of self-sustenance at this difficult time in their ministry. Availing of spiritual direction and supervision can be very helpful. Dealing with feelings of possible guilt and self-doubt, which can sometimes plague many a good formator at this time, cannot be underestimated.

#### 4.10. *Post departure support*

Setting up a kind of good exiting counselling and support for young people who have left at various stages of a congregation's formation can be a positive venture. Some congregations have tried out setting up post-departure care of their ex-members and ex-novices, seminarians and postulants. The support can consist of not only material, but equally some form of checking in for those who might be in need of such, as well as counselling and guidance support. This might not be a simple and straightforward matter. It will definitely have financial and personnel implications. Without doubt, such a venture will be a good contribution to the life of those persons, giving them a start in their 'new' life, to face and live it meaningfully in the challenge of transition. In addition, when people are well treated and prepared before they leave, there is more opening for maintaining a good rapport and friendship with the group with whom they had shared some precious years of their lives. In fact, some of them eventually become associates of the congregation they had left, supporting them as co-workers, collaborators and benefactors in some of their missions and apostolates. Exiting from a congregation should be an experience in response to the voice of the Spirit, instead of an exercise of hatred and resentment. It is worth adding that leaving earlier rather than later in life could indeed be a blessing in disguise. For this person, there is more probability of having the time and opportunity to adjust and make another life for himself, including starting a family for those who might wish to do so.

#### 4. RELIGIOUS FORMATION IS FOR COMMITMENT AND WITNESS

As earlier hinted, in initial formation there are the four fundamental pillars: the human dimension, spiritual dimension, intellectual dimension, apostolic dimension, to which a Religious institute adds community life. These dimensions are integrated during the major stages of formation of candidates: Aspirancy /Candidacy/pre-postulancy, postulancy, Novitiate and Temporary Religious Profession, Perpetual Vows/Solemn Vows, which will be followed by ongoing formation<sup>188</sup> or, for some formandi, the departure from or leaving the Religious Institute. The formation received by candidates is for a commitment and witness to Christ and his Gospel, through love and service of the people entrusted to us today.

In this process, concretely, candidates are trained, in conformity with the *Constitutions and Norms* and the *Ratio* of their Institute, to live the Institute's spirituality and carry out its proper apostolic charism. In this context, Consecrated persons are increasingly called to live out the prophetic character of consecrated life. They appreciate the true significance of the contemporary world, and what it means to be in the world but not of the world, and to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

Faithfulness to commitment and witness to Christ may, in some cases, lead to the point of martyrdom. In practice, the formation process that candidate for Consecrated life undertake is in view of commitment and bearing witness in all the dimensions of his/her life through living a community life, in spiritual life, listening to the Word of God, in the apostolate of evangelization, in the preferential option for the poor and the promotion of justice, the promotion of life and family, in the care of the sick, in promotion of education, evangelization of culture, in the field of social communication, and so on<sup>189</sup>.

#### CONCLUSION

The Church has constantly shown concern for formation in religious institute around the world, a solicitude that intensified since Vatican Council II. This solicitude is expressed in diverse ways and through different organs. This paper discussed some of them. It also examined some of real challenges of Consecrated life and formation of candidates. The difficulties involved could "seem insurmountable and could easily lead to discouragement, if it were a question of a merely human enterprise" (*Redemptoris Missio*, §35). This is true especially for formators directly daily involved with accompaniment of candidates. The resources available for help need to be used more generously. More resources and forms of help and support need to be explored and provided.

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<sup>188</sup> Cf. Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, nn. 42-71.

<sup>189</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, nn.84-96; Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus* (2009), n.134

There is need for a greater familiarity with the Church's teachings and directives on formation.

The existing challenges are also opportunities for improvement and growth. As people of faith, formation is taken not as 'a merely human enterprise' but God's. It is God who really calls. One needs to be aware of this, and totally surrender oneself to God's guidance in this whole enterprise. At the same time, the persons responsible for formation must continually strive to carry out their delicate and important mission, be humble and courageous to undertake periodic update when needed and opportunities are offered. Sharing and mutual support among formators, even if belonging to different Religious Institutes, can be helpful.