

**FAITH DEEPENING AND INTERNALIZATION OF CORE CHRISTIAN
VALUES: A WAY FORWARD IN OUR WITNESSING AS PRIESTS AND
RELIGIOUS IN FORMATION**

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ABSTRACT

No one encounters the Lord Jesus Christ and remains the same. Today more than any other time, there is the need for formators to live up to the life and Christian values they desire to inculcate in the formandi. With the growing problems facing the priesthood and religious life and with the need to have young men and women of faith and character who identify gracefully with the life of Christ as priests and religious, this paper investigates the persuasive power of witness by those called to form men and women of our time in seminaries and houses of formation.

It argues that it is by encounter, experience and the renewal of experience of the risen Lord that the formator can deepen faith, live, witness, then "create" or inspire in the formandi a yearning for the same Lord especially, through fidelity to the living spirituality and charism of the founder of one's proper institute. In other words, It is upon this experience of Christ that faith is anchored and deepened, and that values or virtues learnt are internalised and lived. This being the case, one is able to provoke in hearts today, the desire for God, to imitate Jesus and by so doing attract others to the Lord, to the Creative Word of God.

"For to me living is Christ and dying is gain"

- (Phil 1, 21)

INTRODUCTION

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1. No one encounters the Lord Jesus Christ and remains the same. For every encounter of the Divine bears the fruit of transformation. Living this transformation, which one has become, all through the whole of life is possible and indeed guaranteed only by the power of the Divine Lord and the enabling grace of His Spirit. This transformation brings joy, and everyone who goes by the name Christian is invited to share in this transforming joy which the personal encounter of our Lord brings. This is so because such an encounter “gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” It is to this life that Pope Francis in his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, invites us all: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them... .”² The Pope’s statement reveals a relationship between God and us; a relationship that is itself initiated by God who chose to dwell with and among us by encountering us in order that we can dwell in and with him by the power of his Spirit. In the case where men and women are open to allow God in Christ to “encounter them” there also is present, the work of the same God who readies the hearts men and women to encounter and to be encountered by the Divine: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you” reads Ezekiel 36, 26 and in verse 27 of the same chapter the God of the Patriarchs says “ I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.” In this light then we can understand the exclamation of the Psalmists in his yearning for God: “you are all I want o Lord; I promise to obey your laws” (Ps 119, 57). It is then in our experience of an encounter with God that we are committed through the influence of grace to desire Him and thus to live according to the His precepts.

2. The topic before me reads: “Faith Deepening and Internalization of Core Christian Values: A Way Forward in our Witnessing as Priests and Religious in Formation”. There are two discernible parts: the first, “faith deepening and internalization of core Christian values” and the second, (and I paraphrase) inquires the way forward for priests and religious in formation in their witness to these values. The clear understanding here³ as I began researching on the topic was that I wasn’t just going to speak on faith deepening and internalizing core Christian values but also how exactly in doing *this* we can *bear witness* as priests and religious to Christ, being disciples in the first place, and then as persons who have been sent by the Lord through the Church (and by our Dioceses, particular Religious Institutes and

² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, (LibreriaEditriceVaticana: Varican City, 2013), 3.

³ To avoid the kind of research that intellectualises everything and ends up imposing unto practical situations already made-up formula, I understood the need to first throw open this topic in a discursive forum to my students and then to seniors and colleagues both in the academic and pastoral fields with the aim of understanding what exactly this could mean for us today faced with the different situations in our political, social and ecclesial world.

Societies of Apostolic Life) to be formators and guides to those in the journey of discerning their call to the priesthood and religious life; and then as persons in the formation process itself (the *formandi*). In the light of this understanding the paper therefore is primarily addressed to priests and religious who are formators or “formation guides”⁴, to those in formation who are being guided and then in general to all priests and religious (and I dare say Christians) who by their lives bear witness to the risen Lord and inspire by so doing, the hearts of young men and women to the religious life and priesthood.

3. However and by way of emphasis, I must say that at the level of initial formation, the topic, it seems to me, suggests that I concentrate more on the priests and religious who are formators and how exactly they should, today, bear witness to Christ, for the sake of those they are forming, by being good exemplars of what they hope to impart on the *formandi*. Lessons learnt on how they should bear witness, as this paper would indicate, are valid also for us all who are in the journey of on-going formation – a journey of deepening love for the Lord Jesus.

4. The path of this paper will seek first to investigate, to understand what exactly does faith deepening mean? What is *faith* and how do we *deepen it*? What are those *core Christian values*? Can these values be found also in our traditional cultures permeated by the gospel message; and can they be internalised since we, as Nigerians (and Africans) belong to the community of believers saved by the blood of Christ the Lord? What do we mean when we say *internalise*? For the call to formators to internalise gospel values today means that either something has gone wrong in our mode of witnessing or our conforming to the values of Christ, (being Christians), is *not prophetic* enough to the extent that it is not expressed and seen in what comes out of the formation system into the pastoral field of today. What are those problems then that could and are hindering this internalisation and what is the best way to proceed? The paper is addressed to priests and religious in formation meaning that it includes diocesan as well as religious formators who perform this service for the Church and in the Church. So it is right to ask if the art of training these men and women receives the attention it demands from their respective dioceses and congregations and what kind of training is given to them for this purpose today? That is, how well equipped are those who train the young to be able to be ministers of the Word and Sacraments, imitators of the life of Christ in a radical way, and followers and imitators of the life of Christ for today’s Church and world with all its challenges? What is that *force*, which in the final analysis could be instrumental in rediscovering the path of faith and living out convincingly gospel values that

⁴ In the understanding of Edward Liptak who uses it in the same sense as the word “formators.” Edward Liptak, *The Religious Formator* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Arica, 2006), 11-13.

express the truth we hold firmly and the One in whom and upon whom we have placed our hope and gaze? Henry H. Walker of the Chicago Theological Seminary, in a piece titled: "Christian Experience The Key to Christian History," published in the Harvard Theological Review of April, 1913, said: "behind every movement in the history of the church, behind every institution which she has developed for the expression and perpetuation of her life, behind every doctrine and creed, there stands a human soul which *has met God*⁵ and in the great silence, unbroken save by the cry of penitence or the exultant note of spiritual conquest, has found the path to peace."⁶

5. My humble submission therefore in this paper is, that it is by encounter, *experience* and the renewal of experience of the risen Lord can the formator deepen faith, live, witness, then "create" or inspire in the *formandia* yearning for an encounter of the same Lord primarily through the *living* spirituality and charism of the founder. It is upon this experience that faith is anchored and deepened, and that values/virtues learnt are internalised and lived; and this being the case one is able to provoke in hearts today, the desire for God, to imitate Jesus today and by so doing attract others to the Lord, to the Creative Word of God.

EXPLAINING SOME TERMS

"For I know the one in whom I have put my trust" (2 Tim 1, 12)

6. **Faith.** The word stems from the Greek word "pistos" (meaning, *believing, trusting* and signifies, in the subjective, one who is faithful, trustworthy). This word itself is anchored on the primary verb "peitho" (which means *to convince, to persuade*). In the latter sense, faith is convincing or persuading someone else, and in the former and proper sense, it is believing and trusting God as in Gal 3, 9; and the one who does so is a believer as in Acts 16, 1. Theologically, Faith is man's response to God's self-communication in Christ Jesus. The self-communication is key to the response of man. The ability to respond is anchored already in the very nature of man as one created in the image of God, and thus has the capacity for transcendence; the capacity to believe.⁷ Revelation as "the mystery of God who draws near to man in the human word of his eternal Word" and man's response of faith are both supernatural and constitute "the mystery of God's encounter with man in Christ." In this encounter God makes the first move as his inward call enables man to receive

⁵Emphasis mine.

⁶ Henry H. Walker, "Christian Experience the Key to Christian History", in The Harvard Theological Review, Vol 6, No. 2 (April 1913), pp. 172. Obtained from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1507419>. 11-06-2018 12:31 UTC.

⁷Karl Rahner, "faith", in *Sacramentum Mundi* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2010), 496.

the divine word and then, freely submits to the absolute claim of divine revelation.⁸ The Catechism of the Catholic Church further states that by faith, man completely submits his intellect and will to God and with his whole being gives his assent to God the revealer in the obedience of faith (Rom 1, 5).⁹ Thus faith is a free acceptance of the whole truth revealed by God in Jesus Christ, His beloved Son and a sharing, on account of this belief, in the Spirit of Christ who renders the very act of believing possible. So it is grace given and infused in us; it is grace unmerited; it is freedom in which the believer is enabled to believe what has been revealed and that what has been divinely communicated is true not on his own authority but on that of God.

7. Faith is therefore love. In the words of Joseph Ratzinger, it is the act of taking up a position, a trustful stand on the ground of the word of God. This position that the Christian assumes is born of an encounter with the living God who calls us and reveals his love, a love which precedes us and upon which we can lean for security and for building our lives.¹⁰ It “includes knowledge of a saving event, confidence in the word of God, man’s humble submission and personal self- surrender to God, fellowship in life with Christ, and a desire for perfect union with him beyond the grave: faith is man’s comprehensive “Yes” to God revealing himself as man’s saviour in Christ.”¹¹

Let us take note of certain key terms in this description of faith offered to us by Juan Alfaro which throws more light upon our understanding of this term and is crucial to understanding why we could speak of a *deepening of faith* in the context this presentation. Faith includes knowledge, submission and fellowship. To believe is to attain to the knowledge of the truth of the gospel message; to recognise Jesus as sent by the Father; to accept the truth of the testimony he gives of himself; seek further understanding of this truth; confess and profess his doctrine as a member of (and together with) the believing community; submit to it in freedom and love; abide by its demand and persevere in it.

7. If faith is then a decision as the Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, will confidently assert, then to *deepen our faith* therefore is to take that decision every day, to be firm in it; to gracefully grow strong in it; to make strong our cooperation with grace; to thirst constantly for righteousness; to allow grace take us deeper in love with the One we have come to know and in whom we have believed; *it is desire in act* as St. Paul will express powerfully in his third letter to the Philippians, “I want to

⁸Karl Rahner, “faith”, 500.

⁹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, (Nairobi: Paulines publications Africa, 2005), 143.

¹⁰Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, (LibreriaEditriceVaticana: Varican City, 2013), 4

¹¹Juan Alfaro, “faith” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, Edited by Karl Rahner (Mumbai: St. Paul’s, 2010), 500.

know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his suffering by becoming like him in his death” (v.10) and in v.12 and 14, where he speaks of his hope to attain the resurrection, “...but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own” and “I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.” To deepen our faith is the struggle¹² to constantly live and (advance in living) *in* the experience of my encounter with Jesus. How we can deepen faith as a way of witnessing to love will be discussed below.

8. Christian Values and Virtues. When we say “Christian values” as our topic reads, what do we mean; does it connote the same sense with virtues? I believe using the term virtue in place of value would have been more appropriate for the present discourse given (the objective end to which it tends – bearing witness to Christ) and the confusion of meaning often introduced by the term “values.” Nevertheless, we could maintain the present structure if we understand values as qualified by the term “Christian.” Hence Christian values define the being and character of a person who has been transformed by grace and upon being configured to Christ, takes upon himself/herself the life, virtues or values of Christ the Lord or as taught by him (gospel values). So the present phrasing of the topic can be maintained and is justified for even those “intrinsic/inherent values”, which are integral to the being of man and without which he is less a man, are themselves enriched by a life lived in obedience to the commands of Christ.

Virtue connotes this sense and deepens it. According to the Oxford dictionary, it points to “behaviours or attitudes that show high moral standards.” It means moral excellence; right living; goodness; a good quality or feature. It connotes a specific application to the human person in terms of that person’s nature.¹³ It derives from the Latin word, “*virtus*” which means *manliness* or *power*; hence explains the natural power or function of a thing¹⁴ though it embodies a meaning beyond this. “Every virtue says Aristotle” as quoted by Thomas Higgins, “both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the work of that thing to be well done as the excellence of the eye makes the eye and its work good...therefore the virtue of man will be a state of character which makes a man good and makes him do his work well.”¹⁵ Karl Rahner furthers this understanding by explaining virtue in the widest sense “to be any developed capacity of man’s spiritual soul, or

¹² The Didache Bible, in its commentary on this verse uses apt words to explain this desire to advance in living the life of Christ: “growing in holiness always involves our cooperation with grace and a correspondence to grace through an on-going struggle. Our eyes must be fixed on the prize, which is eternal life; therefore we must spare no effort, just as an athlete competes to reach a goal.”

¹³ Benson, “Are Values the Same as Virtues”

¹⁴ Thomas Higgins, *Man as Man: The Science and Art of Ethucs*, Revised Edition (Illionis: TAN Books and Publishers, 1992), 150.

¹⁵Ibid, 150.

the development itself” and in its narrow sense, “the power (ability, skill, facility) to realise moral good and especially to do it joyfully and perseveringly even against inner and outer obstacles and at the cost of sacrifices.”¹⁶ Virtues are categorised into intellectual and moral. And according to origin, nature, goal, and acquisition they can be natural (or acquired) and supernatural (or infused) with the latter elevating the former. There are many virtues which fall under these classifications and the business of this paper is to talk about the most important ones, the core ones which are necessary for internalisation today in order for our witness, as priests and religious, to shine forth especially in formation. All virtues, whether natural (since man is ordained towards the good) or supernatural, and man’s practice of them necessarily lead to the ultimate Good which is God himself. And it is this ultimate Good that justifies their origin and existence.

“**CONFUSING SIGNALS**”: ...*their hearts are far away from me* (Is 29:13)

9. In his Post-Synodal Exhortation on Religious Life, *Vita Consecrata*, of March 25, 1996, Pope Saint John Paul II, in analysing the difficulties faced by institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life concerning the decrease in the numbers of members and personnel for the apostolate, warned that this difficulty “must in no way lead to a loss of confidence in the evangelical vitality of the consecrated life.”¹⁷ In that same number, he expressed this point in prophetic wordings: “what must be avoided at all costs is the actual breakdown of the consecrated life, a collapse which is not measured by a decrease in numbers but by a failure to cling steadfastly to the Lord and to the personal vocation and mission.” This statement as it is true for religious and as well for priests, underscores the very fact that when witness to the life of Jesus by the priest and religious is no more or is lacking in word and deed especially, there will be a fundamental collapse of the very idea of his or personal vocation¹⁸, and mission itself will lose its meaning since it doesn’t stem anymore from a believer who is convinced of what he/she is being sent to proclaim. This

¹⁶Karl Rahner, “virtue” 1794. On the nature of values, see also Karl Peschke, *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*, Vol. 1 (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2001), 343.

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*(Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996), 63.

¹⁸ Personal vocation here means how the religious and priest *personally interprets*, identifies and lives the message and person of Jesus the master, in his/her own vocation and life. In the words of Herbert Alphonso, “it is a person – the person of Christ Jesus himself in a deeply unique way. For me” he goes on, “I can in very truth speak of “my Jesus” thus transforming my whole Christian life into what I was always taught it to be but never shown how; in very truth, a maturing, profoundly interpersonal love relationship between Christ Jesus and me – one opening out surely, unto my social responsibilities and commitments in Christian witness and mission.” Herbert Alphonso, *The Personal Vocation* Eight Edition (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2002) 38.

truth is important for us today vis-à-vis those responsible for formation. What are those signs, attitudes and behaviours that we express today in formation that are not helpful to those we form? The moment we stop living as believers in formation and cease being “familiar with the path of seeking God”¹⁹ our accompaniment of the *formandi* is in vain and we begin to send out “confusing signals” that contradict the gospel values we have been sent to instil. Fr. Cornelius Okeke, in a paper presented to the seminary rectors of the Association of Episcopal Conference of Anglophone West Africa (AECAWA), spoke about pressures on priestly formation and noted that “the pressure on formation that comes from confusing signals given by self-indulgent formators is difficult to manage.” He explains further:

“These are formators who tend towards extreme subjectivism. Because they do whatever they feel like doing in their lives, they tend to allow the seminarians to do what they feel like doing also. Their teaching and presentation of the values of religion and the priesthood [and of course religious life] appears mechanical and oftentimes seen by the students as not sincere. They could be intelligent teachers but not good formators. And though they can teach well, the values they live can do more harm than the good knowledge they impart on students. These formators do not show deep signs of the perspective of faith in their lives.”²⁰

The last point is striking: *These formators do not show deep signs of the perspective of faith in their lives.* In the Church in Nigeria, experience shows that a good number of formators sent to the seminary are not happy with such a decision from the authorities – bishops or superiors. Though they may be trained and prepared, their hearts are far away from that vocation or task. This state of affairs can have serious effects on the mental and spiritual life of the said formator to the extent that he/she has no flair for the spiritual life because fundamentally his being in formation is perceived as a punishment or an expression of the unavailability of meaningful apostolates in the diocese or congregation. Given this situation it is the case that there are seminary educators (formators) who are not so much men or women of faith or persons who see any meaning in living a life of evangelical witness especially to the vow of chastity. Seminaries and houses of formation are not the best places to house priests and religious who are causes of concern to authorities and

¹⁹ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 66.

²⁰ Cornelius UcheOkeke, “Contemporary pressures on Priestly Formation: A Formator’s perspective” in *The Challenges of Seminary Formation in our Time* Edited by Victor Onwukeme (Gwagwalada: AECAWA RECTORS, 2011), 26.

possess personalities and attitudes that can damage the life of faith in the young men and women.

10. On July 25, 2018 the Catholic world, amid the present on-going storm of sexual scandal in the Church in North America and Europe, woke up to the publication by Edward Pentin of the Catholic Register, of a letter²¹ written by 48 of the 180 students at the Our Lady of Suyapa Major Seminary, Honduras. In this letter addressed to the council of formators, the seminarians say that “we are living and going through a time of tension in our house, due to gravely immoral situations, especially an active homosexuality within the seminary which has been a taboo during all this time. And because of covering up and penalizing this situation, the problem has grown in strength, turning into, as one priest said not so long ago, an “epidemic in the seminary.”” The seminarians asked that the formators re-examine how they have acted, as the Lord has asked them to do, or as they thought they should have done, acting under “your impulses, paternalistic sentimentalism, or a false mercy that Pope Francis has pointed out very harshly.” And then further down they called on the formators to stand up to their responsibilities, and act as the Church has instructed them especially as stipulated by Canon Law and the *Ratio Fundamentalis*. What caught my attention, which is useful for this section, are the following summons to formators by these young men in dire need of mentors who are also witnesses: “Do not be afraid formation fathers to *act* according to the processes that the Church proposes, including sending away a seminarian who is very loved and a friend of yours. Always remember that compassion does not mean to cover up for a friend. True affection is shown by making the truth expressed to that person shine forth. Many times with sadness we hear many of you tell seminarians: “Don’t worry about it, I defend you.” We believe our mission is not to be defense attorneys because this house isn’t a court but a holy place, a house whose only master is Christ whom we follow and with whom we must configure ourselves. Your mission consists in showing us an example, as fathers and pastors, of how to be transformed into Christ, as St. John Eudes used to say.”

Let us pause a while on some striking points in these words and ask ourselves the pertinent question: “what went wrong?” From these words, we are made to understand that there was an existing fear on the part of formators to act; the absence of objective truth in the application of the rule and of firm will in the application of penalties even if it meant applying them to their friends; that the seminary is a holy place in which dwells Christ to whom they must configure

²¹Edward Pentin, “Letter of 48 Honduran Seminarians” <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/full-text-of-letter-complaining-of-epidemic-of-homosexuality-in-honduran-se>. Accessed on 16th October, 2018.

themselves and then finally a reminder of who the formator ought to be – an exemplar, a father (mother), a pastor and a teacher that must show them how to be transfigured to Christ.

11. Do these truths point to the present situation amongst us formators and in the formation system and process today? I humbly urge everyone here not to be quick to take offense at this letter or defend our various formation systems and process in our seminaries and formation houses but to reflect on these points with calm. When this is done, we shall come to the realisation that what these young men have pointed out is extant today, in part or in full, in our formation systems. A few examples will suffice: sometimes it is the case that truth and objectivity are lacking right from the discernment process that leads to admission of candidates into some formation houses and seminaries. In some cases this partial selection of candidates are forced upon the formation team by the authorities when they (authorities) bypass the objective process of admission.

Consequences of this express themselves in the neglect of the principle of subsidiarity, introduction and sustenance of godsons and handbags, explicit cover ups of immorality and negative behaviours and bold negligence of the vows especially that of obedience; for if the godson/daughter knows that you are answerable in the end to his/her godfather and mother, then he/she doesn't see it necessary to obey you thus making you a figure-head in that system. Now when the love for truth is lacking among formators, there cannot be unity. This is simply because everyone has interests in the students that identify with them. Lack of unity among formators is destructive to the formation system because that will teach the *formand* that we cannot actually work together either as persons of the same congregation or from different dioceses. The absence of this value strips from the formation experience a witness to communion – which actually defines the very nature of the Church. It is even more pathetic that this disunity in some cases is caused by the authorities who desire figurehead formators in the system in order to do away with those who cannot compromise that standard and so have their way in the process and advancement of students. The absence of truth is necessarily the absence of justice. We have mentioned godfatherism as a culture that has a negative impact in formation. When some students feel neglected and are made to see themselves as unimportant when compared to their colleagues who are much closer to formators, the consequence is that they immediately experience concretely a kind of injustice. And this I tell you can affect the psychological maturity of the student involved, taking away from him/her self-confidence and courage.

When asked what will be the most convincing factor in formation in relation to how they were formed or how formation is carried out, some of my students answered that it lies in the relation between formator and student. They opined that trust from formators to students is very important; and in this relationship, equal treatment and openness would help together with the eradication of master-slave leadership styles and partiality in the sense of involving favoured students in certain tasks and responsibilities and leaving others out. These negative attitudes damage the self-worth of students and speak volume of the kind of values the formator in question pays attention to. It is not the intention of this paper to “defend” the views of seminarians in relation to their formators. However it is important too that we sometimes evaluate our tasks by getting these feedbacks from those who look up to us. Where if we may ask, have the virtues of humility, fraternity and love gone to? A former formator and priest friend once told me that he wonders sometimes if some priests and sisters in formation are Christians. This is deep. Once Christian love does not define the vision and goal of formation, once love does not form the foundation of the formative process and informs the attitude and outlook of the formator to his or her students and his/her relations with them, what will be seen as a result is nothing far from tyranny. Some religious sisters in formation cannot dare to dialogue with their formators and express themselves freely and responsibly. To do this is to give the impression to the formator that the sister “has arrived” and something must happen to that effect: either the sister is put back in her position and persuaded to remain there in peace or told to leave.

12. I agree to the fact that we too are weak as humans. I also believe however, that there are certain kinds of weaknesses that should not be displayed in the seminary or formation houses which in the words of St. John Paul II should be experienced by the *formandi* as “a community, a specific ecclesial community, a community that relives the experience of the group of the twelve who were unite to Jesus.”²² Cardinal Sarah, remembering the words of the Fr. Bracquemond on what the seminary is, writes: “...no doubt, seeing my ardent desire to know God and probably impressed by my love of prayer and faithful attendance of daily Mass...asked me if I wanted to enter the seminary. He explained to me that *it was a house upheld by the prayers and affection of the Church...*a place that would prepare me and other youths to become a priest like him.”²³

Seminarians and young religious are more affected by the lives of their formators than by their erudite teachings. As young people they look for models to look up to;

²²John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications in Africa, 1992), 60.

²³Robert Cardinal Sarah, *God or Nothing* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015), 27.

virtues to emulate and imbibe; models that will help them address the doubts and confusions in their own lives especially those regarding the priestly and religious life.²⁴ “Obvious inconsistencies and public expressions of unbelief in certain aspects of priestly vocation have far reaching negative effect on them, even on the most intelligent.” What is a formator, who is not a man of faith and prayer, who does not believe and hold as true the fundamental teachings of the Church on faith and morals (e.g chaste celibacy, abortion, homosexuality, paedophilia) or see authority as gift, believes in the transforming power of the evangelical counsels; know about religious life and its place in the Church; understand the utmost importance of education in sexuality in seminaries and formation houses; the dignity of women; who is not a man and woman with a matured personality, doing in the seminary and formation house? With the present state of things in our world today especially the venomous attack on the Church and her teachings in areas of morality by the secular and subjective culture and unfortunately by pastoral agents and clergy (even of high ecclesial standing), “it is no longer enough” according to Cornelius Okeke, “to present the teachings of the Church as merely contained in the documents without personal touch”, without a life of witness; for “the heart is clever to intuit a formator who does not believe in what he[she] teaches.”²⁵

As was mentioned above, John Paul II believed that those in charge of formation should themselves be very familiar with the path of seeking God “so as to be able to accompany others on this journey” and avoid, of course creating confusing signals that deform and give the student a different kind of orientation. In pointing out the need for them to be sensitive to the action of grace, he disclosed the goal to which their task of formation is orientated which is, “to disclose the beauty of following Christ and the value of the charism by which this is accomplished”. How will they disclose this beauty? What will it take for the formator to disclose this beauty, the core values of Christ and his or her charism?

EXPERIENCE LEADS US TO A LIVELY FAITH: “I know him in whom I have come to believe” (2 Tim 1, 12).

13. Only in the drama of an encounter, the kind that breaks the soul bringing him or her face to face with how he/she no longer stands with Jesus nor lives his life, his values, and teaches his truths, and lives the counsels of chastity, obedience and poverty; only in this renewed experience can we formators witness to Jesus by our faith and lives. We have need of the Spirit of Jesus to rekindle in us the fire of his

²⁴Cornelius UcheOkeke, “Contemporary pressures on Priestly Formation: A Formator’s perspective” 26.

²⁵Ibid., 27.

love by which we are capable of kindling in the hearts of the formandi, love for Christ and an ardent desire to live him. Experience is the driving force to renewal. Priests and religious entrusted with the work of formation and those who are in the pastoral field must seek a renewed encounter with Jesus in order to be capable of witnessing. This encounter is anchored on the fact of Christian existence which is the primary element in Christianity. Christian existence precedes encounter and is that which grounds our being in God through His self-communication in Jesus Christ. Our response to this revelation is faith lived in love and a lively hope that awaits a perfect union with God to whom we tend. Christian religious experience therefore has its roots in the primal experience of Jesus Christ who has seen the Father and comes from Him (Jn 1, 18; 6, 46); such an experience is enabled by the Spirit and is at once ecclesial since the Christian herself is part of the body of Christ bonded in unity by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Such an experience doesn't cut one away from the Church nor from his or her religious congregation and diocese but furthers one's configuration to Christ in living fidelity to the charism of one's congregation.

Pope Francis believes as he writes in *Evangelii Gaudium* on the need for evangelizers to have a personal encounter with Jesus, that "a person who is not convinced, enthusiastic, certain and in love, will convince nobody."²⁶ In his book "God or Nothing" Cardinal Sarah writes in appraisal of the then missionaries and formators who on the one hand attracted him to the priesthood and on the other had formed him as he tried to answer his call to follow Christ. Asked how he would describe the spirituality passed down to him by the missionary fathers, he said, "I believe that what impressed me most profoundly, since I was very young...was the regularity of their prayer life. I will never forget the spiritual rigor of their daily routine." In his seminary years and with the transfer of the seminary to the Novitiate of the sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny in Dixinn, he remembers and writes about the concern his rector, Father Louis Barry, had as he formed them; in his words: "he was concerned about setting an example, so that our discipline, piety, and desire to become better acquainted with God would grow a little more each day."²⁷ The understanding explicit here is that by his lively faith and exemplary life that expressed belief in Jesus, Fr. Louis Barry, as understood by the Guinean Cardinal, desired to *create* an occasion and *process* of encounter with Jesus, in the hearts of his young students. *To create*, that is, that they be set ablaze too with the same love that urges the formator on as a missionary; process here is understood to be, that they learn, themselves what it means to be led by the God they were to encounter. The Apostles said to Jesus after seeing him pray fervently in love: "Lord teach us how to pray!" (Lk 11, 1).

²⁶Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium*, (Vatican City: LibreriaEditriceVaticana, 2013), 266.

²⁷Robert Cardinal Sarah, *God or Nothing*, 3.

Without his primary pastors – the Holy Ghost Fathers – and his formator, Louis Barry, who themselves were convinced about Christ and in love with him, the Cardinal may not have had the chance to experience the Lord and have his life forever transformed for love and service.

14. The Samaritan woman in John 4, 1-41 did not leave Jesus the same. That dialogue which ensued in their encounter furthered into a dialogue of faith which proceeded into conversion and then, a burning desire stemming out of freedom, to proclaim her redemption just experienced in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. A re-encounter with Jesus by religious and priests cannot leave us the same; there has to be a *metanoia* – a complete transformation that brings us to a *living faith* – an everyday praying and listening to Jesus; an everyday walking with Jesus, His Church and with our brothers and sisters in community; and the daily decision to say “yes”, to the life of the beatitudes, to not walk away from the Incarnate Word as did the young rich man at the proposal by Jesus of a radical followership. This is what faith deepening means. Sr. Evelyn Schumacher furthers this meaning – “it is deliberately committing our whole being to the guidance and power of Jesus Christ who works in us through his Spirit.”²⁸

To re-encounter Jesus, to experience anew the living Word and attain a deepening of faith and of love, what must we do? The question brings to mind that of the rich young man who sought from Jesus what exactly he must do to enter the kingdom. The question in as much as it reveals a yearning in him to be perfect also expressed his desire for something deeper; a new kind of commitment. There are various ways laid down by the Church for a renewal of our experience with Jesus and a deepening of faith; I find however, and this is what I put forward to you all, the *Spiritual Exercises* done according to the method of St. Ignatius of Loyola as one of the most effective pathways to encounter Jesus anew and to deepen faith in Christ and in his Church today. Some of us are well acquainted with this. There is the need however to rediscover its efficacy in turning around hearts and minds in a radical way towards Christ and the living out of his commandments. Except it is being undervalued by the one who undertakes it or seen ordinarily as one of those retreats done to fulfil all righteousness from which one comes out the same, then one cannot hope to gain anything positive from it. The results if taken seriously by the one who does it, necessarily leads to the awakening of faith and love for Christ and in his or her commitment to the demands of the gospel, the commandments of God and the life of Christ. As one of the ways we can re-experience the divine, the spiritual

²⁸Evelyn Ann Scumacher, *Holiness The Heart Of Renewal: The Lasting Legacy of Pope John Paul II's Message to Religious* (Institute on Religious Life, 2005), 27-28.

exercises is that pathway in which the soul journeys in the “grip of grace” through the scriptures unto freedom in the Holy Spirit. *It is a method of Christian prayer and entry into the freedom of the gospel.* In more precise terms, by spiritual exercises is meant, every method of examination of conscience, of vocal and mental prayer, and of other spiritual activities by which the soul is prepared and disposed to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul.²⁹ Its purpose is to lead one “to the conquest of self and the regulation of one’s life in such a way that no decision is taken under the influence of any inordinate attachment.”³⁰ *At the heart of the spiritual exercises lies the individual seeking to be transformed by the love of Christ.* Its dynamics, from the principle and foundation, conversion and discipleship, contemplation of Christ and the choice to follow him (and configuring oneself to His virtues) to union with Christ, helps the one seeking the Lord to journey in freedom with the knowledge that in this journey of encounter, the Lord accepts me the way I am in order to make me in the end who he desires me to be. The desire of the one transformed is encapsulated in a prayer of total abandonment composed by St. Ignatius:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.

You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.³¹

If you ask me to word my experiences, though ineffable, when I made the exercises, as it is usually said, I would simply say, I encountered *merciful love*.

15. The Spiritual exercises have the effect of both a transforming experience and one that deepens faith. There are other ways by which we, priests and religious in formation can *deepen our faith* in order to be witnesses to Christ; I find these four spiritual values, however, very central for an enduring friendship with Christ in love: life of prayer; reverence for God, familiarity with the word and love for the

²⁹Louis J. Puhl, *The spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on the Studies in the Language of the Autograph* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1951), 1.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 11

³¹<https://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/prayer/traditional-catholic-prayers/saints-prayers/suscipe-prayer-saint-ignatius-of-loyola>. Accessed on 29th October, 2018.

Eucharist; living the evangelical counsels and sincere commitment to the charism of the Founder.

Life Of Prayer

16. "Anyone in love desires to commune long and lovingly with the beloved." Priests and religious in formation cannot dispense with this most important spiritual value – prayer. Since we have been transformed anew in love through a process of encounter, we must now seek to keep step with the Master, to keep *being in love* with him. Constancy in prayer is needed to be docile to the God who uses us to accomplish his tasks in those who are formed. If faith is love, as we saw in the preceding lines, then prayer and familiarity with the word of God in scriptures, are the most valid expressions of that love. I propose here that, as it is important to develop a life of prayer personally, the community of formators should create time to pray together at least once a week. This experience was introduced by the rector of our formation house on a certain day; and I tell you that it has been most efficacious in binding us together and entrusting in faith our work and its process to Christ. It has also established in my consciousness another way of seeing my responsibility: formation is also a spiritual task for which strength is needed otherwise we lose focus and think it in purely human terms. This communal attitude of praying together is most effect as by it we bear witness to faith and our communion with the Father through Jesus Christ and to the Church's unity in the Spirit. Students cannot not be touched deeply by this witness to faith.

Reverence for God

17. Faith deepening seeks also to put God first. In an age of the "crisis of God", priests and religious in formation must sustain the culture of the sense of the sacred, of awe for the Divine and of deep reverence for God by immersing oneself in constant and silent adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Our deep sense of the sacred expresses our faith and deepens it. It is easily seen by those we form and concretely in our taking great care of those things that deal directly with God especially our worship of Him in the Liturgy. Spiritual virginity, interior silence and a necessary solitude are the most suitable rocks upon which we build our lives with God in an intimate experience with him.³² Neatness, godliness, prudence, modesty

³²Robert Cardinal Sarah, *God or nothing*,124.

and joy express the formator's respect for and deep faith in God; for the "educator who lives by faith teaches more by what he is than by what he says."³³

Familiarity with the Word and Love for the Eucharist

18. Familiarity with the word of God is essential to understanding one's identity in Christ, and his or her call to follow him. Constant dwelling upon the word makes conversion easy in detaching us from evil and nourishing our hearts with thoughts of God so that our faith as a response to the word becomes a new basis for judging and evaluating persons and things, events and problems.³⁴ One powerful thing familiarisation with the word does for the formator and for priests and religious is that it reminds us that we are on a journey of *becoming* and it is Christ in his word that bring that to manifestation. It breathes into us reverence for God and His name.

The extent to which we have reverence for God is the extent to which it will define the seminary atmosphere and be learned by the students. Priests and religious especially those in parishes and the pastoral field can deepen faith by the way they celebrate the Eucharist and see to the neatness of all that is used for worship. "The Holy Mass" says Cardinal Sarah "must be treated with dignity, beauty and respect. The celebration of the Eucharist requires first a great silence, a silence inhabited by God." Some years ago while I served in a parish on Sunday, I was told to go and bring the Blessed Sacrament from the tabernacle. Upon getting there, I was irritated at the sight of maggots big enough to have been seen and removed if the pastor had considerable and holy attention. These unfortunately were present also in the Sacred Hosts! Is it not true that chapels in convents are neater and dignifying than those in the rectories of some parishes? This by no means should be the case. We deepen faith when we celebrate Mass and carry out worship in the liturgy with reverence, attention, serenity and care since the priest is himself the custodian of these mysteries.

Living the evangelical counsels and sincere commitment to the Charism of the Founder

19. By our profession of the evangelical counsels, religious as well as priests already are in the business of faith deepening and witnessing because we all have taken upon ourselves in a decisive and radical way, the very life of Christ. Fidelity to the evangelical counsels in the midst of daily temptations to act to the contrary is a powerful witness that doesn't go unobserved by students in formation and of course

³³ Vatican Congregation For Catholic Education, *Directives Concerning the Preparation of Seminary Educators* (1993), 27.

³⁴ John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 47.

members of the Church and society. Fidelity to the vows go side by side with fidelity to the charism. The former makes the life of Christ shine forth through us and the latter prophetically brings our charism at the service of the body of Christ. Indeed priests and religious in formation, by their witness ensure not only the internalisation of the charism by the young but also extend to generations to come, the identity of the congregation. One of the powerful ways of deepening faith and witnessing through fidelity to the charism is by frequent study of the Constitutions and norms and the directory of our Congregations, and the conscious effort to live by it in love and communion with other members of our proper institutions.

If what has been outlined above is taken seriously and put into practice, then the question of internalising core Christian values has already been attended to. For to allow ourselves be transformed by Jesus in encounter and to commit ourselves in lively faith to his teachings, is necessarily to live the very life of Christ in the spirit and adopting as ours, his very standards such that we can say, together with St. Paul, "It is no longer I who live but it is Christ who lives in me. This life that I live now, I live by faith in the Son of God" (Gal 2:20). I will try therefore in the following pages to briefly outline some core values (I believe are important for our consideration today) and how we can witness to them as pastoral agents and persons entrusted with the formation of young men and women to the religious life and priesthood.

WITNESSING TO CORE CHRISTIAN VALUES IN FORMATION TODAY

20. Christian virtue, properly speaking, takes its orientation from Christ and is fulfilled in him. Christian theological tradition differentiates between those virtues that are theological (faith, hope and love) and moral. The former are supernatural (infused) as they are bestowed by God in his self-communication to us³⁵ and the latter are natural as they perfect human character, and are developed by correct and constant practice in accordance with the nature of those powers and their acts. The theological virtues, including the ways as listed above by which faith is deepened are the orientation of natural virtues and their faculties towards God. The latter on the hand include prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, known traditionally as the cardinal virtues and other virtues that orientate man to the good and the Christian to blessedness in Christ. These other values include those that are traditional to us Nigerians and do not contradict those of the gospel but are instead

³⁵Karl Rahner, "Virtues", 1794.

elevated by it, such as respect for the elderly; communal living; discipline; sacrifice; etc. To the extent we cooperate with grace and deepen our configuration to Christ, priests and religious must strive daily in the growth and practice of virtue as our response to love the one who has called us in Christ Jesus.

The New Evangelization, as the pathway to prophetically proclaim the faith and reawaken in hearts the fire of love for our Lord, “will be effective if it proclaims from the rooftops what it has first lived in intimacy with the Lord.” It is against this background I proceed to discuss some of those central values we must fan to flame and bear witness to in carrying out the work of formation today: Love, Mercy and Truth, Unity/communion.

21. *Love.* “God is Love; and those who abide in love, abide in God, and God abides in them.” Love is the greatest of all virtues and that which defines our adoption as sons and daughters; and of course as friends of Christ for he has made known to us all he has learnt from his Father. Priests and religious in formation, and pastoral agents inclusive, should carry out their task of forming from the viewpoint of love. Their task is not only to guide the growth of the *formandi* towards wholeness but also attract him or her, in joy, to the life of Christ as expressed in the charism and spirituality of the Founder and lived by members in that very congregation or diocese. Being in love with Jesus should change our outlook to formation. Love should define their tasks and how we approach the students under our care. A formator who does not, from the onset, approach his or her students with love, and respect the very fact that they, through the grace of the Spirit, have responded to discern their vocation in that proper institute or society of apostolic life, will see his task negatively to the extent that he is more preoccupied in looking for control, failures and faults, offenders and lawbreakers to dismiss, other than to “mould”, accompany students to their desired maturity. Love in this sense and in relation to the formator, flows from the possession of “a good, mature affectivity³⁶” understood “as the capacity to love and to allow oneself to do so in a right and purified way.”³⁷ It is simply Christian love that sees Christ in the other as a fellow human being; not as in the context of a master-slave relationship or constant suspicion from the formator to the student. It asks us to be humane in our guiding and forming.

³⁶ “He who is affectively mature will never bind others to himself; instead he will be able to form in them an equally self-giving affectivity concentrated and founded on love received from God in Jesus Christ and in the end always referred to him.” ³⁶Vatican Congregation For Catholic Education, *Directives Concerning the Preparation of Seminary Educators*), 5.

³⁷Ibid.

The attitude of love sustains the method and process of accompaniment needed to guide the young today as shown in the *Instrumentum Laboris*³⁸ of the just concluded Synod of Bishops and in the *Directives For Formation In Religious Institutes* where it refers to the one entrusted with the responsibility of formation as “requiring inner serenity, availability, patience, understanding, and a true affection for those who have been confided to [his] pastoral responsibility” (n.31). The attitude of love towards the process of formation gives a new meaning to it in that formation is not geared towards *perfection* but *maturity*: rigidity gives way to modest discipline and patience; pretence to authenticity and sincere internalisation of Christian values; feelings of oppression, control and negative tensions to responsible freedom, and sadness to joy - the kind that liberates the mind and heart. This joy allows the person to commit himself/herself consciously to the goal of formation, which is priestly identity³⁹ on the one hand, and for the religious men and women, configuration to Christ.

22. *Truth and Mercy*⁴⁰. “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14, 6) says Jesus to Thomas the Apostle; and in the gospel of Luke 9, 56, he says, “the Son of man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.” Truth and Mercy are personified in the Incarnate Word. These Divine attributes belong to the very nature of God. Priests and Religious conformed to Christ through a process of encounter and conversion, consent to live “in the truth” that is, in the simplicity of a life in conformity with the Lord’s example, abiding in his truth. And like Jesus who is the “merciful face of the Father” we are disciples who show mercy and are compassionate to others since we ourselves have received it unmerited. Jesus affirms through the parable of the ruthless servant, that mercy is not only action of the Father but is a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are.⁴¹ Mercy and truth are today very important virtues to internalize and witness to in relation to ecclesial authority at different levels and magisterial teachings of the Church. This is so especially in the face of changing circumstances in our world, and also in the current conversation that seems to be defining the doctrinal and pastoral discussions in the Church today.

³⁸The Synod of Bishops, “Young People, The Faith and Vocational Discernment” *Instrumentum Laboris for Synod 2018*, 133,134,135.

³⁹Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (2016), 30.

⁴⁰I refer the reader to the interesting article of Oseni recently published by the Catholic Voyage. Oseni Ogunu, “Mercy and Truth Shall Meet Together For Renewal and Fidelity In the Church” in *The Catholic Voyage* Vol. 14 (Enugu: Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria, 2018), 6

⁴¹Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2015), 9.

Oseni Ogunu, in an article published in the *Catholic Voyage* titled, "Mercy and Truth shall Meet together for renewal and fidelity in the Church"⁴² observes two currents that seem to pit themselves against each other in their understanding and acceptance of the pastoral style in the Pontificate of Pope Francis and the path of program of reform going on in the Church today. On the one hand, "it is claimed that an insistence on mercy distorts, contradicts or deviates from the truths the Catholic Church proclaims." Those against whom this accusation is labelled are termed liberals. And they are accused of misleading and creating a state of ambiguity, confusion in the Church. On the other hand, the conservatives are alleged to be legalistic, insensitive to the sufferings and pains of people or accused of being ignorant and uncaring of the agony that real life and plights of persons and members of one's religious institute and family sometimes imposes and thus they lack mercy and compassion. The consequences this conversation leads to is first, the impression that both virtues are opposed to each other, and second, that the Christian communities in different local Churches are expected either to uphold solely the truth as that which ultimately matters or the proclamation and practice of mercy interpreted as key to Christian life and essential to the gospel. Oseni believes that a one way approach is destructive to the conversation and could be misleading considering the complex nature of the situation. He concludes, through an investigation of the relationship between truth and mercy⁴³, *that religious, as consecrated persons and as agents of pastoral formation, have a role to play in the ensuing conversation by witnessing through the evangelical counsels and the ministry of education, to the inseparability of truth and mercy which themselves are integral to the gospel of Christ.*

Without going into critical investigations on the content of Oseni's piece, I want to simply and deeply appreciate and identify with the intended goal of that article (as stated above in italics) and the witness to objectivity it seeks to proclaim and present; and consequently draw out the implications therein that is vital for our instruction and awareness in this discourse of witnessing to core Christian values.

Priests and Religious in the Church in Nigeria cannot stay in the background or remain silent in the face of theological and pastoral problems either at the intellectual level or at the practical level. We must "awake the world" by our witnessing to truth and mercy. Acknowledging the contributions of some

⁴²OseniOgunu, "Mercy and Truth Shall Meet Together for Renewal in the Church" 67-125.

⁴³ The investigations on mercy carried out in this article is all the more to be appreciated as it leans on the theological expositions on that virtue by Ven. Bruno Lanteri – Founder of the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary and one who is well known with the phrase, "NuncCoepi" which is the *cardo* upon which his treatises on mercy is anchored. CfThe book of Fr Timothy Gallgher, OMV, *Begin Again: The Life and Spiritual Legacy of Bruno Lanteri.*

theologians on this topic, more research, study and enlightenment need to be done in order that the faithful and those we form may come to a balanced understanding of issues which boarder on faith and morals, on doctrine and praxis today especially does that define our cultural experiences in Nigeria. Witnessing to truth and mercy in the context of the on-going conversations, by our very lives is important in order to clear the “confusion” in the church and help the people of God remain faithful to the teachings of the Church. On this note, I appreciate the vital contributions of the Ibadan Ecclesiastical Province in two publications released this year on marriage and human life.

Just as Pope Francis says that everyone is called to be holy⁴⁴, so too the business of keeping the people of God informed, catechising them and exposing a balanced picture concerning the inseparability and interconnectedness of truth and mercy, of doctrine and praxis, of faith and life, as espoused by the living magisterium of the Church and by the special exercise of theologians must be furthered and taught *too* by the laity (as pastoral agents), Consecrated men and women, members of Institutes of Apostolic life and those in formation (formators, formandi either in initial or on-going) in a prophetic way to the people of God in our day in such a way that does not exclude one aspect in favour of the other. Thus we are called to witness by proclaiming and teaching,

- The truth of God in a world that is fast replacing God with “gods” especially in the sphere of morality and material possessions.
- Right doctrine according to the teachings of the universal and ordinary magisterium of the Church with special attention to those presented by the CBCN on certain matters that affect the faithful in Nigeria.
- The truths in the Constitutions and Norms and the charism of one’s proper Institute. This is important especially in formation houses and should be done in the pedagogical process of formation rather than being solely confined to the Novitiate or spiritual year. The goal is to enable constant familiarity by the student with the words, life and understanding of the charism taking into cognizance the signs of the times and how he/she can give an effective witness.
- The Church’s teaching on homosexuality (and sexual behaviours that define the LGBT movement) since it is a recurrent issue in the Church today. This is an endemic problem not just in the churches of the West but also in Africa and Nigeria. We cannot pretend that it doesn’t plague us nor can we remain mute and indifferent to its growth. Our witness to truth and mercy demands

⁴⁴Francis *GaudeteetEsultate* (Vatican City: Libreria EditriceVaticana, 2018), 14. Also read nn 11-13.

that scholarly research be carried out on this moral problem as it exists in our society and I dare say in seminaries and houses of formation so that we may understand better how to deal with it and what practical initiatives can be set up to accompany effectively these persons (who include seminarians, sisters and some formators themselves) other than ignoring it and repeating its formulation in the catechism whenever the issue is raised. Our witness to mercy will be most effective if superiors and bishops can train personnel even among the laity or lay members of their associations who can effectively begin a ministry of accompaniment that will seek to aid our brothers and sisters in this irregular situation on the path of healing and balanced sexual integration. Again whatever pastoral initiative that is set up must incorporate the truth of their situation and present Christ's loving call to conversion and trust in his saving grace and mercy. Our approach in this endeavour cannot assume the same content, in my opinion, with that of the Jesuit priest, Fr. James Martin⁴⁵, but can learn something of his method.

Also there is the need to re-evaluate the courses taught in seminaries and houses of formation. This is important in order to furnish the student with a clear knowledge of concrete issues he/she is expected to handle society and in mission areas. Could courses such as sexuality⁴⁶, Religious life, collaborative ministry, diocesan spirituality, theology of the family, family ministry, pastoral ministry to politicians, ministry to persons in irregular family and sexual situations etc be introduced in the curriculum and given the status of major courses?

Clarity on the *meaning* and the consequent demands or exigencies of vocation and discernment⁴⁷ is another important area our witnessing to the values of truth and sacrifice, celibacy and chastity should come to bare. With the present mentality of the age in which we are vis-à-vis the idea of the priesthood, religious life and

⁴⁵Fr James Martins, SJ is Jesuit priest and editor of AMERICA, an online magazine. He dedicates his ministry to the pastoral accompaniment of what he terms, the LGBT community and with his recent book on Building Bridges, argues for a more integral acceptance of LGBT persons, as they are, in the Church other than what is proposed by the Catechism of the Catholic Church in its doctrinal and formulations and pastoral indications. His views are very controversial and his teachings on these issues contradict the magisterial teachings of the Church on the issue of homosexuality. I do not propose his teachings here but in the spirit of truth believe that the method of his accompaniment of these persons and not his teachings and content of his catechesis could be studied to understand how, if fused with the right teachings of the Church, can enrich accompaniment of persons with homosexual behaviours in the Church and society. I refer you to some articles: <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2018/08/29/fr-james-martin-is-not-thinking-with-the-church/> and <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2018/08/fr-martins-false-comfort>. Read also Sarah, God or Nothing, 159-160.

⁴⁶The writer is aware that some of these courses are already being taught in some seminaries but encourages that it be taught in all as they boarder on concrete issues that affect men and women in society today.

⁴⁷ On discernment please read *Instrumentumlaboris*, of the Youth Synod, 107-108 and 116-117 on conscience.

marriage, a critical re-evaluation of the meaning of vocation understood by young people is needed. The “start of a reform” according to Cardinal Sarah “must concentrate on Catholic schools and seminaries” and should begin, I believe, in our ability as formation guides to know, in the words of Cornelius Okeke, what “belief-systems” or values young men and women and seminarians hold unto as they seek entrance to seminaries and houses of formation; and what beliefs about the priesthood and the evangelical counsels seminarians temporary professed members form and possess at the cognitive level during the stage of initial formation.

23. *Unity and Communion.* “A community will be what its members make it.” Unity and communion are values that define our traditional cultures and lives as Africans. The famous saying of the great African philosopher, J.S. Mbiti – “I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am” traditionalizes the African concept of communion as natural to man; that is, it is in the nature of the African man and woman to be communal and to live, as a consequence in unity with his brothers and sisters. The evangelical counsels (as our profession to radically live the life of Jesus simply) enriches this concept in the light of faith with the effect that it extends the concept of brotherhood as a bond not only held together by same blood of the members of one’s clan but through (and this is decisive), the waters of baptism in Christ, is also held with the members of other clans, tribes, peoples, nations and race. Irrespective of tribe and tongue, our witness to unity and communion must first be expressed in our personalities and show us to be in the first place, men and women of communion; that is, with the capacity to relate and be in peaceful union with others yet respecting the grace of individuality. For Pope St. John Paul II, this capacity is fundamental to the learning, internalisation and living out of Christian values such as, honesty, prudence, hospitality, service, generosity, effective communication, dialogue, listening, solidarity, forgiveness, compassion and of course love as the crown of them all. To this effect our witness to this fundamental value should be expressed in,

- Our communal relationships with one another in community. Where everyone is treated with love and not discriminated against.
- The effort to eliminate the crisis of collaboration in pastoral ministry, in its understanding and exercise by priest and religious especially those engaged in pastoral services in dioceses as clarified by Akinwale⁴⁸ and the need for

⁴⁸ Anthony Akinwale, “Consecrated Life And The Challenge Of Collaborative Ministry In The Church,” in *Consecrated Persons and mutual Relations: The Dynamics of Collaboration Within the Ecology of Mission*, Edited by Anthony Kanu, 35-45; and John Onayekan, “Collaborative Ministry With The Religious In The Local Church” in *Consecrated Persons and mutual Relations: The Dynamics of Collaboration Within the Ecology of Mission*, Edited by Anthony Kanu, 52-55.

religious especially sisters to renew their understanding of collaborative ministry in relation to social services in dioceses as noted by Cardinal Onayekan.⁴⁹ In both cases and in the light of the ensuing discourse on faith deepening and internalisation of care Christian values, priests and religious, are encouraged to map out practical guidelines that reflect the real situation in both instances present practical guidelines that are acceptable by the parties involved.

- Effective collaboration with the Bishops. It is important to collaborate with the Hierarchy of the Church especially in respecting their decisions when it comes to approving or not approving new religious communities and congregations with questionable intentions and unstable foundations. Given the collaboration between the Bishops and Conference of Major Superiors in Nigeria in screening and identifying religious foundations according the guidelines of the CBCN, what still needs to be looked into are (i) the case when it is a bishop himself who is founding the congregation and does not follow due process and meets the requirements and (ii) the case of prospective founders who, refused permission in Nigeria, go to other countries in Africa to found their congregations with permission from the Bishop there and then return to Nigeria asking a Bishop to work in his diocese or establish a community.⁵⁰ More studies are to be done concerning this situation by the CMSN/NCWR in collaboration with the bishops with the help of the Canon Law Society of Nigeria.

Unity in the formation community. “The bonds that are created in the seminary between formators and seminarians and between seminarians themselves must be marked by a sense of fatherhood and fraternity.”⁵¹This unity is first and foremost among formators; for the inability of formators to work together may be itself the first witness impressed in the minds of the *formandi* against unity and collaborative ministry. It is a disservice for individual authorities of any congregation or society of apostolic life to inappropriately influence the 1. The admission of candidates into houses of formation; 2.The process of formation in favour of any candidate; 3. Instigate disunity among formators in order to have control over them or elicit from one party a loyalty that has nothing to do with gospel obedience according to the teachings and understanding of our Lord and the spirit of our Constitutions and Norms; 4. The work of formation as entrusted to the community of formators under

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰John Onayekan, “Collaborative Ministry With The Religious In The Local Church” in *Consecrated Persons and mutual Relations: The Dynamics of Collaboration Within the Ecology of Mission*, Edited by Anthony Kanu

⁵¹Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (2016), 52.

the guidance of the proper rector of that seminary or formation house. Our witness to unity and love must begin here with the right intention to formation and with the respect of the principle of subsidiarity by the government in relation to the formators.

The Superiors General, assisted by their Council members, is primarily responsible for promoting the formation of the religious in their respective Congregation. The Major Superiors and Delegates should promote the directional unity of all the communities of formation, determined by the Congregation's own spirit and methods. Like the Diocesan Bishop in the local church, the Major Superiors are primarily responsible for the admission of candidates to the seminary or formation houses. This responsibility is expressed in the choice of Rector and of members of the community of formators, the preparation and approval of the Statutes, the program of formation and the rule of life. The major Superiors are also to see, in the spirit of love, Trust, justice, and responsibility towards the whole Church and the Institute, that the formators are doing their work well according to the Institute's Constitutions and Norms/Directory and the *ratio*. In matters concerning the students and their proper formation, formators are to be given the just freedom to do their work in the day-to-day running of the Formation community not negating the presence of effective collaboration between authorities which is needed to stem abuse of any kind. The Major Superior should be attentive not to exercise his authority in a way that undermines the Rector and other formators in their discernment of vocations of the candidates and of their adequate preparations. Rather, he should make frequent personal contact with those in charge of the Seminary or formation house, placing his trust in them, so as to foster a spirit of full harmony, communion and cooperation.

That a few persons identify with the vocation to be formators express the negative mentality about being a formator or the environment of formation in Nigeria. If this reigns in any institute, then it is a sign that the authorities should begin to change their mentality of how formators are treated and what necessary ways they could be assisted in doing their jobs. We must change that culture not by having only formators who are passionate and prepared for their tasks but also by having authorities who passionately care for those who see to the kind of men and women that come out to the field of mission.

CONCLUSION

24. I hope that in this presentation, I have been able to show that it is by encounter, *experience* and the renewal of experience of the risen Lord can priests and religious

especially those in formation, deepen faith, live, witness, then “create” or inspire in the *formandi* a yearning for an encounter of the same Lord primarily through the *living* spirituality and charism of the founder. It is upon this experience that faith is anchored and deepened, and that values/virtues learnt are internalised and lived; and this being the case, one is able to provoke in hearts today, by attraction in witness, the desire for God, and to identify with the lifestyle, the beatitudes of the kingdom of heaven. The discourse presented herein is not an exhaustive treatment of the topic and the themes present; it has only mapped out paths for continuing discussions and theological dialogue on the various themes: “encounter”, “experience”, “faith deepening”, “virtues”, “values”, “Christian values”, “internalisation” “formation”, “consecrated and apostolic life” and “witness.” In general it has contributed, I believe, to the overall theme of new-evangelization.

Docility and our openness to the Spirit of God ensure our path to renewal, and that despite all odds, we tire not but press on to our goal in solidarity and love with all men and women of good will, to the attainment of the true and good. Thus there is no better way to end this piece than to be encouraged by the exhortation of the Apostle to the Gentiles: “*finally brothers, fill your minds with whatever is truthful, holy, just, pure, lovely, and noble. Be mindful of whatever deserves praise and admiration. Put into practice what you have learned from me*” (Phil 4, 8-9a).