

BEING A PRIEST AND PROUD TO BE

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ABSTRACT

Among the things that a priest can enjoy as a human person and a citizen of this world and a citizen of a state where he lives is the right to be a priest. Not only that he possesses this right from the divine mandate given to him at his priestly ordination, he also has the civil liberty to join any legitimate association of his choice. The United Nations charter on the fundamental human rights protects the priest, as does every citizen of the world or a state, to live unhindered by any person or group. All that the priest needs is live within the boundaries of just laws and he will be just fine and happy. For that reason, the article examines the life of a priest in light of his expectations and responsibilities that protect and promote his identity. "Man, know thyself, and you are going to know the gods," is an ancient Greek aphorism that is so relevant to being a Catholic priest. A priest who understood his calling is more likely to be a priest with pride and for Christ. This article portrays some aspects of the priestly life as well as positive actions that support the right to enjoy being a priest. The article shows how a priest's identity is inseparably connected with his identity with Christ. The priest's identity with Christ is enhanced through fidelity to the evangelical counsels (obedience, chastity, and poverty) and ongoing self-improvement in human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formations.

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PRIESTLY IDENTITY IS A RIGHT

The priest has right to live fully as priest. In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly, in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed 30 fundamental human rights that should be universally protected. Each of them is strikingly important. Each is universal, inviolable, and inalienable. "Universal because they are present in all human beings, without exception of time, place or subject. Inviolable insofar as they are inherent in the human person and in human dignity and because it would be vain to proclaim rights, if at the same time everything were not done to ensure the duty of respecting them by all people, everywhere, and for all people. Inalienable insofar as no one can legitimately deprive another person, whoever they may be, of these rights, since this would do violence to their nature."¹ Although each of the articles in the United Nations declaration of human rights has its pride of place in the most urgent and needed effort to identify and proclaim the fundamental rights and dignity of each individual person, article 18 is the most pertinent to our discussion here. It states, "Everyone has the right to

freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”² Based on the universality, inviolability, and inalienability of human rights, freedom of religion gives each individual the right to teach, practice, worship according to, and observe his or her religion. Therefore, a priest can only live to his highest potential and express his humanity in its purest form if he fully expresses his religion within the bounds of faith, justice and reason and without legitimate interference with another. Such right brings us to the life that each priest is called, and to how proper response to it could foster the perfection of the person’s vocation to serve God and humanity.

The identity of a priest is that way of life that enables him to say to himself and to others who his is. Like everything in life, it is important for a priest to understand who he is called to be; to be self-aware, without which it will be difficult for him to live like one. Pope Benedict XVI wrote, “The theme of priestly identity...is crucial to the exercise of the priestly ministry, today and in the future. In an epoch like our own, so "polycentric" and inclined to blur every conception of identity, deemed by many contrary to freedom and democracy, it is important to keep clearly in mind the theological particularity of the Ordained Ministry to avoid succumbing to the temptation to reduce it to the prevalent cultural categories.”³

Priestly identity can never be more pertinent than in today’s Nigerian church and society due to the socio-economic, religious, and technological changes in the country. The socio-economic setup in Nigeria produces an imbalance of the haves and the have-nots and nothing in-between. Sometimes the priorities and values of the haves seem to be at odds with the have-nots. The priest has to make the right decision to carry along both sides without losing his identity either by being influenced by the moneybags or siding with the poor to the detriment of the haves. The religious crisis is another volatile situation that requires an intelligent handling. Threats by some religious extremists could suggest to a priest that he does not have the right to practice his own religion. However, as one called to serve Christ, the priest, even in the face of such unconscionable circumstances, has an image and a calling to protect. Technology is another area of life that is transforming every person and profession in Nigeria. Some aspects of the technological transformation stand at obvious odds with the Catholic priesthood. For instance, the music, media, and movie industries feed the public with floodgates of sensations that make it hard for so many people to sieve the truth from the fad; or in some cases, are completely false and misleading. The manipulation of information also falls in the same category. Some newsbytes, video clips, and Photoshop that are sometimes doctored and put out to capture a certain audience are not necessarily true. But the public is more attracted to them due to their great appeal and sensationalism. It is in such challenging situations that the priest is expected to stay on course and be without sway like the public who sponges on such information and go headlong to embrace it. The priest needs to stay convinced of the truth.

The identity of a priest as a man of God remains at the basis of the priesthood. This identity is expressed in so many ways that one can only share a few of them here.

We will recall the fundamental doctrinal elements that are at the centre of the identity, spiritual life and ongoing formation of priests that may help deepen the meaning of being a priest and heighten his exclusive relationship with Jesus Christ. There will be special mention of the Christological dimension of the priest's identity, as well as communion, friendship and priestly fraternity, which are considered vital goods in light of their impact on a priest's existence. Another area of emphasis will be the priest's spiritual life insofar as it is founded on the Word and the Sacraments. Finally, we will discuss about the ongoing formation of priests that is understood as a source of assistance for deepening the meaning of being a priest, and thereby joyfully and responsibly living one's vocation. It is believed that true identity and freedom of every priest is most safeguarded by his faithful adherence to the authentic priestly life.

i. Christological Dimension of the Priest's Identity

Is not uncommon to hear people tell a priest that he is their visible God, or that he is the one closer to God than the rest of us. People immediately see Christ in every priest. They give him the respect that he is their representative before God. As stated in the Bible, he was "taken from among men and made their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Heb.5:1). Christ is the Priest, Master, Sanctifier and Pastor of his people.⁴The ministerial priest participates in the One Priesthood of Christ. The sacrament of priestly ordination unites the priest to Christ in a mystical and deep relationship so that the priest begins to share in the priesthood of Christ. As clearly stated by Pope Benedict XVI, "Indeed, the priest no longer belongs to himself but, because of the sacramental seal he has received (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1563, 1582), is the "property" of God."⁵St. John Paul II traces the historical development of the ministerial priesthood down to the Apostles. He affirms that Jesus Christ had a mission that came to him directly from God the Father. Similarly, the Apostles had a mission that came to them directly from Christ. The saint further states, "The sign and presupposition of the authenticity and fruitfulness of this mission is the apostles' unity with Jesus and, in him, with one another and with the Father - as the priestly prayer of our Lord, which sums up his mission, bears witness (cf. Jn. 17:20-23)."⁶Like the Apostles, the priests are called to prolong the presence of Christ, the one high priest, embodying his way of life and making him visible in the midst of the flock entrusted to their care.⁷Pope Benedict XVI calls the priest "a man of the sacred, removed from the world to intercede on behalf of the world and being appointed to this mission by God and not by men (Heb 5:1)."⁸When the identity of the priest is well conformed and aligned with Christ, people seek in him who is to them a man of God, to discover God's Word, Mercy, and Bread of Life. Before souls, the priest announces the mystery of Christ, only in the light of which is the mystery of man understood in full. Priests who are not swayed by transient cultural trends are capable of living authentically that freedom which alone the certainty of belonging to God can give.

ii. The Priest's Identity With The Body Of The Church

Adding to the priest's identity with Christ is his identity with the ecclesial community and fellow men and women. The priest lives in relationships with other people. These relationships also give him identity in himself and fulfill his freedom. He shares communion with the Pope, the episcopal body, his own bishop, other priests, and the lay faithful.

At his ordination the priest pledges obedience to his bishop and his successors. His pledge of obedience originated from Peter the Apostle who first received the mandate to lead the Church in the name of Christ, the Head. Christ said to Peter, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the key to the kingdom of heaven" (Matt.16:18f). Having inherited this authority from Peter through the apostolic succession, the Pope and Bishops deserve obedience from their priests if the individual priest wishes to genuinely exercise his ministry. As St. John Paul II states, "Indeed, there can be no genuine priestly ministry except in communion with the supreme pontiff and the episcopal college, especially with one's own diocesan bishop, who deserves 'filial respect and obedience' promised during the rite of ordination."⁹Contrary to the view that such obedience is a humiliation, obedience to constituted hierarchical ecclesial authority sets the priest free for a responsible personal identity and discovery. As further stated, "Authentic Christian obedience, when it is properly motivated and lived without servility, helps the priest to exercise in accordance with the Gospel the authority entrusted to him for his work with the People of God: an authority free from authoritarianism or demagoguery. Only the person who knows how to obey in Christ is really able to require obedience from others in accordance with the Gospel."¹⁰Because the Pope has the Petrine ministries of teaching, sanctifying, and leading the flock of Christ, the priest is to have a deep, humble, filial bond of obedience with him. Similarly, the priest's filial union with his own Bishop is also an indispensable condition for the efficacy of the priestly ministry. The triumphal attitude at the priestly ordination that one has finally made it, which leads some people to the swagger that nobody can discipline the priest is a wrong one that could begin at the early stage of one's priesthood to sour his identity and ministry. This mentality should be completely avoided.

Another beautiful life of the priest that is so admirable is the communion in the presbyterate. Although not biological brothers, priests share brotherhood through the grace of ordination. When properly cultivated, this relationship becomes stronger than blood, because Christ is the one who unites his priests in fraternity. At the ordination of a new priest, the older priests impose their hands on him. This shows two things; first, that the priests participate equally in the ministry; and second, that the priest cannot act by himself, but always within the presbyterate, becoming a brother of all those who constitute it. Pope Benedict XVI encourages priests to be concerned for one another, and avoid living the priestly service in an isolated and subjectivist manner, and so indifferent to the fate of others. Such isolation is based on an indifference and disinterest born of selfishness and masked as a respect for privacy.¹¹Every priest should endeavor to promote fraternal

communion by giving and receiving – from priest to priest – the warmth of friendship, caring assistance, acceptance and fraternal correction. The priest will be so empty if he tries to live a different life than the one he was called to be. When priests live as brothers, they are able to help each other in ministry and in difficulties. They learn, like those in marital life, to confide in one another. They spend more time in nourishing the faithful with the Word and Sacraments, rather than complain to them about each other. Such damaging reports about each other do nothing than scandalize and weaken the faithful in their journey to holiness. On the other hand, living with and for one another liberates him to make his own priesthood more like the priesthood of Christ. Specific examples of common life for priests are a life lived in common and directed entirely towards their sacred ministry, the practice of having frequent meetings with a fraternal exchange of ideas, counsel and experience with their brother priests, the movement to form associations which encourage priestly holiness, residing together in one parochial house, sharing in a communal table, and communal participation in liturgical prayer. Exercising and outdoor games are other popular activities that priests can engage in common. The last group in this consideration is the priest's communion with the lay faithful. The laity is the basis of a priest's pastoral ministry. Apart from his love for Christ and the Church, the faithful is the next sanctuary of his outpouring of love and mission. In his relationship with the lay faithful, they expect him to be simply the priest who is the visible representation of God and the church. The Document of Vatican II as well as other documents of the Church has very extensive list of things the priest can do for the people and vice versa. For instance, priests must sincerely acknowledge and promote the dignity of the laity and the part proper to them in the mission of the Church. And they should hold in high honor that just freedom which is due to everyone in the earthly city. They must willingly listen to the laity, consider their wants in a fraternal spirit, recognize their experience and competence in the different areas of human activity, so that together with them they will be able to recognize the signs of the times.¹² Furthermore, the priest must seek to give the lay faithful a solid theological formation that will help the laity to expedite in full their role as Christian animators of the temporal order (political, cultural, economic, social).¹³ The priest is not to undertake every task in the parish. Rather, as he recognizes and uses the talents and personal and professional charisms in the faithful, he will be freer in attending to his primary commitments such as preaching, the celebration of the Sacraments and spiritual direction. Contrary to the notion that, as human beings, priests ought to be ordinary, the faithful wants their priests to show themselves for who they are as priests, at all times, in all places, and in every circumstance. In their search for meaning in life, the lay faithful want the priest to be their shepherd who guides and leads them to the encounter with God. The priest as priest has a lot to offer to the faithful. He will never run out of services or have too many idle times to be solitary if he engages in all activities that help the faithful to grow closer to God. The Christian faithful, on their part, should realize their obligations to their priests, and with filial love they should follow them as their pastors and fathers. In like manner, sharing their cares, they should help their priests

by prayer and work insofar as possible so that their priests might more readily overcome difficulties and be able to fulfill their duties more fruitfully.¹⁴

As the priest lives authentic priestly life by working closely with Christ, the bishops, fellow priests, and the laity, he is guaranteed perfect freedom to be a priest. Catholic priesthood is still respected in Nigeria. The Nigerian lay faithful take care of their priests and protect their interests. In some cases, they stand with their priests at the cost of their own lives. They have a knack for holy priests and are ready to support them. Such great relationships should be harnessed and encouraged. The priest and the lay faithful should be each other's keeper and collaborators in the vineyard. Since freedom or right is given for a purpose, responsible priesthood and maintaining the priestly identity will always and everywhere guarantee freedom for the Nigerian priest.

iii. Priestly Holiness

The priesthood was conceived, born, and consecrated in the prayer of Jesus (Lk.6:12; Jn.17:15-20). That means that the priest must also pray in order to maintain his true being and holiness. The priestly holiness does not necessarily require picking and choosing since he is called to be like Christ who was like us in all things except sin (Heb.4:15). However, since Christ's holiness will require a whole book, this study will discuss a few of the priestly holiness in relation to Christ Jesus. The Catholic Church has more sacraments and devotions than any Christian denomination or religion that I know of. Check the churches and see which one is as busy as the Catholic churches with the number of faithful using the church, chapels, and shrines of saints to pray. The priest is the leader of his parish in those prayers. It is true that the Catholic Church rightly places the sacrifice of the Eucharist at the center of her prayer life; there are other forms of prayers that the priest can say. Sometimes it seems that some priests are content with celebrating the Mass with the faithful. In some cases, it is the only prayer that a priest could say for a whole day. In dangerous cases, the celebration of the Mass degenerates into a routine, which the priest does as a matter of obligation in order to keep the flock together while, in reality, he does not get with it or feel it himself. The priest can do a whole lot more in prayers. He has other forms of prayers. In fact, he has almost limitless sources of prayers to enrich himself. Just to mention a few, a priest can say the following prayers: the daily celebration of the Eucharist with suitable preparation and ensuing thanksgiving; frequent confession and spiritual direction, the complete and fervent celebration of the liturgy of the hours, which is a daily obligation for him; examination of conscience; the regular practice of mental prayer; the *lectio divina*, prolonged moments of silence and colloquium, especially in periodical spiritual retreats and days of recollection; the precious expressions of Marian devotion, such as the Rosary; the *Via Crucis* and other pious exercises; the fruitful reading of the lives of the saints; etc. The prayer life of a priest is important both for him and for the faithful. For the priest, prayer will keep at bay the enemy of spiritual tepidity, apathy and doubt, and constantly nourish his spiritual life. Through prayer the priest cultivates love and friendship with Christ and thereby deepens his relationship with Him. Such relationships will result in ever-abundant peace and joy in the Lord. For

the people, the priest's prayers will gladden their hearts who seek in him the man of God, the counselor, the mediator of peace, the faithful and prudent friend, the sure guide to confide in during more difficult moments in life in order to find comfort and assurance¹⁵.

Important to the identity of life of a priest are the evangelical counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty. In fact, these are virtues by which the people judge priests. They, too, contribute to the joy or grieve of priestly life. Obedience is a habit that the priest must learn from Jesus Christ whose obedience to the Father is at the heart of his priesthood (Phil.2:8; Heb.5:8). The obedience of the priest is first and foremost to God whose will he must obey. Since the Holy Spirit calls the priest to a divine task, the wisdom and ability for it surpasses that of humans. Therefore, the priest needs more than just his wisdom or the autonomous will that is so pervasive of our time. Aware of his weakness, the priest works in humility trying to do what is pleasing to God. Adding to the obedience to God is obedience to his Bishop and other constituted authorities in the Church. As directed by the Vatican Council II, "The priestly ministry, since it is the ministry of the Church itself, can only function in the hierarchical union of the whole body. Pastoral charity, therefore, urges priests, as they operate in the framework of this union, to dedicate their own will by obedience to the service of God and their fellow men. In a great spirit of faith, let them receive and execute whatever orders the holy father, their own bishop, or other superiors give or recommend."¹⁶The priest's obedience to the teaching authority of the Church safeguards the uniformity of teaching on faith and morals, whose absence could lead to the scandal and confusion of the faithful. Obedience also helps to maintain respect for the liturgical norms, unity in pastoral planning, and fidelity to the Word. Therefore, "Insofar as a minister of Christ and his Church, the priest generously takes upon himself the duty to comply faithfully with each and every norm, avoiding those forms of partial compliance, according to subjective criteria, which create division and have damaging effects upon the lay faithful and public opinion."¹⁷In addition, a priest's obedience and support of the bishop could enhance his happiness, as experience shows that most disobedient priests end up being frustrated, disappointed, depressed, and angry. The bishops have important roles to play also in the obedience and happiness of priests. "It is good for bishops to be reminded of this central reality: *Priests value their relationships with you, perhaps more than you know* [Italics original]. "Wasting time" with your priests is never time wasted. A phone call to priests during a time of grief, a hospital visit to a sick priest, a visit to an elderly priest in a nursing home, a priestly anniversary remembrance, or just sharing a beer with a group of priests, these are all simple gestures, but all are valued and important."¹⁸Ultimately, every form of obedience is given to God who made up for the disobedience of Adam (Rom.5:19) in order to free those who sinned, to the Blessed Mother, and to the Church for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Priestly celibacy is another form of evangelical value that the priest needs for his image building and freedom. The law of priestly celibacy has survived many years of criticism especially from liberals and libertarians. But the eschatological basis of it as well as its pastoral importance makes it ever stronger and relevant in the priest

who receives the Holy Orders with full liberty after years of preparation, deep reflection, and assiduous prayers. Celibacy is a gift of God's mercy and love to the Church and the priest. It has an intrinsic rather than extrinsic value. Those who view it only physically think that it is unrealistic. However, it is essentially a spiritual and ontological gift whose meaning can be fully appreciated in its eschatological nature. Pope Benedict XVI spoke of its eschatological form, "Celibacy is an anticipation rendered possible by the grace of the Lord, who 'pulls' us to himself towards the world of the resurrection; again and again does he invite us to transcend ourselves in this present, towards the true present of the future, which becomes present today."¹⁹ Celibacy holds a lot of hope for the priest. It also serves a lot of great purposes for the people of the world he is called to shepherd. Jesus Christ lived a celibate life, and so did the Apostles who, when they met Jesus, left everything and followed him (Matt.19:27-29; Lk.18:28-30). In this sense, celibacy connects the priest with Christ and the Church on the one hand, and safeguards the liberty of the priest on the other. There are times when individuals or occasions endanger fidelity to celibacy or cause scandal among the faithful. In that case, due prudence is required on the part of the priest. St. John Chrysostom encourages the priest in his struggle for purity in celibacy in the following passage: "The soul of the priest must be purer than the rays of the sun so that the Holy Spirit not abandon him and so that he might say: It is no longer I that live but Christ that lives in me (Gal. 2:20). If the anchorites of the desert who lived far from the city and its activity, enjoying harbor and the tranquillity there, they nevertheless did not rely solely on the security of that life of theirs, but rather took special care of strengthening themselves in purity and confidence and diligently ensuring to the best of their ability that their conduct be worthy of God's presence. To what extent, do you think, must a priest employ strength and violence to avoid any kind of stain against his spiritual beauty? Certainly he needs to have more purity than monks. Yet precisely he who needs it the most is the one who most often is exposed to inevitable occasions in which he can be contaminated, unless he renders this inaccessible with assiduous sobriety and vigilance."²⁰ Celibacy is beautiful. The priest who lives it will love himself more and be indeed free.

Finally, there is the third evangelical value the priest needs to practice in order to live to his fullest identity. Vatican II calls it voluntary poverty.²¹ Priestly poverty has relationship to Christ who being rich, became poor for us so that by his poverty we might become rich. (2Cor. 8:9). In accepting poverty and renouncing luxuries, Jesus dismissed the devil's offer of "all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence" (Matt.4:8), saying to him, "The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve" (Matt.4:10). The priest who voluntarily chooses poverty makes the choice also to conform his poverty to Christ. The priest's conformity to the poverty of Christ must be interiorly motivated so that through it he can attain eternal salvation. Vatican II also highlights the poverty of the early Christians, which they expressed by sharing everything in common. Thus, "by their example the apostles witnessed that a free gift of God is to be freely given with the knowledge of how to sustain both abundance and need. A certain common use of goods, similar to the common possession of goods in the history of the primitive Church, furnishes an excellent means of pastoral charity. By living this form of life, priests can laudably

reduce to practice that spirit of poverty commended by Christ.”²²The priest lives in the world and has all the attractions therefrom. He may decide to do a lot of other things to make money; including doing commercial business. He may even decide to benefit himself, family and friends from whatever means he chooses to raise money. He may also decide to seek positions of authority and privilege. The priest may decide to live in a mansion, drive luxury car, take expensive vacations, live like an earthly prince, be worldly to the core, etc. However, the priest should know that his primary life is to follow Christ more closely, that he has his treasure in heaven and that everything is to be used for the edification of the Kingdom of God (Lk 10:7; Mt 10:9-10; 1Cor 9:14; Ga 6:6). Moreover, a priest whose words and actions with regard to poverty are not consistent risks his credibility and his apostolic effectiveness. The priest whose lifestyle is different from the majority poor in his parish will be sinning against charity. Even if the parishioners are all rich, the priest’s lifestyle is to be different due to his calling that demands charity without boundary. Such goods are to be shared, not used on oneself, in order simply to look alike and belong.

It is no longer clear that some Nigerian priests respond appropriately and wholeheartedly to the evangelical counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty. There have been some touchy moments that cast some shadows of doubt on how focused the priests are on these virtues. While one can proudly say that so many priests live exemplarily, it is also the case that others have given in to the mammon, concupiscence and lust. It used to be that priests were trusted in everything and with everything. One could entrust him with the most precious thing and be rest assured. Not anymore. The opposite is, in fact, the new norm. Some lay faithful and the publics are struggling right now with trusting a priest. Some lay faithful are more prone to equate the Nigerian priesthood with commercial businesses. Priesthood, for some, is just another type of business where trust is hard to achieve except with written and signed documents. Nigerian priests need to control this damage and to redeem their image and identity before the lay faithful and public. A very effective way of doing this is to desist from measuring himself with the society’s richest, most powerful, popular, arrogant, and so forth. On the contrary, Nigeria’s priesthood, as also the priesthood worldwide, should stand as a beacon of hope and sign of contradiction against other human institutions that have consistently failed their people. It should be the shining light in the darkened world. The authentic freedom of the Nigerian priest does not lie in their wealth or women, but rather, in their closeness and identity with Christ and his Church.

iv. Continuous Improvement

Memory is a wonderful thing, but sometimes it can play tricks on us. No matter how well we learned a thing, we are so forgetful that over time we lose it especially if we don’t use it. Even where we know it and use it, there is always a spin in what we knew due to the passage of time. Therefore, a priest must constantly improve himself. Continuous improvement for a newly ordained priest will certainly be different from a midlife or a senior (aging) priest. For that reason, a priest must be a continuous learner, each according to his state in life. The priest’s continuous

education will help his priestly identity. One may ask why a priest needs to learn as much if Christ never had any formal education. Christ's knowledge is sacred. He has the wisdom that can only be possessed by the Son of God. Therefore, he did not have to learn like us. When the people saw his great wisdom and mighty deeds, all they could say was that he was the carpenter's son and son of Mary... (Matt.13:54-56). As a carpenter, Jesus was not expected to know much. Yet, "The people were [always] astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes" (Mk.1:22). Christ teaches his disciples on the kingdom of heaven (Matt.13:52) as the only one who can make God known to them. Therefore, his knowledge is more profound than the scribes and Pharisees could offer. On that note, the priest's learning works well in opening him more and more to the mystery of Christ and becoming like Christ. No other person can teach a priest how to be Christ-like than Christ himself. The end of ongoing education of a priest is Christ. The United States Catholic Bishops define ongoing formation in this way: "It is the continuing integration of priestly identity and functions or service for the sake of mission and communion with Christ and the Church"²³In order to have the full benefit, the priest's ongoing formation must be holistic. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* divides ongoing formation into four categories; namely, human formation, spiritual formation, intellectual formation and pastoral formation. Let us discuss each briefly in the light of their identity of a priest with Christ.

a. *Human Formation*

The letter to the Hebrews reminds the priest that he is part of humanity since chosen from among men to be their representative before God (5:1). Therefore, the priest must improve those skills, general and specific, that are helpful to communicate Jesus Christ to the people in the most authentic and genuine ways. For instance, the priest must engage with the people with the skills of speaking and listening so that effective communication can take place. Fluency in the language is the most effective skill of the speaker. Rather than avoiding the public or getting angry in conversations or meetings, the priest must learn the openness that is necessary for every genuine conversation. Furthermore, the priest must acknowledge the fact that he lives in the flesh as man. He must acknowledge the sexual energy that he has, but at the same time direct it toward a vibrant spiritual life. In some specific instances, one-on-one dialogue, feedback from peers and other people, and professional spiritual counseling are other ways to improve human formation. A good summary is found in Pope Benedict XVI's letter, "Therefore, as a brother among brothers, in order to sanctify himself and succeed in his priestly mission he is to have the resources of human virtues that make him worthy of the respect of others. It must be recalled that it is important for the priest, who is called to accompany others through the journey of life up to the threshold of death, to have the right balance of heart and mind, reason and feeling, body and soul, and to be humanly integrated."²⁴

b. *Spiritual Formation*

A lot had already been said in the foregoing that related to spiritual formation. However, the spiritual formation of a priest will be a constant reminder that he is a disciple of Christ. As such, he is called to rid himself of every form of illusion and to embrace his real and authentic self in Christ. This is fundamental for both rookies and veteran priests. The following seven areas had been suggested for deepening the priest's spiritual life: 1. daily meditation on the Word or a mystery of the faith; 2. daily personal encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist, in addition to devote celebration of Mass and frequent confession; 3. Marian devotion (Rosary, consecration or entrustment, intimate colloquy); 4. a period of doctrinal formation and study of the history of the saints; 5. due rest; 6. renewed commitment in putting into practice the indications of one's Bishop and verification of one's convinced adherence to the Magisterium and to ecclesiastical discipline; 7. attention to priestly communion, friendship and fraternity."²⁵For the new priests, these are to be practiced with great zeal, while for the midlife and senior priests they are to be renewed and intensified. Conformed to Christ the Priest, the priest should be accustomed to adhere to Christ as friend in an intimate companionship.

c. Intellectual Formation

There are a lot of works to be done in the ongoing intellectual formation of a priest. However, the aim must be to help him toward opening his mind more and more to the mystery of Christ.²⁶The primary sources of the priest's ongoing intellectual formation are the Sacred Scriptures and other sacred texts and subjects. As rightly stated, "The knowledge of the sacred minister ought to be sacred because it is drawn from the sacred source and directed to a sacred goal."²⁷However, since this knowledge is to benefit the priest and the faithful who live in peculiar historical and existential milieus, other forms of ongoing formation are required. The priest should continually study the humanities and sciences. In this regard the Directory states, "Special treatment must be reserved to the questions posed by scientific progress, which exercises such an influence on the way people think and live. The priest is not to dispense himself from keeping adequately updated and ready to give the reason for his hope (cf. 1Pt 3:15) in the face of the questions the faithful – many of whom have an elevated cultural level – may pose, since they are cognizant of the progress made by the sciences. In this regard the priest will not fail to consult due experts and sure doctrine. Indeed, when presenting the Word of God the priest must take into consideration the progressive growth of the intellectual formation of people, and hence be able to adapt according to their level, as well as to various groups and their places of origin."²⁸Important in intellectual ongoing formation of a priest is his ability to link theoretical and speculative knowledge to practical wisdom that will be of better service to the people. With regard to the midlife and senior priests in particular, this ongoing education can mean new deepening in all aspects of formation with the purpose of examining their actions, and a reawakening of the motivation underlying the sacred ministry.

d. Pastoral Formation

Pastoral formation, like the other forms of ongoing formations, has Christ as its primary focus. It is the more practical form of theology because it is the way of addressing the existential issues such as catechesis and preaching, liturgical worship and the administration of sacraments, works of charity, assisting the erring and the unbelieving, the family, fundamental morals, ethics of professional and social life, etc. It is hoped that pastoral training will help the priest to be alert to the challenges of the world today and sensitive to the problems and hopes of the people. He should share their experiences and grow, above all, in solidarity towards the poor. He should use the talents of the faithful who are experts in their fields. The priest should listen to the people and, through dialogue, encourage their participation and co-responsibility. The disposition for such pastoral strategies could be learned through ongoing formation. Midlife priests are at some advantage here due to past experiences of handling pastoral situations. However, their position sets them in a double line of responsibility. "Because they are in the middle, they have responsibilities to the younger priests behind them, to welcome them, to encourage them, and to share ministry with them. They also have responsibilities to the older priests ahead of them, to maintain their legacy, to recognize their achievements, and to support them as they draw their ministry and life to a good conclusion."²⁹ Good ongoing pastoral formations will help the priest perfect his knowledge of divine things and human affairs and so prepare him to enter more opportunely into conversation with his contemporaries and their unique situations. Nothing can be more liberating for a priest than to carry his flock along.

CONCLUSION

The discussion opened with an encouragement to the priest to have better appreciation of his identity with God. The United Nations' human rights charter gives a universal, inalienable, and inviolate right to the priest to express his religious identity in teaching, preaching, practice, and worship. The priest enjoys the protection of every other legitimate professional to practice his faith. The practice of his faith shines forth from a series of integrated lifestyles that weave him to Christ the Priest. In addition to his identity in Christ, the priest has identity with the body of Christ, the Church and her members. He fulfills his life as priest by nourishing relationships with the Church and her members. Similarly, the priest continues to edify himself through obedience, chastity and poverty. Finally, he renews himself by being a lifelong learner in the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formations. All that the priest needs do to be truly priest is "let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father" (Matt.5:16). In this is the heavenly Father glorified when the priest truly becomes God's disciple (Jn.15:8).

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