

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

FOCUS

1. *Christian Commitment in the contemporary world in the light of Papal teachings.* --
- Valentine Kelechi IHEANACHO, MSP.

STUDIES AND PERSPECTIVES

2. *Religious life: A Call to Prophetic Stance.*
- Nkechinyerem IWUOHA, PHJC
3. *Consecrated Life for the Service Of God: The Vocational Discernment And The Relevance of Mission in the Contemporary World.*
- Chikere Gladys NGOZICHUKWUKA, OLA.
4. *Religious Life in the Orientations of the Church: the Challenges of Formation in Nigeria*
- Oseni J. O. OGUNU, OMV
5. *Consecrated For Mission, Witnessing to Unity, Peace and Progress: the Role of Consecrated Persons in the integral development of Nigeria.*
Clara M. Austin IWUOHA, DMMM.
6. *Consecrated to Catechize People From Cradle to Grave.*
- Bartholomew CHIDILI, OSA
7. *The Church of the Youth and the Youth of the Church: A Plea for the Present and Future of Christianity.*
- Jean-Paul TAGHEU, OP

CONSECRATED LIFE AND FORMATION MATTERS

8. *The Process Of Screening, Selection And Admission Of Candidates For Religious Life And The Priesthood. (Part 1)*
- Josephine ENENMO, OLA.
9. *Collaboration Within the 'Ecology Of Mission': An African Cultural Perspective*
Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, OSA.
10. *Abandonment, Dismissal and Prolongation: the accompaniment of a candidate in formation in the times of transition and trials in the Institute.*
- Margaret FAGBAMIGBE, SSM

11. *Faith Deepening and Internalization of Core Christian Values in Formation: A Way Forward in the Witnessing as Priests and Religious.*

-Rev. Fr. Chukwunonso Emmanuel ONYEMEH, OMV

EXPERIENCES - WITNESS - INTERVIEW - REPORT

12. *Integral Formation, the Commitment and Witness of Young People And Consecrated Persons In Africa.*

An exclusive Interview with Archbishop Anthony MUHERIA (Catholic Archdiocese of Nyeri, Kenya), a Delegate of Kenya at the Synod of Bishops, Vatican City (2018)

13. *Give Wings And Roots To Young People: A Reflection on the Message And Implications of The Synod Of Bishops 2018 for Africa And Consecrated Life.*

An exclusive Interview with Bishop John Akin OYEJOLA (Oshogbo Diocese, Nigeria), a Delegate of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria at the Synod of Bishops, Vatican City (2018)

14. *Being a Priest and Proud to be.*

- Agharese ARASE

15. *The Role of the family in the Formation of a Committed Christian in the Society.*

- Maria Regina OSONDU, DMMM.

PUBLIC SQUARE FORUM

16. *Of Words and Symbols: A Theological Response to the CBCN's Communiqué on the recent Violence in Nigeria (The Killings in Makurdi Diocese).*

-Emeka NWOSUH, OP.

BOOK REVIEW

17. *Religious Life, a Sign of Contradiction,* by Benezet Bujo. Paulines Publications Africa (2017).

- Rev. Dr. Mary Joan IWENOFU, IHM

EDITORIAL

One of the essential elements in the teaching of the Catholic Church on Consecrated life is formation. The first African Synod reiterates that the whole Christian community, the Family of God in Africa, needs to be trained, motivated and empowered for evangelization, each according to his or her own specific role within the Church. Since the Family of God includes members of the Consecrated life, African bishops emphasize necessity and importance of their formation¹. They acknowledge the need, in particular, for an integral, updated, and inculturated formation of candidates to Consecrated Life and to the priesthood. In fact, John Paul II's *Vita Consecrata* asserts that formation is of "decisive importance"². On its part, the recent Synod of Bishops on Young people insisted also on the formation and accompaniment of young people, including young consecrated persons³.

Formation is at the centre of the reflections of the present volume dedicated to this general theme: *Formation for Christian Commitment and Witness in the Church and Society*. Generally, the articles focus on different aspects of formation, mainly initial formation, in Consecrated Life. You will find other relevant and well-researched papers that enrich and compliment the studies on this theme, for they offer important reflections on mission or apostolate of consecrated life, on priesthood, youth, the social doctrine of the church, the quest for response to the sustained violence in Nigeria, as well as two exclusive interviews that echoes the concerns and message of the recent Synod of Bishops on young people.

The volume you have at hand opens with a critical look into the question of Christian commitment in the contemporary world in the light of papal teachings. For over a century, the Church has particularly defended the human person, in the conviction that the human person is intrinsically related to the common good. Accordingly, Valentine Iheanacho, MSP, a Church historian, investigates the evolution of the social doctrine of the Church, and underscores certain salient issues.

Particularly, in the development and practice of the Social doctrine of the Church the Religious women and men continue to play a vital role. In the present-day Nigeria, Nkechiyerem Iwuoha, PHJC opines, the religious men and women are called to take a more prophetic stance in the face of the "growing new situation of injustice and exclusion" and "massive poverty". Thus, the formation of religious, she argues, need to be tailored to the understanding and critical analysis of an option for the poor. The contribution of Chikere Ngozichukwuka, OLA, explores the theme of the vocational discernment and the relevance of mission in the contemporary world. Ngozichukwuka's reflection presents those who are

¹ For instance, see: *Ecclesia in Africa*, n.93; AMECEA, "The Formation of Agents of Evangelisation for the Church as a Family of God. Resolutions", n.9, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.IV, p.3206

² *Vita Consecrata*, n. 65.

³ Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco" (27 ottobre 2018), n.97, 100, 163-164. In: *Bollettino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

called and why they are called, as well as vocational discernment -- the steps taken to ascertain the authenticity of one's vocation. The consecrated life today is exposed to all sorts of attacks and temptations, but, in her view, it has never lost its relevance in the Church and to the world. The response to the call to follow Christ more closely and to bring His message to others demands a process of exploration. It requires a discernment of vocation. Ngozichukwuka expresses the hope that the consecrated life will continue to be meaningful in the Church and in the world.

Oseni Ogunu's study reflects on the religious life in the teachings of the Church with particular reference to initial formation of candidates in Religious Institutes and presents some of the challenges of formation in Nigeria.

Nigeria takes prides, as its coat of arms suggests, in her determination to pursue unity, peace and progress for the development of this country and her peoples. As a matter of fact, however, it is unfortunate that this expected environment seems elusive and seriously threatened by an atmosphere of crisis, conflict and obnoxious spilling of innocent blood. Nigerians recently have continued to live in fear and tensions. What can the consecrated persons do to forestall the eroding unity, peace and progress in Nigeria, which are inseparable from development? This is the crux of Clara Iwuoha's article. The writer observes that consecrated persons have been both proactive and active in using their pulpits in spreading the messages of peace and tolerance but warns that they might not be able to guarantee the elasticity of the patience exhibited so far by the people, especially Christians, as this patience and tolerance continually has been misconstrued as cowardice.

Bartholomew Chidili, OSA, highlights the necessity and value of catechesis, understood as a deliberate effort to transmit religious knowledge, values, skills, attitudes, and sensibilities of a society to its progeny. Catechesis involves educating the people religiously to get rid of fear and estrangement transmitted by religious parochialism causing the incessant hostility among the people of Nigeria. His study suggests a dialogical process as a new teaching based on the work of the Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire to rewrite the narrative of religious education from being the harbinger of wars and distress to harbinger of peace and harmony; and to be the permanent process of teaching religion in Nigeria from cradle to the grave. Catechesis, he argues, must be done from cradle to grave; it is an on-going process.

Jean-Paul Tagheu, a young theologian from Cameroun, writes on "The Church of the youth and the youth of the Church"; as its subtitle says, the article is a plea for the present and future of Christianity. His central question is: *How can the African youth be the present and the future of the Church?* This question is examined based on the last two African Synods.

Whether for the young or adult, the family is fundamentally where almost all things begin, for better or for worse. The future of the church and of society themselves passes through the family. Maria Regina Osondu, DMMM examines the role of a Christian family particularly in the spiritual and social formation of a committed consecrated person. The call to total consecration is an additional call

to a Christian that requires total submission to the will of God through the observation and practice of the evangelical counsels – poverty, chastity and obedience. On the other hand, a consecrated person who did not understand or accept the implications of the religious commitment question the rationality of the vows until such a person separates him or herself from the religious community. What is the attitude and contribution of the family in the consecrated person's following of Christ in the Religious Institute, or in the case of to his/her eventual separation from the Religious Institute?

Sr. Josephine Enenmo, OLA, offers a rich reflection on the process of screening, selection and admission of candidates for religious life and the priesthood. The essay shares the author's many years of experience in the formation of candidates, especially the process of discernment of vocations and admission into consecrated life in Nigeria. It uses what is now known as the 'Iperu model' to describe a process of interviewing candidates. The author recommends that it is important to practice a prudent selection process that will foster both the individual candidate's growth and the good of the Church.

Chukwunonso Onyemeh, OMV proposes a paper originally presented to the Formators' Association of Nigeria (FAN) and is titled "Faith Deepening and Internalization of Core Christian Values in Formation". Starting from the conviction that "no one encounters the Lord Jesus Christ and remains the same", the author argues that it is by encounter, experience and renewal of experience of the Risen Christ that formators can deepen faith, live, witness, then "create" or inspire in the formandi the desire for the same Lord, especially through fidelity to the living spirituality and charism of the founder of one's Institute.

Most formators are aware that formation for consecrated life is not about quantity but about persons of high-quality and helping candidate to discover her/his calling and find best way to respond to it. At the same time, human life is sacred and persons are entities of great worth; therefore, we should play games with it and not allow anyone to be sacrificed on the altar of cheap popularity. Bearing this in mind, Margaret Fagbamigbe, SSMA, explicitly examines the delicate and important question of abandonment, dismissal and prolongation of candidates in formation, particularly the need for accompaniment in the times of transition and trials in the religious institute.

In the Church-as-Family of God, one of the many areas where the mutual relation between Consecrated persons, the lay people, the clergy, and Bishops is expressed is the area of mission, the apostolate. Collaborative ministry concerns the dynamics of relationships between the clergy, consecrated persons and lay faithful, that is, how they are able to work together as Christian ministers, each in his or her own right, being mutually supportive and each one acting in fellowship with the wider church. But what has the African worldview to offer in the evolving discourses on collaborative ministry? Ikechukwu Kanu, O.S.A., tackles this question. He critically examines the "collaboration within the 'ecology of mission'" from an African cultural perspective in order to make discourses on collaborative ministry more meaningful, relevant and at home in and to the

African. Noteworthy is the author's specific and explicit effort to investigate his topic from an African cultural viewpoint.

Along with Consecrated persons, the Catholic priest plays a vital role in the evangelization and in the integral development of the society. It is necessary, therefore, for everyone to appreciate the identity, vocation and mission of the priest and to respect the dignity and fundamental human rights of every priest. However, in Nigeria, as in some other regions, the frequent acts of terrorism, of violence, kidnappings, anti-clerical attitudes and practices, and the too frequent killings of priests, religious women and men, and lay faithful in recent years have provoked much anger, fears, discouragement, a feeling of helplessness and perplexity in many people but they also motivated and led to sober reflections, quest for solutions, and even to civil and peaceful organisation and initiatives by concerned citizens. From the perspective of human rights, in her "Being a priest and Proud to be", Agharese Arase, offers a unique viewpoint on the priest "as a human person and a citizen". The article insightfully examines the life of a priest in light of his expectations and responsibilities that protect and promote his identity, aware that 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, and also positive actions that support the right to enjoy being a priest; it also shows how a priest's identity is inseparably connected with his identity with Christ. Is it possible to see in it both a sisterly and respectfully clear invitation to a change of unhelpful attitudes and practices, and a courageous appraisal, support and encouragement of priest today? She reminds, "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". From the theological perspective, the Dominican theologian Emeka Nwosuh writes on the necessity and worth "OF WORDS AND SYMBOLS", in the wake of sustained violence and killings. His reflection attempts to offers a theological response to the Communiqué of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria on the recent killings in Catholic diocese of Makurdi (Nigeria). In the common search for solutions, he offers his proposals.

Readers will find two major interviews on the recent Synod of Bishops echoing its theme: "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment". Both interviews are as informative and enriching as relevant and challenging. The first is with Archbishop Anthony Muheria of the Catholic Archdiocese of Nyeri, Kenya. The second, more extensive, was granted by Bishop John Oyejola of the Catholic diocese of Oshogbo, Nigeria. Both prelates were delegates at the Synod in Rome. The conversations with them, focusing on Africa and Consecrated Life, touch on a wide range of issues: , vocational discernment, formation and formators, consecrated life, the young people and pastoral care of young people, employment, education, financial self-reliance and self-sustenance of the local Churches in Africa, co-responsibility and mutual collaboration between the Bishops and the Religious, etc.. The gratitude of the Editorial Staff of *The Catholic Voyage* goes to Archbishop Muheria and Bishop Oyejola for agreeing to share their thoughts with the Catholic Voyage and managing to actually find the time to do so

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7

in spite of the almost air-tight schedule and hectic programme of the Synod Assembly.

You find also a book review. Mary Joan Iwenofu, IHM, graciously and boldly proposes a critical review of one of the recent works of a most renowned and foremost African theologian, a creative scholar, Prof. Bénézet Bujo, *Religious Life: A Sign of Contradiction* (Nairobi, 2017). She highlights the Bujo's studies on the evangelical counsels. According to the reviewer the book is "very inspiring. It offers valuable material for meditation", and it made "an important contribution to the wider discussion of religious life in modern-day African cultures"; hence she recommends it "for use in formation houses and religious communities and for those interested in religious life in modern-day African culture".

The Catholic Voyage is pleased to propose the present collection of studies and reflections. While it does not (and its aim was not to) cover *all* aspects of formation in consecrated life in one small volume, this edition of the journal wants to enrich and enhances the on-going studies and discussions on this theme, open vistas and invite all to continue to contribute their quota to further strengthen the formation in Consecrated life. In this way as well, hopefully, we can take one more step to advance in the commitment and witness to Christ and His Gospel in the Church and in the society in Nigeria and indeed Africa.

Enjoy reading!

Oseni J. Osilama Ogunu, OMV

Editor-in-Chief

FOCUS

**CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD
IN THE LIGHT OF PAPAL TEACHINGS**

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ABSTRACT

In the last 120 years the Church has particularly defended the human person: their dignity, human rights, equality, economic and social justice. The Church does so in the conviction that the human person is intrinsically related to the common good. In the light of discernible basic principles of Catholic social teaching as found in the different pronouncements of the Magisterium, this essay takes a historical approach in presenting the evolution of the social doctrine of the Church. It equally underscores certain salient issues where necessary.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is the general assumption nowadays that whoever ascends to the throne of St Peter as Pope is expected in one way or the other to make pronouncements on issues. Their pronouncements may cover a wide range of subjects or matters: war and peace, social justice and development, human rights and equality, science, politics, economics and ecology, etc. Such was not always the case in the past. The first use of an encyclical as a literary genre in pontifical documents owes its origin to Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758). *Ubi Primum* (On the duties of Bishops)⁴ issued by Benedict XIV on December 3, 1740 is commonly considered the first encyclical by any pope. After Benedict XIV and beginning with Pope Pius IX (1846-1878), encyclicals gradually became the preferred medium used by subsequent popes in

⁴For the text of the encyclical, cf., <https://www.ewtn.com/library/ENCYC/B14UBIPR.HTM> (accessed: June 5, 2018).

treating a variety of issues or questions as may be demanded by various social, cultural and historical circumstances in a particular time.⁵

With regard to encyclicals on social matters, *Rerum Novarum*, issued on May 15, 1891 by Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903), is often regarded by common consent as the first social encyclical chronologically published by a pope. According to John Coleman, the roots and origins of the social teaching of the Church predated the pontificate of Leo XIII because “the life and words of Jesus” are the norm and the basis for the involvement of the Church in social problems. During the early Christian centuries, particularly in the Patristic period, the Church witnessed the insistence of Church fathers about caring for the poor and those at the margin of the society. In the medieval era, theologians and other intellectuals of the time debated and propounded theories and conditions for a just war in order to minimize incessant wars that threatened the peace and stability of the medieval commonweal.⁶ They also preoccupied themselves with economic questions such as a ‘just price’, ‘fair wage’ and the use of money in the form of usury. But in the estimation of Paul Valley and Michael Walsh, the plethora of their thoughts was “never systematic.”⁷

The systematization of the social teaching of the Church became possible only after many years of evolution with the confluence of historical realities and forces. Hence, in view of its long evolution and of its dynamic nature, Michael Schuck opines that it is wrong to uphold 1891 as the starting date for the beginning of the social teaching of the Church. On the contrary, Schuck devised a three-fold period of evolution of the official Church teaching on social issues using Pope Leo XIII as the referential point of departure: (1) pre-Leonine period: from the pontificate of Benedict XIV in 1740 to the pontificate of Pius IX in 1877; (2) Leonine period: from the pontificate of Leo XIII in 1878 to the death of Pius XII in 1958; (3) post-Leonine period: from the pontificate of John XXIII in 1958 to the present.⁸ Although distinguished by the different questions treated therein, each period, according to Schuck, discloses a dominant worldview of the Church peculiar to each epoch and a trend of thought that acts as a binding cord that tied them together into some form of coherence:

On one level, the discussions are dissimilar: pre-Leonine period encyclicals portray the world as a nourishing, yet dangerous pasture; Leonine period letters picture the world as a benign, cosmic hierarchy of being; post-Leonine period texts view the world as a temporal context wherein God and humanity journey together. Yet despite these shifting viewpoints, the popes collectively construe the world as a medium of God’s ubiquity. Whether pictured as a pasture, a

⁵<https://www.britannica.com/topic/encyclical#ref218552> (accessed: June 5, 2018).

⁶ John A. Coleman 1991. “A Tradition Celebrated, Reevaluated, and Applied” in John A. Coleman (ed.) *One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Thought: Celebration and Challenge*. New York: Orbis Books, 2; Michael P. Hornsby-Smith 2006. *An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 91.

⁷ Paul Valley 1998. Introduction, in Paul Valley (ed.) *The New Politics: Catholic Social Teaching for the Twenty-first Century*. London: SCM Press, 3.

⁸ Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, *An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought*, 91.

cosmos, or unmarked path, the world is imbued with God's presence . . . "There is no realm whatsoever outside the dominion of that God . . . Neither politics nor economics, neither national interests nor international affairs, neither technology nor commerce, neither aesthetics nor productivity, can ultimately be a law unto itself. . ." As a result, the popes uniformly criticize world views inspired by atheistic naturalism and dialectical materialism.⁹

The aim of this essay is to present a quick historic picture of papal pronouncements on Christian commitment to the building of a just society based on the promotion of human dignity and respect for the common good. It is not possible to make an in-depth exposé of each and every pontifical and conciliar documents on society and social justice. Due to the variegated nature of those documents and their multifaceted subjects and themes, this research limits itself to highlighting certain salient principles discernible in Catholic social thought. It will accord some prominence to *Populorum Progressio* (1967), *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971) by Pope Paul VI and *Justice in the World* (1971) in order to propose the reawakening of the hunger for social justice, peace and development that enveloped the life and activities of the Church of the post-Vatican era.

2. AN ENDURING TRADITION

The inaugural speech of Thomas Jefferson of America in 1801 succinctly articulated important criteria of a good government that is attentive to its people, such as honesty, truth, temperance, gratitude and the love of neighbour. Jefferson stated in his speech: "wise and frugal government, shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and *shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned*" (emphasis added).¹⁰ President Ronald Reagan during his own inaugural address in 1981, slightly rephrased the ideas of Thomas Jefferson in which he called for "a new consensus with all those across the land who share a community of values embedded in these words: family, work, neighborhood, peace and freedom."¹¹ For Reagan, it was never his ". . . intention to do away with government. It is rather to make it work – work with us, not over us, to stand by our side, not to ride on our back. Government can and must provide opportunity, not smother it, foster productivity, not stifle it."¹² The ideas of Jefferson and Reagan are not radically different from the principles and notions that underpin the core ideas of Catholic social thought with regard to good governance and the economic wealth of the society.

⁹ As cited by John A. Coleman, "A Tradition Celebrated, Reevaluated, and Applied", 4.

¹⁰ Cf. Michael Novak 1989. *Free Persons and the Common Good*. New York – London: Madison Books, 129-130.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹² *Ibid.*, 130.

Starting from 1931 with the exception of 1941 as estimated by Richard Rousseau, popes after Leo XIII, on the average, have issued at least every ten years a social encyclical in commemoration of *Rerum Novarum*. Only Pope Pius XII, given the bellicose circumstances of the Second World War, did not issue any social encyclical to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. He only did so with his radio address on Pentecost Sunday of June 1, 1941¹³ and in that address, he underscored the interdependency of three fundamental values that are beneficiary to society. He identified those values as: (a) the material use of goods; (b) labour and (c) the family. According to him, these three values “are closely connected one with the other, mutually complementary and dependent.”¹⁴ In that interconnectedness, the pope maintained that it was easy to “conclude that the economic riches of a people do not properly consist in the abundance of goods measured according to a purely and solely material calculation of their worth but in the fact that such an abundance represents and offers really and effectively the material basis sufficient for the proper personal development of its members.”¹⁵

The thought of Pius XII bore resemblance to the thoughts of his predecessors who in the light of the many cultural, political, economic, social and religious changes that took place in Europe in the nineteenth century, as opined by Gene Burns, the popes “acquired a broadened sense of pastoral responsibility for the whole of Western civilization, a greater preoccupation with specific moral issues, and a stronger claim to religious and moral authority.”¹⁶ This “broadened sense of pastoral responsibility” can be gleaned from the fact that the post-Leonine popes altogether wrote no fewer than 185 encyclicals and in the reckoning of Hornsby-Smith, quite a good number of them were on social matters. Within a period of eighty years that spanned from 1878 to 1958, the following major issues were recurrent themes in the social writings of the popes: “political liberty, nationalism, war and peace, family life, the rights and duties of employers and employees, the right to private property, and the importance of intermediate organizations such as trade unions.”¹⁷

In the spectrum of events of his time, Leo XIII through *Rerum Novarum*, initiated a process, which though began as a reaction to socialism, has nonetheless coalesced into a formidable body of social teachings that has weathered the storm of contemporary epoch. The papal document of 1891 was cast against the background of the spread of Marxist socialism across Europe and the unification of Italy finally realized in 1870. Given the political and economic turmoil together with the dislocation of social cohesion, the social doctrine of Marxism positioned itself to fill the starving stomachs of the working class people who were being exploited by the unbridled and unrestrained capitalism.¹⁸ As an antithesis to Christianity and to the

¹³ Richard W. Rousseau 2002. *Human Dignity and the Common Good: The Great Papal Social Encyclicals from Leo XIII to John Paul II*. Westport – London, 2.

¹⁴ <https://thejosias.com/2017/06/02/pius-xii-la-solennita-della-pentecoste/> (accessed: June 7, 2018).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, *An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought*, 92.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁸ J. Wright 1966. “The Common Good” in Benjamin L. Masse (ed.) *The Church and Social Progress: Background Readings for Pope John’s Mater et Magistra*. Milwaukee: Hallow Books, 227.

Church, atheistic socialism as conceived in the belly of historical materialism of Karl Marx, “promised happiness here, not hereafter”¹⁹ in order to end the economic alienation or the material conditions that determined the social being of a person. Leo XIII did not just stop at the mere condemnation of socialism especially its atheistic variant, and in its place so as to counter it, the pope expounded a clear-cut Catholic social teaching even though in its nascent stage at the time.

Subsequent popes following in the footsteps of Leo XIII constantly returned to the same themes: critique of capitalism in reaction to socialism. As Richard Rousseau rightly explicates, “with this background it is easy to miss the importance of Socialism to the development of the Church’s social doctrine.”²⁰ When Pope Pius XI issued *Quadragesimo Anno* in May 1931 to mark the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, his intention was to update and endorse the core principles enunciated by Leo XIII. He treaded carefully between individualism and collectivism, between traditional liberalism and socialism which he described as “a remedy much more disastrous than the evil it is designed to cure.”²¹ It was the fear of socialism always lurking in the background that drove the Church to support fascist organizations in Austria, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Slovakia under Jozef Tiso and Vichy France.²² Sandwiched between liberalism and socialism, the Church cautiously preferred fascism as a midway between those two known enemies (liberalism and socialism) until the excesses and evils of fascism became manifestly evident. From the viewpoint of the Church at the time, the corporate state advanced by fascism appeared to be in harmony with the developing social teaching of the Church since fascism at first, did not present any apparent danger of class conflict.²³

The fact merits reiterating that the body of teachings now regarded as Catholic social thought in its complex form, does not strictly admit coherence in terms of approach, style and even issues. These are often determined by context and epoch since the various pronouncements made by the different pontiffs in general, are historically conditioned to respond to the needs of the time as understood by the popes. All that can be said with a very modicum of certainty in the affirmation of Michael Wash is that “each pope likes to present his teaching as in direct continuity with that of his predecessors – as is demonstrated by the encyclicals’ titles which frequently recall the anniversaries of *Rerum Novarum* to the most recent . . .”²⁴

In terms of style, Pope John XXIII broke new grounds in 1961 with publication of *Mater et Magistra* and again in 1963 with *Pacem in Terris*. John XXIII abandoned the old style of arguing from natural law which was very fashionable among the popes before 1958. Instead of natural law, John XXIII opted for a more scriptural based

¹⁹ Richard W. Rousseau, *Human Dignity and the Common Good: The Great Papal Social Encyclicals from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, 3.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹ James Wilkinson – H. Stuart Hughes 2004. *Contemporary Europe: A History*. New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 270.

²² Michael Wash 1998. “Lay the Foundations: from *Rerum Novarum* to the Second Vatican Council” in Paul Vallely (ed.) *The New Politics: Catholic Social Teaching for the Twenty-first Century*. London: SCM Press, 34-35.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Ibid.*, 40.

reference. There was also a move away from abstract philosophy to concrete historical realities, and from general real life to the tangible life experiences of the ordinary people. The change in style and approach as signaled by the papal pronouncements of John XXIII would find their ways into the various documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962 - 65). Thus, from the pontificate of John XIII onwards, Catholic social teaching made a big transition from “. . . abstract philosophy to historical consciousness, from immutable essences to the changing facts of history, from deduction to induction, from the classical world to one which took account of Freud and Marx, from theory to the real life of ordinary people . . . Documents began with a consideration of a particular topic, or a section of the gospel which illuminated such a contemporary reality.”²⁵

Equally important to note is the discovery of human rights by the Church which now occupies a prominent place in the Church’s teaching on the human person whose dignity must not be violated. As *Mater et Magistra* ushered in a new era in Catholic social teaching and also inaugurated the process of ending the political alliance between Catholics and socially conservative forces in Europe and Italy in particular, *Pacem in Terris* for its own part, provided a new avenue for the Church to operate and engage the contemporary society. That avenue was the defence of human rights and the place of the individual in the society whose human dignity in various manners is related to the common good.²⁶

Prior to the 1940s, the Church’s attitude to question of human rights was at best very ambivalent because it previously considered such issues as part of the excesses of liberalism alongside its secular connotation. Although amidst the slaughter and destructions of the First World War, Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) in his outright condemnation of it maintained that: “The equilibrium of the world and the prosperous and sincere tranquility of the nations rest on mutual benevolence and on respect of the right of others and their dignity much more than on multitude of armaments and on formidable wall of fortresses.”²⁷ It was, however, with the monstrous Second World War that the Church decidedly shook off its old derision and suspicions of liberalism in terms of the promotion and defence of human rights. Pope Benedict XVI during his annual address to the Roman Curia on December 22, 2006, recalled in some manner the Church’s journey towards the embracement of human rights and religious freedom. In reference to the 18th century Enlightenment period in Europe, he described human rights and religious freedom as the “true conquest” or achievement of the Enlightenment.²⁸ Wash rightly points out:

Given the emphasis which has been put upon human rights by recent popes . . . it is difficult to imagine the church as other than a champion of human rights. But it was not always so, and Pope Pius VI condemned the French Declaration of the Rights of

²⁵ Paul Vallely, “Introduction”, 11-12.

²⁶ Charles Villa-Vicencio 1986. *Between Christ and Caesar: Classical and Contemporary Texts on Church and State*. Cape Town: David Philip, 113-4.

²⁷https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xv_exh_19150728_fummo-chiamati.html (accessed: June 8, 2018).

²⁸http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedictxvi/en/speeches/2006/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20061222_curia-romana.html (accessed: June 8, 2018).

Man in March 1791. To be fair to Pope Pius, his chief objection was to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, but in his rejection of that he included a condemnation of, among other things, freedom of religion and of expression. Papal rejection of these human rights, now regarded as fundamental to human dignity, was reiterated in the blanket condemnation of liberalism and the modern age to be found in Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* of 1864.²⁹

Another key point in the evolution of Catholic social thought is the inherent tension that borders on the notion of justice. There are two notions of justice in the social teaching of the Church, namely: (1) natural justice and (2) biblical justice.³⁰ This tension exists in two camps because while biblical notion of justice is prophetic and tends to be more radical in its declaration, the natural notion of justice is more philosophical, nuanced and diplomatic. This tension may help to explain the difficult relation of the Vatican under John Paul II with Liberation theology which seems very radical in contradistinction to traditional theology. The confliction between natural and biblical notions of justice came to a head in 1971 and 1974 during the synods of bishops of those years. The conflict was on the word "constitutive", described by Marvin Mich as "tension of perspective."³¹

The bishops in the synod of 1971 through *Justice in the World* emphatically stated: "action on behalf of justice . . . fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel" (par. 6). According to Mich, this was "a powerful statement" implying "that action on behalf of justice is an essential part of the mission of the church in preaching the gospel" but which in 1974 was met with some opposition because some bishops saw the statement as very strong and therefore, wanted a "softer" interpretation.³² In the estimation of Charles Murphy as cited by Marvin Mich, the disagreement over "constitutive" was reflective of the differing notions of justice (natural and biblical) as currently visible in Catholic social thought:

If justice is conceived exclusively on the plan of the natural, human virtue of justice as explained in classical philosophical treatises, then such justice can only be conceived as an integral but nonessential part of preaching of the gospel. But if justice is conceived in the biblical sense of God's liberating action which demands a necessary human response – a concept of justice which is far closer to agape than to justice in the classical philosophical sense – then justice must be defined as of the essence of the gospel itself.³³

²⁹ Michael Wash, "Lay the Foundations: from *Rerum Novarum* to the Second Vatican Council", 39-40.

³⁰ Marvin L. Krierk Mich 2003. *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements*. Bayard: Twenty-Third Publications, 193.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 192.

³² *Ibid.*, 192-3.

³³ *Ibid.*

The official Church often finds itself in a dilemma, and being pulled by both ends of the divide. However, a lot depends on historical circumstances because for the Church it remains the ideal to see itself as continuing the work of the biblical prophets who denounced evil, injustice and oppression in their milieu. Despite the misgivings of some bishops in the synod of 1974 about the word “constitutive”, Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, underscored the centrality of justice “as the kernel and centre of his Good News,” since “Christ proclaims salvation, this great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses man” (EN no. 9).³⁴ Through that affirmation, Paul VI reaffirmed the commitment of the Church to justice because everything that oppresses the human person which include material poverty and violence, injustice and denial of human rights, disfigure a person created in the image and likeness of God.

3. BASIC MORAL PRINCIPLES IN CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT

What the Bishops of the United States of America in their 1988 pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All*, wrote concerning their intervention in the social and economic order of the American society is also true of any papal pronouncement that may pertain to economics, politics or the general welfare of human beings. Ideally, the intervention of popes and bishops ought to be done not from the perspectives of public officials but as pastors, not as economists but as moral teachers guided by the light of faith which impels the entire Church to be actively involved in the project of social and economic justice. In the words of the American bishops, “We seek not to make some political or ideological point but to lift up the human and ethical dimensions of economic life, aspects too often neglected in public discussion.”³⁵ The Church does not get tired repeating that its social teaching is not a blueprint for a perfect society. Were that to be the case, the Church without intending it, would be encouraging the construction of an earthly utopia. In the reality of economic life amidst scarce resources coupled with individual and collective egoism, the most that a person can expect is that the politics and economics of a society may work sufficiently for everybody.

Pope Paul VI took cognizance of the multiplicity of national settings and their peculiarities when he acknowledged in *Octogesima Adveiens* (May 1971): “In the face of such widely varying situations it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to forward a solution which has universal validity. Such is not our ambition, nor is it our mission.” In view of this fact, “It is up to Christian communities with the help of the Holy Spirit, in communion with the bishops . . . and in dialogue with other Christian brethren and all men of goodwill, to discern the options and commitments which are called for . . .”³⁶ (par. 4). Hence, the following principles as envisaged in Catholic social teaching are meant to act as a rudder or a guide for Christians in their peculiar societies.

³⁴ Cf. Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, *An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought*, 98.

³⁵ National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States of America 1988. *Economic Justice for All*. Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 15.

³⁶ Cf., Marvin L. Krierk Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements*, 179-180.

The Common Good: As a rich concept, it constitutes one of the major pillars of Catholic social thought, conceived as an indispensable component for the building of a just, social and economic order. According to John J. Wright, the common good is a time-tested Christian philosophical concept that incorporates within itself the hope of Hebrew prophecy for social justice and economic equity, the wisdom of Greek speculation, the practical acumen of the Roman law and the charity of the Christian Revelation.³⁷ As a Christian concept, it seeks to safeguard the human person together with his or her human dignity because they are the very hinges upon which the common good itself rests. It is for this very reason that any economic system is judged “by what it does *for* and to people and by how it permits all to *participate* in it.”³⁸ Ultimately, it does mean that the economy ought to serve people and their needs, and not that people should be sacrificed in order to serve the needs and interests of the economy.

In its proper perspective, the common good presupposes and implies a “*bonum honestum*” of the society.³⁹ That is, the honest good of the political society oriented towards its practical good in which the common good is truly served, human rights are respected, and the demands of justice and fraternal charity are upheld. It is in this respect, Jacques Maritain insisted that the common good both as a Christian and a philosophical notion:

Includes the sum or sociological integration of all the civic conscience, political virtues and sense of right and liberty, of all the activity, material prosperity and spiritual riches, of moral rectitude, justice, friendship, happiness, virtue and heroism in the individual lives of members. For these things are, in a certain measure, *communicable* and so revert to each member, helping him to perfect his life and liberty of person.⁴⁰

As an idea, the common good runs through the entire length and breadth of papal social pronouncements from the time of Leo XIII. It is a recurrent theme in the social teaching of the Church and features prominently in conciliar and synodal documents. For instance, John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris*, reiterated his definition of the common good as found in his earlier encyclical, *Mater et Magistra* where he defined it as “the sum total of those conditions of social living whereby men are enabled to achieve their own integral perfection more fully and more easily”. And because it “applies to the wholeness of man, both corporal and spiritual”, “civil authorities need to protect and promote both” that is the material and the spiritual needs of the human person (*Pacem in Terris*, nn. 55-59).⁴¹ The Second Vatican Council in the

³⁷ John J. Wright, “The Common Good”, 218. For the connection between economic activities and the common good, see, Christian Felber 2015. *Change Everything: Creating an Economy for the Common Good*. London: Zed Books, 15-16.

³⁸ National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States of America, *Economic Justice for All*, 16.

³⁹ Jacques Maritain 1947. *The Person and the Common Good*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 43.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

⁴¹ Cf. Richard W. Rousseau, *Human Dignity and the Common Good: The Great Papal Social Encyclicals from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, 7.

footsteps of Pope John XXIII reaffirmed: “The political community exists for the sake of the common good, in which it finds its full justification and significance, and the source of its inherent legitimacy. Indeed, the common good embraces the sum of those conditions of the social life whereby men, families and associations more adequately and readily may attain their own perfection” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 74).⁴² In his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), Pope Benedict VI links justice to the common good as two basic requirements that ought to guide and inform moral actions in the political society. Every Christian is called upon to practice both in his or her daily life understood as two forms of charity in practical terms. And also, because the common good:

. . . is the good of “all of us”, made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society . . . Every Christian is called to practise this charity, in a manner corresponding to his vocation and according to the degree of influence he wields in the *pólis*. This is the institutional path – we might also call it the political path – of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbour directly, outside the institutional mediation of the *polis* (*C in V*, nn 6-7).⁴³

Subsidiarity and Solidarity

The “principle of subsidiarity” first appeared in Catholic social teaching in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) by Pope Pius XI. Conceived against the background of a stratified and hierarchically structured society, and in the context of the great economic recession of 1929, Pius XI maintained that it was “gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community.” In equal measure, it was also “an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do.” As the pope understood it, “every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them.” This right order of things, he described as “the principle of “subsidiary function”” (QA nn 79-80).⁴⁴ John Paul II in *Centesimus Annus* (1991) elaborated further on this principle insisting that “a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should

⁴² Cf. Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Between Christ and Caesar: Classical and Contemporary Texts on Church and State*, 114; http://www.lifeissues.net/writers/doc/ges/ges_gaudium_et_spes10.html (accessed: June 14, 2018). For the 1996 the statement by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, entitled *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching*, confer, [http://www.cbcew.org.uk/CBCEW-Home/Publications/The-Common-Good-1996/\(language\)/eng-GB](http://www.cbcew.org.uk/CBCEW-Home/Publications/The-Common-Good-1996/(language)/eng-GB) (accessed: June 14, 2018)

⁴³http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html (accessed: June 14, 2018).

⁴⁴http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html (accessed: June 14, 2018).

support it in case of need and help to co-ordinate its activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good" (CA no. 48).⁴⁵

A companion to the principle of subsidiarity in Catholic social teaching is **solidarity**. In the understanding and teaching of John Paul II, the terminology does not mean "a feeling of vague compassion . . . at the misfortunes of many people" but rather "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good" (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 38).⁴⁶ It implies the obligation to 'love our neighbour' with social implications requiring "a broader commitment" to the civil, political and economic rights of everyone in the society. In the judgment of the American bishops, "the partial ways" like "Gross National Product, per capita income, stock market prices and so forth", used to measure and debate the health of a nation's economy are grossly inadequate when juxtaposed with the Christian vision of economy. With the human person at the centre of its consideration, "the Christian vision of economic life looks beyond" such abstract economic measurements and poses the question: "Does economic life enhance or threaten our life together as a community?"⁴⁷ The deliberate resolve to ensure that no man, no woman and no child is left behind to languish in poverty and want is the core of solidarity because a society is judged fair and just by how it treats its vulnerable members at the margin of society. True solidarity implies a true charity that leads to advocacy.⁴⁸

Human Rights

It is inconceivable nowadays to think of Catholic social teaching without its unapologetic defence of the inviolable rights and dignity of the human person. With particular reference to "dignity" – a word that is almost on everyone's lips, it still remains somewhat illusive to pin down in concrete terms its proper and universally accepted definition. According to M. Douglas Meeks, "*dignitas*" from the Enlightenment has become closely associated with "*humanitas*" so that both may be said to be co-extensive with "the fundamental meaning of being human."⁴⁹ The Christian perspective of human dignity goes beyond certain narrow ideological definitions that identify human rights and dignity with "a few dimensions of human life or with a limited number of human rights." The Christian understanding which is biblical is predicated on this theological truth: ". . . human rights are grounded in God's creation of the human being in God's image." It means that "to be created as a human being" carries alongside with it a responsibility implying that the human person is "commissioned to represent God's will to the creation." Therefore, "this commission is what distinguishes the human being from the rest of creation and

⁴⁵ Cf. Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, *An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought*, 105-6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 106-7.

⁴⁷ National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States of America, *Economic Justice for All*, 16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁴⁹ M. Douglas Meeks 1984. "Introduction" in Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, ix.

what constitutes being human. Human rights are whatever human beings need in order to keep this commission."⁵⁰

Although the Catholic Church was slow in catching up with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights, but once it woke from its immobile conservatism, it positioned itself as a champion of the human person in order to keep him or her safe from all that may harm and disfigure their God-impressed image. Long before the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human rights, the popes when the occasion warranted, never missed the opportunity to denounce any violation of human rights. And many years before the formal definition of genocide as a crime against humanity, Pope Benedict XV during World War I, pronounced these memorable words against the senseless destruction of human lives: "Let each put aside the purpose of destruction, and reflect that nations do not die: impatiently they bear the yoke put on them, preparing for revenge, and handing down from generation to generation a miserable heritage of hatred and vengeance."⁵¹ Pope Pius XII during World War II declared unambiguously: "To protect the inviolable field of the rights of the human person and facilitate the fulfillment of his duties, should be the essential task of every public authority."⁵²

In two important documents of the Second Vatican Council: *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions) and *Dignitatis humanae* (Declaration on Religious Freedom), the Council Fathers affirmed that the rights of individuals and of communities to social and civil liberties equally embody in themselves the right to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups especially in religious matters. That is to say that every human being has a right to his or her freedom of conscience, since they are endowed with reason and freewill to seek the truth and to adhere to it. Unarguably, human rights and the inherent dignity of the human person are among the cornerstones of contemporary Catholic social teaching.⁵³

Other principles of Catholic social thought are (1) preferential option for the poor; (2) no recourse to violence as a tool for social change⁵⁴ and (3) peace. The theological shift or perspective that began in Vatican II and continued throughout the pontificate of Paul VI seemed to have reached its climax with the Second General Conference of the Latin American Bishops held at Medellin, Colombia in 1968, together with the 1971 Synod of Bishops on Justice in the World. In many respects, it could be said that Liberation theology was born out of the strong ecclesial emphasis on justice and development in the years that followed immediately after Vatican

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, x.

⁵¹ https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xv_exh_19150728_fummo-chiamati.html (accessed: June 8, 2018).

⁵² <https://thejosias.com/2017/06/02/pius-xii-la-solennita-della-pentecoste/> (accessed: June 7, 2018).

⁵³ Cf. Peter K. A. Turkson 2014. *The Catholic Church and Human Rights*. Address presented to Slovak Bishops' Conference, Bratislava, March 4, 2014; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Città del Vaticano: Editrice Vaticana); Paolo G. Carozza – Daniel Philpott 2012. "The Catholic Church, Human Rights, and Democracy: Convergence and Conflict with the Modern State" *Scholarly Works. Paper 882* (http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/law_faculty_scholarship/882) (accessed: March 18, 2017).

⁵⁴ Cf. Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, *An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought*, 106-7.

Council II. It equally brought to the fore the Church's "preferential option for the poor", on the basis of "denouncing global injustice and addressing justice within the church itself, on theology that should ground the church's involvement in social justice, and on the need for new approaches to education for justice."⁵⁵ Similar conclusion can be made about the Church's concerns and efforts for peace. According to Mary Ann Cejka, "peace is central to the social teaching of the church" which "is not just 'made' out of conflict, but built, day by day with the bricks of human dignity, development, solidarity, and world order."⁵⁶ Regrettably as it is sad to note, the official teachings of the Church "in matters of personal morality – or personal piety, or details of Catholic liturgy" often have the unintentional effect of obscuring "Catholic social teaching on poverty, development, justice and peace."⁵⁷

Ecology

Another area of concern today in Catholic social teaching is Ecology. Just as Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* (1967) called "peace, the new name for development" (PP no. 76), today's concerns for the protection and preservation of the ecosystem may rightly identify ecology as "the new name for development." What the Filipino bishops said in 1988 about the Philippines has universal import: "God intended this land for us, his special creatures, but not so that we might destroy it and turn it into a wasteland. Rather, He charged us to be stewards of his creation, to care for it, to protect its fruitfulness and not to allow it to be devastated (Gen. 1:28) . . . More and more we must recognize that the commitment to work for justice and to preserve the integrity of creation are two inseparable dimensions of our Christian vocation to work for the coming of the kingdom of God in our times."⁵⁸

The Filipino Bishops anticipated by two years Pope John Paul II's 1990 Message for World Day of Peace. Devoted entirely to environmental concerns, the message was titled, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation*. As affirmed by Marvin Mich, this text of John Paul II was "a breakthrough in Roman Catholic official teaching on the environment" intimately connecting "respect for life and for the dignity of the human person" "to the rest of creation, which is called to join man in praising God (cf. Ps 148:96)" (par. 16).⁵⁹ A particularly major breakthrough is *Laudato Si* (On Care for Our Common Home) by Pope Francis (2015). It is the first ever papal encyclical dedicated solely to the environment. In it, the pope calls for an "ecological conversion" in order to protect the earth and everything that lives on it. "Ecological

⁵⁵ Marvin L. Krierk Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements*, 190.

⁵⁶ Mary Ann Cejka 2007. "The Wrath of the Poor: Peace, Poverty, and Catholicism since *Populorum Progressio*" in International Jesuit Network for Development, *The Development of Peoples: Challenges for Today and Tomorrow (Essays to mark the Fortieth Anniversary of Populorum Progressio)*. Dublin: Columba Press, 37, 50.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵⁸ <http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/What-is-Happening-to-our-Beautiful-Land.pdf> (accessed: June 5, 2018)

⁵⁹ Marvin L. Krierk Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements*, 390-391.

conversion” demands a *metanoia* – a change of attitude about pollution, waste, the throwaway culture, the use of water and other natural resources:

“The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast”. For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion. It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So what they all need is an “ecological conversion”, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience (*LS* no. 217).⁶⁰

4. RECAPTURING THE LOST VIBRANCY

Many an author concurs that the ecclesial climate in the immediate post-Vatican II Church was characterized by dialogue and openness both within and outside the Church. This was manifested in a number of initiatives at the level of the local churches and at the international level led by the foresighted Pope Paul VI. In that climate of openness and dialogue in which the Church demonstrated the qualities of a listening Church, much readier to learn than quicker to prescribe instructions, a plethora of lay Catholic thinkers and writers played some notable roles in the formulation of Church’s documents on social justice, economy, politics, development and peace. It was a period that saw, for instance, the tireless work of Jacques Maritain in helping with Paul VI’s active commitment to the United Nations and the pope’s support to post-World War II Christian Democracy in Europe.⁶¹ The contribution of Lady Barbara Ward Jackson (renowned British economist) to the 1971 Synod of Bishop remains till date very remarkable. Speaking on “Structures for World Justice,” she urged the Church and her children to “reconsider social structures and personal living standards” and called particularly on bishops “to ensure that the church itself conduct its own affairs “in the strict spirit of justice and poverty.””⁶²

The epitome of the vibrancy of the immediate post-Vatican II years can be located in 1971 with two important documents: *Justice in the World* and *Octogesima Advieniens*. In addition to notching the local churches to take initiatives and lead in social justice ministry, those two documents continued with the typical attitude of openness and freshness of the Second Vatican Council so that as opined by Mich, the positive outcome was “a convergence of vision, creativity and energy that led to a new level of commitment to social justice ministry.”⁶³ Both 1971 and the papal

⁶⁰http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html (accessed: June 14, 2018)

⁶¹ Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, *An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought*, 110.

⁶² Marvin L. Krierk Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements*, 191.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 195.

documents of that same year could be described as milestones in Catholic social teaching. Those years were unrepeatable moment, truly graced and energizing as the entire Church came to the realization that “justice was neither an option nor a postscript to the gospel: it was its very essence.”⁶⁴

Sadly, as 1970s waned, receding through the 1980s into the 1990s under the pontificate of John Paul II, previously unleashed energy and initiatives from the local churches progressively slacked. One of the criticisms against the pontificate of John Paul II was its lip service to the principle of subsidiarity when the Church often failed to apply the same principle to itself in terms of Church governance and decision-making process. With regard the official articulation of Catholic social teaching as presented in *Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), Michael Hornsby-Smith observed that the book only “reflects the teaching of Pope John Paul II and marginalizes all conflicting or alternative views . . .”⁶⁵ The same author maintains that while previously there were efforts by liberation theologians to move the Church towards the direction of dialogical and inductive approaches to seeking social justice, the positions of John Paul II as clearly set out in the *Compendium* and *Centesimus Annus* (1991) hardly demonstrated “an openness to the modern world or to a willingness to dialogue about the marvels as well as the challenges of modern science.”⁶⁶

Thankfully, the pontificate of Pope Francis appears to be bringing back the Church once more towards the paths of dialogue and openness. His indications also reveal a conscious attempt to recapture that sense of an ecclesial community constructed together with Peter and under Peter that was emblematic of the immediate post-Vatican II Church. From the vantage point, his *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) and *Amoris Laetitia* (2016) could be considered as a single corpus. Both documents most remarkably, convey the efforts of Pope Francis to “face-lift” the Church, often perceived rightly or wrongly as a stern and ever-demanding teacher. His apostolic exhortation (2018) *Gaudete et Exultate* (On Call to Holiness) continues in the same spirit and could be interpreted as a clarion call to Catholics to work for social justice. Accordingly, “Just as you cannot understand Christ apart from the kingdom he came to bring, so too your personal mission is inseparable from the building of that kingdom: “Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Mt 6:33). Your identification with Christ and his will involves a commitment to build with him that kingdom of love, justice and universal peace” (G et E, no. 25).⁶⁷

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, *An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought*, 109.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 110.

⁶⁷http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html (accessed: June 15, 2018).

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- http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html (accessed: June 14, 2018).
- http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadregesimo-anno.html (accessed: June 14, 2018).
- https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xv_exh_19150728_fummo-chiamati.html (accessed: June 8, 2018).
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http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/law_faculty_scholarship/882 (accessed: March 18, 2017).
- <http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/What-is-Happening-to-our-Beautiful-Land.pdf> (accessed: June 5, 2018).

5. CONCLUSION

As this essay has endeavoured to demonstrate, the one hundred and twenty-years of the social teaching of the Church (1891 - 2018) bear the footprints impressed upon it by the variegated circumstances, experiences and issues that were peculiar to the time of each pronouncement or teaching. It is difficult and will even be misleading to make a general and categorical summation that may explicitly capture into a coherent unity various pontifical teachings and pronouncements on social issues and questions of their different epochs. Be that as it may, some principles have been identified as constituting the kernel of Catholic social teaching. They include: the common good, subsidiarity, solidarity, human rights, peace and ecology.

Another thing to recognize is the Church's triple-faced opposition to unbridled capitalism, liberalism and atheistic socialism. In its opposition to unrestrained capitalism together with its concern to protect the common good, the Church's social teaching leans more towards wealth redistribution rather than wealth creation. This is an inherent weakness in Catholic social teaching that requires a rethinking, perhaps, to be balanced with Calvinistic work ethic that places much emphasis on hard work and political participation. Experience has taught human beings two hard lessons: wealth must be created before it can be redistributed; and nature gives human beings nothing on a platter of gold as daily bread must be earned through sweat and ingenuity.

There is no shortage of Church documents on any conceivable social question. As a matter of fact, it suffers from superabundance which renders it more of an intellectual activity devoid of concrete applications. The change in tone and approach by Pope Francis in this regard is a welcomed development. It is only to be hoped that he can help the entire Church to recapture once again the enthusiasm and zest of the late 1960s and 1970s in which the Church was alive with initiatives and activities in social justice ministry. Mere knowledge of the Church's social teaching is not sufficient. It can happen that a person may be a "good" Catholic and still support an oppressive government, vote for obnoxious policies, harbour contempt for the poor, defend unjust structures and without regard for the environment and biodiversity. Effective pronouncements must be marched with effective and concrete actions at an institutional level and at a personal level.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si.html (accessed: June 14, 2018).

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exultate.html(accessed: June 15, 2018).

STUDIES AND PERSPECTIVES

RELIGIOUS LIFE: A CALL TO TAKE A PROPHETIC STANCE

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ABSTRACT

In Nigeria, we are blessed with religious vocation: Men and women who accepted the invitation of Christ to come follow him and they have lived the evangelical counsels of poverty, obedience and chastity with commitment and grace. However, in the new dispensation, Nigeria is being confronted with an old but growing new situation of injustice and exclusion: The massive poverty of more than 50% of our population, the threat to expression of need through violence, insecurity and instability of those men and women that the religious are called to minister to. In this article therefore, I will discuss the renewed call on religious to take a prophetic stance in the contemporary context of Nigeria. This propounds the need for initial and on-going formation to be tailored to the understanding and critical analysis of an option for the poor and a courageous look at what it means to be a prophetic witness in contemporary Nigerian society.

INTRODUCTION

A society such as Nigeria that has to address social problems such as corruption, unemployment, poverty, inequality, poor education and labor unrest is in desperate need of prophets. In this article, it is suggested that the clear prophetic voice of men and women religious could change the society in which the people we are called to serve belong. The problem is that this prophetic voice seems to have either lost momentum or has disappeared. As part of the solution to the growing problem in Nigeria, formation of religious men and women at the initial and on-going formation should make them more authentic Christians with passion for social justice and courageously committed to using their prophetic voice. Jesus who calls us has showed an example of taking a prophetic stance by addressing boldly the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, Sadducees and tax collectors of his day. You hold the key of the kingdom, not going in yourself and not allowing anyone else. God invited prophets to announce: Go and proclaim these words toward the north and say, 'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD; 'I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious,' declares the LORD; 'I will not be angry forever. 'Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God, and have scattered your favors to the strangers under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice,' declares the LORD. Jeremiah 35:15. When David arose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, "Go and speak to David, "Thus the LORD says, "I am offering you three things; choose for yourself one of them, which I will do to you." 2 Samuel 24:11-12. These are some of

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the scriptural foundations of an invitation by the Lord for us to be prophets given the mandate to call society to order. In the thirteenth century there was a significant movement from hermitage to mendicancy. This movement was a significant event in the history of religious life that highlighted the socio-political implications of religious life as a prophetic witnessing to the gospel. This transition was both symbolical and practical, as it marked the beginning of many current religious institutes. The entrance of these holy men and women into society replicates in a way the appointment of the prophets and the inauguration of the prophecy of old.⁶⁹ Against this backdrop, therefore, religious men and women like Jesus are called to use their prophetic voice to effect positive social change especially in the Nigerian society.

Hence, this article will investigate the following: What is prophetic witnessing and how is prophetic testimony grounded in the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets, the Vatican Council 11, and of Jesus? The act of performing the gift of prophecy in the present-day Nigerian society will be explained. Finally, what type of formation is needed for initial and on-going formation of men and women for Christian commitment and witness in church and society.

METHODOLOGY

The research is conducted mainly by means of a critical literature study and by suggesting how relevant findings could be put into practice. What is prophetic witnessing and how is prophetic testimony grounded in the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets, Vatican Council 11, and of Jesus.

There is a variety of meanings designated to a prophet and several synonyms are attributed to the old definition of a prophet: Seer, soothsayer, fortune teller, clairvoyant, diviner. However, a contemporary definition refers to a prophet as a person who spreads God's truth, who speaks for God or a deity, or by divine inspiration. A person chosen to speak for God could be likened to for instance Moses who was chosen to guide the people of Israel; as the greatest of Old Testament prophets. *There are other male prophets such as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah to mention but a few. Micah expresses with courage and conviction what he believes that God has put into his heart to proclaim to the people of Israel.*

"He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

In this way, creating a question and curious inquiry into the knowledge of what this inspiring verse teaches on the issues of justice, mercy, and humility.

Lest anyone think that prophets are only males called to witness to the salvific mission of God; women are also invited to be prophets. The label "prophetess" or "woman prophet" (*nəbī'āh*) is attributed to five women in the Old Testament: Miriam (Exod. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chron. 34:22), Noadiah

⁶⁹Obiezu, E. C., & Szura, J. (2004). *Journey's to renewed consecration: Religious life after Fifty years of Vatican II*

(Neh. 6:14), and "the prophetess" (Isa. 8:3). Its significance is clear. Miriam claims the Lord "has spoken" through her (Num. 12:2). Deborah says to Barak: "Look, the Lord, the God of Israel, has commanded" (Judg. 4:6). Huldah similarly uses the prophetic introductory formula: "Thus says the Lord God of Israel..." (2 Kings 22:15).⁷⁰ Scripture, then, describes a woman prophet as someone through whom God speaks to his people. In this regard, a "prophetess" is no different than her male counterpart prophet.

In the old testament, God continues to speak to God's people through the prophets. God sees the importance of eloquent prophets who are fearless and restless in the face of evil and lawlessness of society. The Lord was relentless in warning Israel and Judah through all his prophets and, saying,

"Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, my statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through My servants the prophets." 2 Kings 17:13

"Yet I sent you all My servants the prophets, again and again, saying, "Oh, do not do this abominable thing which I hate." Jeremiah 44:4

"I have also spoken to the prophets, And I gave numerous visions, and through the prophets I gave parables Hosea 12:10

When David arose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying,

"Go and speak to David, 'Thus the LORD says, "I am offering you three things; choose for yourself one of them, which I will do to you." 2 Samuel 24:11-12

God presents his son to humankind as the epitome of a person we can learn from.

"Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, in whom my soul delights. I will put my Spirit on Him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations (Mtt 12:18)

Jesus obeys his Father's will by teaching us by example in what it means to take on the cause of members of society who live on the margins; he proclaims:

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of spirit to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden (LK 4:18)

Jesus's stance on his prophetic call affirms the sense of prophecy (1Corinthians 14) which is not to forecast future things, but to interpret scripture concretely and to apply the interpretation in consoling and admonishing the congregation and society.⁷¹ Prophecy is above all the gift to understand and express what the will of God is in a concrete, given situation.

The prophetic character of the consecrated life was strongly emphasized by the Synod Fathers. It takes the shape of a special form of sharing in Christ's

⁷⁰Del Housaye, J. (2009). Who are the women Prophets in the Bible. *Journal of CBE International* Vol. 16 No. 2

⁷¹De Klerk, B. J. (2013). Service to the South African society through prophetic testimony as a liturgical act. *HTS Theological Studies* vol.69 n.2 Pretoria Jan. 2013 Retrieved from http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0259-94222013000200015

prophetic office, which the Holy Spirit communicates to the whole People of God. There is a prophetic dimension which belongs to the consecrated life as such, resulting from the radical nature of the following of Christ and of the subsequent dedication to the mission characteristic of the consecrated life.⁷² The sign value, which the Second Vatican Council acknowledges in the consecrated life, is expressed in prophetic witness to the primacy which God and the truths of the Gospel have in the Christian life.

John Paul II, in *Vita Consecrata* crystallized this characterization by succinctly stating that prophetic witnessing is inseparably linked to religious vocation both intrinsically and teleologically. Intrinsically refers to religious life and its radical nature to the call of the Father to follow Christ and theologically implies to the core of the mission men and women religious are called to embrace.⁷³ Prophets, such as Bishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador, believe in creating and preparing for a brighter future not his own. Thus, our task is to call the people as a community to accountability and responsibility in their relationship with God as lived in their various social milieus. As mediators of the covenant of God with his people, prophets needed to identify with what was expected of them in that relationship. In doing so, they often interpreted history, the flow of events, in light of relationship with God. Like the prophets of old and like Christ, not even the threat of death would deter their commitment, so marked was their life by utter self-giving. This way of life was instituted through the charisms and prophetic witnessing of Founders/Foundresses of Religious Congregations that we belong to. That all founders and foundresses witnessed to the love of the communitarian God, was not an abstract mission but one with strong implication for the social reality of h/her time.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

A prophetic witness in the face of challenges in the present-day Nigerian socio-political climate

Religious life has embarked on a changing, painful, challenging, life giving journey. The doors of once sheltered religious men and women have flung open creating all sorts of vulnerabilities through the new age realities, challenging the status quo and questions the credibility and role of religious life in our present day. This reality is gradually settling in the church in Nigeria. It is a common practice in Nigeria to see young children, especially in the Northern part of Nigeria, actively engaged in begging. In Northern Nigeria, many families send children known as

⁷²Vatican Council II (1975). *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. Dublin, Ireland Costello Publishing Company, Inc., and Reverend Austin Flannery, O.P.(Ed.)

⁷³ *Ibid.* i

“Almajiri” to Koranic schools.⁷⁴Abiodun, George, Amadi, Oladipo, and Iluno(2017) described the challenges faced by Nigeria as law enforcement from other nations apprehend many trafficked women and girl-children. The findings revealed that traffickers take their victims to Europe, some parts of Africa and the Middle East.⁷⁵ Kelly (2017) states that in 2014, 1,450 Nigerian women were registered at the landing port in Italy, in 2015, 5,600 women were registered by the International Organization for Migrants (IOM) and in 2016, out of 180,000 migrants arriving in Italy by sea, 37,500 were trafficked Nigerian women, and children.⁷⁶Eze (2017) explained the trend of deportation of trafficked Nigerian women and girls for sex. Her research findings proved that in 2003, Spain deported 160 women and girls, 59 from the Netherlands, four from the United States, 13 from South Africa, six from Ireland, others from Cote d'Ivoire, Niger Republic and 104 from Mali.⁷⁷ The insurgence of Boko haram activities threatens national/regional security and stability.⁷⁸ The economic contraction in 2016 led to a projected increase in poverty by close to 2 percentage points and reached 48.4 percent. Poverty in Nigeria, as per the projections based on NLSS 2009/10, is estimated to have increased along with negative economic growth in all four quarters of 2016 and the first quarters of 2017. The economic recession, insecurity and displacement in North Eastern Nigeria led to low agricultural production, substantial disruption of basic services and damage to infrastructure, depleted house household's food stocks, and reduced purchasing power, with several millions of people facing food security crisis. The conflict between the herdsmen and farmers in the North Central, Nigeria also posed similar threats in the region, especially food security.⁷⁹ In the face of a troubled nation such as Nigeria, where kidnapping has become the in-thing, political instability forms the wake of our day, preventable diseases plague our land, unemployment renders our

⁷⁴Ekong, S. (2016). Nigerian Policy on Child Labor: An Evaluation of the Education Sector Preparedness for Effective Policy Implementation Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/pqdtlocal1005747/docview/1758252321/abstract/98BC2B3E83D4DCEPQ/>

⁷⁵Abiodun, A.K., George, A, Amadi, C.C., Oladipo, G. & Iluno, L.U. (2017). Human trafficking: A global challenge reflection on the challenges in Nigeria. *Journal of Law, Policy, and Globalization*. Vol. 61 2017 Retrieved from <http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/jawpglob61&id=193&div=&collection=ile>

⁷⁶Kelly, A. (2017). Number of Nigerian women trafficked to Italy for sex almost doubled in 2016 *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/jan/12/nigerian-women-trafficked-to-italy-for-sex-doubled-2016>

⁷⁷Eze, M. D. (2017). *Human Trafficking and Prostitution Among Women and Girls of Edo State, Nigeria Possibility of Rehabilitation Through Education and Prevention*. Xlibris Publishing Corporation, UK

⁷⁸Ogbonnya, E.M., Ogujiuba, K. & Stiegler, N. (2014). *Terrorism in Nigeria: Implications of Boko Haram's movement for security and stability in the ECOWAS sub-region* DOI 10.1080/10246029.2014.903378 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10246029.2014.903378>

⁷⁹World Bank, (2017). *Country poverty brief: Sub-Saharan Africa Nigeria* 2107. Retrieved from http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/Archives-2017/Global_POV_SP_CPB_NGA.pdf

youths to self-inflicted slavery within and across the world, we could go on and on. The problem of refugees due to Boko haram's deadly campaign and Northern children parade our streets as "Alamajiris" while politicians fold their arms, watch and engage in partisan wrangling and embezzlement of public funds. The litany of pain and suffering tells the story of the ever-widening gap between the poor and rich in Nigeria.

Poverty, unemployment, food security crisis precipitates kidnapping, armed robbery, terrorism just to name but a few. Lack of education due to either unavailability or lack of access to expensive education by the poor (including schools run by the church). Tribalism has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society. In the face of these complicated but multifaceted problems that plague society, religious are called to raise the questions with enthusiasm while staying hopeful for the future. Religious life lived in faith is to say "Yes" to be faithful in all circumstances. A passion to follow Christ in the lame, broken-hearted, the sick, and the marginalized on the margins of society. To say Yes: I will surrender to a future so blurry to be claimed with hope, yet I know that God is in the question. The ability to say Lord I believe; help my unbelief; in living the paradox of my life. God is still calling the religious to contribute to the healing of the body of Christ. The joy of service is the daily transformation causing the dry bones to rise again (Ezekiel 37: 3); in believing in the people that we are called to serve by walking with them to Calvary. A reporter covering the funeral event of Martin Luther King saw an old man standing at the edges of the cemetery. The reporter asked him: What did this man mean to you? Why was he special? Through tears he answered. He was faithful. He believed in us when we stopped believing in ourselves, he stayed with us when we were not worth staying with. This can be a testimony of a life well lived in faith and hope for us and others entrusted to us.

We are called to be the one who walk with God's people in the corridors of death, who sing in the hallways of terror, who return as the rising of hope.⁸⁰We are called to take the road less traveled and uncommon. To go against the grain, not to settle; to be restless. We are called to address the problems in our Nation and the polarity in citizens' thinking. To be the voice of the marginalized poors' call in a supposedly richest nation in Black Africa. To engage with courage the tribal divide that threaten the message of Christ; "that they may be one" (Jn 17:22).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Attributes needed for initial and on-going formation of men and women Christians

What sort of religious men and women are needed to address these contemporary national; but global issues? This question is crucial because religious life in Nigeria is facing similar narrative/challenges that plague Nigerian society: Materialism, tribal tension in communities, love of power rather than the power of

⁸⁰ Richardson, J. (2000). In wisdom path: Discovering the Sacred in Every season. Pilgrim Pr.

love, lack of accountability of communal property, cliques or what I refer to as "Religious Gang". The gradual move by religious men and women towards secularism was voiced in *Vita Consecrata* (the outcome document of the synod issued by Pope John Paul II). Pope Benedict XVI, (2011) posited that consecrated life, like other aspects of Church life, is trapped in the wave of worldliness that challenges us today. According to Pope Benedict XVI, consecrated life has become too settled in this world, adapting itself to worldly standards. Its vocation to prophetic openness has been abandoned in favor of greater weight and attention paid to self-preoccupation, self-centeredness and self-preservation rather than total self-giving to God, love for Christ the teacher, Lord and bridegroom of the Church who is intimately followed and served above everything and decision to live according to the Spirit.⁸¹ Institutes of Consecrated Life are thus invited to courageously propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today's world. This invitation is first of all a call to perseverance on the path of holiness in the midst of the material and spiritual difficulties⁸².

The Synod Assembly paid special attention in the discussion of the formation of those who wish to consecrate themselves to the Lord and recognize its decisive importance. The primary objective of the formation process is to prepare people for the total consecration of themselves to God in the following of Christ, at the service of the Church's mission.⁸³ To say "yes" to the Lord's call by taking personal responsibility for maturing in one's vocation is the inescapable duty of all who have been called. According to Vatican II decree on the up-to-date of religious renewal, *Perfectae Caritatis* published in 1965, the Church Fathers emphasized the need for initial and ongoing formation for Christian growth.

They deliberated on a formation that will prepare the novices in the type of life or the activities which will be theirs in the future, and to teach them how to realize in their lives in progressive stages that cohesive unity whereby contemplation and apostolic activities are closely linked together. The type of formation that will inculcate in them a unity which is most fundamental and primary values of these same societies. The attainment of this unity, they emphasized, requires training in self-denial and persevering efforts towards purity of intention in action.

The Vatican Council II, Decree on Religious life; *Perfectae Caritatis* also affirmed that continuing formation, whether in Institutes of Apostolic or Contemplative Life, is an intrinsic requirement of religious consecration. As mentioned above, the formation process is not limited to the initial phase. Due to human limitations, the consecrated person can never claim to have completely

⁸¹ Apostolic Exhortation, (1996). Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *VITA CONSECRATA* of the Holy Father John Paul II Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Retrieved from

http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031996_vita-consecrata.html

⁸² *ibid* iv

⁸³ *Ibid* iv

xvi Nolan, A. (2006). *Jesus today: A spirituality of radical freedom*. MaryKnoll, New York,

brought to life the "new creature" who, in every circumstance of life, reflects the very mind of Christ. *Initial* formation, then, should be closely connected with *continuing* formation, thereby creating a readiness on everyone's part to let themselves be formed every day of their lives.⁸⁴ Community, they stressed nurtures this process.

Against this background, therefore, what should religious institutes be forming both those in initial and on-going formation for? I believe that religious institutes should base their formation on some of the concerning issues that threaten to cripple religious communities and the challenges of social and political realities of our environment. The problems identified as a challenge is not peculiar to Nigeria. However, it needs to be addressed by developing formation curriculum that is contextualized and appropriate, so that Nigerian religious men and women will be relevant not only to Nigeria but also that they can develop skills and attitudes to address global questions. I would suggest the following issues to be addressed both at the initial and on-going formation to help consecrated men and women to develop relevant skills needed to be true prophets witnessing with their lives and actions to the resurrected Christ:

- *Formation in contemplative prayer,
- * Formation authentically rooted in detachment,
- *Formation in awareness of social justice /involvement,
- * Formation in Contemplative dialogue,
- * Formation in cultural competence,
- *Formation in the spirituality of servant-leadership style and
- * Formation in the knowledge of self.

Formation in contemplative prayer

Religious men and young women in both initial and on-going formation need to realize the importance of being a contemplative in action. The formation has to inculcate in a religious the essence of not just the recitation of the Breviary, but authentic union with God in prayer; where every word and action becomes a prayer. We need to live lives which question whether we are "human being" or "human doing". A prophet who wants to be rooted in God who calls h/her to a deep christian formation needs to engage h/herself in silence and solitude. It is in this state of quiet that we can experience the power of God calling deep in our souls to be aware of who we are, whose we are and which route we want to take on our journey. The quest for 'busyness' in our apostolate can become an obsession where we set out to save the world, but we also need to realize that unless we can be spiritually transformed, we cannot be part of others' transformation. We will experience burnout and lack spiritual upliftment to become our best selves. Jesus was a busy person. Great crowds followed him, pushing and shoving to get closer to him (Mt 5:24, 31), hoping for healing or words of wisdom. And yet Jesus would try to get away to a quiet place to rest awhile. He adhered to his need for silence and solitude. He withdrew for forty days and forty nights and to which he went early in the morning to pray (MK 1:35).

⁸² Ibid iv

According to Luke, he went to the mountains with the twelve and spent the night in prayer (Lk 6:12). If we want to follow Jesus, we need to follow him first and foremost into the desert. We cannot accomplish any task let alone get to know who we are without creating some space in our lives for prayer and communion with God. In this way, we are energized for mission.

Formation authentically rooted in detachment

In every age there have been men and women who, obedient to the Father's call and to the prompting of the Spirit, have chosen this special way of following Christ, in order to devote themselves to him with an "undivided" heart (cf. *1 Cor* 7:34). Like the Apostles, they too have left everything behind in order to be with Christ and to put themselves, as he did, at the service of God and their brothers and sisters.⁸⁵ In this way, through the many charisms of spiritual and apostolic life bestowed on them by the Holy Spirit, they have helped to make the mystery and mission of the Church shine forth, and in doing so, have contributed to the renewal of society. The three disciples caught up in ecstasy hear the Father's call to listen to Christ, to place all their trust in him, to make him the center of their lives. The words from on high give new depth to the invitation by which Jesus himself, at the beginning of his public life, called them to follow him, to leave their ordinary lives behind and to enter into a close relationship to him. It is precisely this special grace of intimacy which, in the consecrated life, makes possible and even demands the total gift of self in the profession of the evangelical counsels.

The Son, who is the way which leads to the Father (cf. *Jn*14:6), calls all those whom the Father has given to him (cf. *Jn*17:9) to make the following of himself the whole purpose of their lives. But of some, those called to the consecrated life, he asks a total commitment, one which involves leaving everything behind (cf. *Mt* 19:27) in order to live at his side and to follow him wherever he goes (cf. *Rev* 14:4). Formation at initial and on-going which is rooted in the dialogue of detachment may help religious men and women to be less materialistic, but to ask for that which is needed for mission.

Formation in awareness of social justice issues/involvement

The prophets of today also need to interrupt the status quo by unmasking and deconstructing the structures of today. The regular Sundayliturgy needs also to be seen as an opportunity for the gathering of the faith community to be nurtured and revitalized for prophetic action in and for the world. ⁸⁶ Our lives are continuing acts of worship. When the members of the prophetic community of faith gather around God's Word, they find grace to articulate their mission in harmony with the gospel of Christ they preach. Prophetic mission is directly connected with the praxis of justice. Liturgy expresses and fosters faith that does justice in missionary praxis. No prophetic mission is isolated from efforts to restructure the social-political-economic order. The justice Christians proclaim in their mission must recognize that the struggle for a just social-political-economic order parallels the struggle for the

⁸⁵ Ibid xiii

⁸⁶ iii

dignity of the whole human being. The theological foundation for a Christian praxis of justice is God's saving work through grace.

Therefore, the formation of prophets in initial and on-going process should embody the

God who continues to call men and women who will be able to adapt themselves to the changing times. Men and women who are fearless, courageous, selfless, committed and prayerfully listening to the promptings of the spirit to embrace the struggle for justice. As men and women called to be prophets if we do not understand, know, able to evaluate and critically analyze what national and international politics and policies are, if we are not aware of the laws that are promulgated in our land that impact us and the people we serve, if we do not listen to news, how can we understand the obstacles militating against our efforts to announce the reign of God. Then religious men and women would be like the kid who came to school but fell asleep. When the teacher asked. Junior, what is the answer to the question I just asked. Junior replied: Sorry Teacher, in the first place, I did not hear the question.

Formation in Contemplative dialogue

Called to life in communion (Interpersonal relationship), prophets need to perfect the art of relationship. The ability to navigate interpersonal relationship will help both men and women both in initial and on-going formation to master ways to relate to God's people on the missions. My conviction is that religious are first missioned self, to each other and then we can gain better skills to give what we possess. Jesus washes the feet of his disciples inspiring humanity to take up the basin and the towel. Through this gesture, God calls us into deeper and greater communion with God-self. Day after day we are invited to take up the basin and the towel. The tenderness of the towel and willingness of the water inspires us. The call is to community; the impoverished power that sets the soul free and the humility to take the basin and the towel.

Hence, as vocation ministers, we are called to invite God's children into service of the washing of the feet. Be it at the initial or on-going formation, we encourage consecrated men and women to take the basin and the towel in humility. In this urgency to take the basin and the towel; we become the change we want to see.

The challenge however is, sometimes in relationship; metaphorically we run a movie in our minds called Reality which is construed from our perception of what is. Tipping (2009) describes this scenario as the Projector. Once we understand that our reality is just our projections, instead of blaming others we can begin to take responsibility for what we have created with our thoughts. When we change our perception and drop our illusion and attachments to our belief that what appears on the screen represents reality, we experience Radical Forgiveness.⁸⁷ Radical forgiveness sets our hearts ready for mission, with no stress, no baggage, no chip on our shoulders; we can go with great enthusiasm to be authentic prophets.

⁸⁷ Tipping, C. (2009). *Radical forgiveness*. Boulder, CO. Sounds True Inc. Publishers.

Formation in cultural competence

In a country such as Nigeria, religious men and women are called to minister among people from other ethnic and tribal groups. It will be incorrect to think that since we are Nigerians, we share same culture and tradition. In the way our languages are different so are some cultural and social ways of life. Nigeria is not a homogenous country and thus men and women in initial and on-going formation need to learn to take off their sandals when they meet each other or are missioned in other areas other than theirs; as where they are sent to is a Holy ground. For its part, the consecrated life itself is the bearer of Gospel values and, where it is authentically lived, it can make an innovative contribution in meeting the challenges of inculturation. As a sign of the primacy of God and his Kingdom, it can, through dialogue, elicit a positive reaction in people's consciences. If the consecrated life maintains its prophetic impact, it serves as a Gospel leaven within a culture, purifying and perfecting it.⁸⁸ In present day circumstances, special importance must be given to the interior freedom of consecrated persons, their affective maturity, their ability to communicate with others, especially in their serenity of spirit, their compassion for those who are suffering, their love for the truth, and a correspondence between their actions and their words. *The apostolic dimension* opens the hearts and minds of consecrated persons and prepares them for constant effort in the apostolate, as the sign that it is the love of Christ which urges them on (cf. 2 Cor 5:14). In practice, this will involve updating the methods and objectives of apostolic works in fidelity to the spirit and aims of the founder or foundress and to subsequently emerging traditions, with continuous attention to changing historical and cultural conditions, at the general and local levels where the apostolate is carried out.

Formation in the spirituality of servant-leadership style

A call to servant leadership is a call to invite people and educate them on how to engage themselves at the table of dialogue, peace, justice, fairness, brother/sisterhood. At this table there is mutual accountability and freedom to be who you are created to be while mutually seeking transformation of the soul of the leader and the one being led.⁸⁹ A call to be a companion on the journey, a call to offer "the power of love and not love of power".

As religious we are called to model servant leadership; that liberates and affirms the giftedness of community members and people we are called to serve as companions on the journey. The spirituality of leadership means service, so it is absurd and un-Christlike to use it as a position of power over others to humiliate, intimidate, and strip them of their dignity and deprive them of a just hearing. It is not to be used against those who are not in the clique which I refer to as "Religious gangs." When such abuse of leadership takes place in religious community, it

⁸⁸ Ibid xiii

⁸⁹ Arnold, J.H. (1994). *Discipleship*. Walden, New York, Plough Publishing House

becomes unhealthy. Formation of new and old religious should emphasize the need to reverence and respect brothers and sisters who wholeheartedly gave themselves voluntarily, trustingly, and open heartedly to the church and humanity. Men and women in initial and on-going formation should be taught to understand that in a dictatorial state, people might yield to a greater power even though their souls reject the process that led them to give in to the action. But sooner or later especially younger members will begin to live in fear with the hope of making it to what I christened the Nigerian religious "Final Profession" syndrome. In this state, the growth of those young men and women religious in initial and on-going formation prior to final vows becomes stunted and lack genuine commitment with freedom which goes with responsibility. They lack spiritual maturity, they fail to ask relevant questions, they wear masks till they make final vows. This is the tragedy of Final vows syndrome.

Religious - both those in the initial or on-going formation - can learn not only from Jesus, but also from outstanding leaders who have modeled servant-leadership; who led their people through the path into the light of day. Leaders such as Moses, Joseph son of Jacob, and Mary the Mother of God who have led the world to new ground, a fertile ground with the soil of forgiveness and tilled with a desire for truth, reconciliation, and restoration. Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mohandas Gandhi are the forerunners of today's leaders who lived and worked based on the principles of servant-leadership.⁹⁰ Pope Francis models this type of leadership and is accessible and approachable, though he may not agree with people on all fronts. Such leaders are the modern-day expression of a long line of visionaries; leaders with foresight, able to hear the voice of others, and capable of leading in a way that provides others with light, life and maturity needed for prophetic ministry. Religious men and women may learn from what Mandela had to say: As a leader, I have always led from behind. I would listen to what each person had to say in a discussion before venturing my own opinion. Oftentimes my opinion is simply represented in a consensus of what I heard in the discussion.⁹¹

Formation in the knowledge of self

Teaching religious men and women in getting to know oneself is an essential element to authentic Christian formation and spiritual development. The need to strive for self-knowledge cannot be overemphasized in the journey towards initial and ongoing formation in religious life. A prophet without self-scrutiny is bound to project, take refuge in blame syndrome and would lack effective prophetic stance. Jesus was a poet and an artist who communicated with people by painting mental pictures. In this case he exposed the ludicrousness of not knowing oneself by

⁹⁰Ferch, S. R. & Spears, L.C. (2010). *Spirit of Servant-leadership*. Mahwah, New Jersey U.S.A. Paulist Press/Orbis Books Inc.

⁹¹Mandela, N. (1994). *Long walk to freedom: The autobiography of Nelson Mandela*. London. Little, Brown and Company

painting a picture of someone offering to take out a speck from her neighbor's eye while ignoring the huge log of in her own eye. It is a cartoon and caricature like the picture he painted of a camel attempting to pass through the eye of a needle. By implication therefore, with a such a log, one cannot see anything. To quote the text in full:

“Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, “Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye,” when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye. (LK 6: 41 -42).

The log in the eye is the ego, selfish self. What can blind us in the journey of initial and on-going formation is the truth about ourselves and others is ego. What can be blindness to ego, is the ego itself. Our egos make hypocrites of us all. Although each of us has a slightly structured ego, there are ways of categorizing general personality types to help us discern where we need to focus on to experience healing.

One way to explore self-knowledge is through the scripture and enneagram. The nine ennea-types point to different compulsions and obsessions; different forms of self-centeredness. The enneagram summarizes the different strengths of various personality types. In recent types, people in ministry have begun to use these tools to unlock who they are which has helped them to begin the journey to self-knowledge. Enneagram explains why we behave the way we do and helps to point out specific directions for individual and spiritual growth thus improving relationships with other companions on the journey.⁹² Self-knowledge is therefore the growing awareness of our ego and all its work; without judging or blaming or making excuses for ourselves. We need to form religious men and women to begin to observe their behavior in different circumstances, of recognizing obsessions and compulsions; in this way we can become effective prophets and are able to gain more freedom in the knowledge that we are not wearing the mask of perfection and projection.

Conclusion

What do great prophets such as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Ezekiel and Jesus have in common with the religious? asks Joan Chittister. And she answers: All of them were simple souls like you and me. All of them loved without limit, burned with an enduring patience, were afire with God and proclaimed a new vision. All of them invite you and I to claim our prophetic dimension and speak God's word in the midst of human chaos. Prophecy, she insists is not a luxury; it is an essential dimension of the Christian life.⁹³That's key to the whole question of the prophetic

⁹²Baron, R. & Wagele, E. (1994). *The enneagram made easy: Discover the Nine types of People*. New York. HarperCollins Publishers.

⁹³Chittister, J. (2009). *The cry of the prophet: A call to fullness of life*. PA. U.S.A. BenetVision Publishers

voice in any society. It comes out of the experience and history of the time. When you look at the situation you're in, prophets are not people who sit around theologizing out of some kind of airy-fairy transcendent overview of somebody else's idea of what the world is. These are people who, out of immersion in the mind of God, speak about what the society is now and what the society should be. The prophetic movement in any society looks, first of all, at what is the Word of God for humanity. And then uses that as a measure for the way humanity itself is acting at this moment.

Men and women religious are chosen by God to raise questions, to disturb the peace, to rock the boat of political leaders. In a country such as Nigeria, the attempt right now is to silence the questions. "You may not discuss, you may not think, you may not do." Also, if we can suppress the questions, we'll have the time, we hope, to build up a young generation in the old answers. The way you empower is religious men and women to refuse to be silent. If consecrated people are silent now, if they fail to articulate the real questions now, it will take another fifty years just to legitimate the questions again. Hence, it is crucial to know the naked position of the Gospel, "I live no longer with my own life" (Galatians 2:20). In that place, as Jesus warned, "the whole world will hate you" (John 15:19). Chittister (2009) poses the question: Why anyone would choose or want to be a prophet.⁹⁴

Jesus explains that prophetic stance is not so that we can isolate ourselves in order to be in the world but not of it. It is essential to understand that we are not of the world only in the sense of separating ourselves from the evil root of self-interest, greed, and injustice. We need to separate ourselves from all that is loveless in the present world order. In the midst of the political instability, corruption, nepotism, man-made unemployment, reckless administration of the Nigerian political elite, ethnic division, juvenile delinquency, violent crime, quest to gain and control power, mental illness, hijacking of the wealth of Nigerians by a few, God calls each prophet. Religious are called out of this world order not to complacency and to maintain culture of silence, to glory in the status of being religious and to walk the streets in dazzling religious regalia, attaining final vows and obtaining a ring (while this is a good outward sign), it is not what makes us authentic religious and clearly not what makes us consecrated people. The essence of our commitment to vocation to religious life and our vows is to build the city of God where the Spirit alone rules, to build the city on the hilltop which cannot be hidden but shines into the world. It is our deeds that will shine out for others to have life and life to the fullest.⁹⁵

Prophetic stance ultimately calls for risk taking in daring to expand the kingdom and reign of God for the hopeless. Hence, call to prophetic living invites us to take strength in Jesus who dared to rock the boat of the Pharisees and Sadducees, those who turned his father's temple into a market place. It is also important for prophets to know that for Jesus to risk bumping into an unknown became challenging and cost him his life. It is also imperative to remember that sometimes the road will be foggy, the thunderstorm storm scares us as heavy rain blurs our

⁹⁴Ibid xxvi

⁹⁵ Ibid xx

vision. The rivers and oceans may overflow their banks. Dead bodies will be found in prisons and on street sidewalks.⁹⁶ Those who dare to speak up against injustice can be silenced or killed. Sometimes culture of silence and pessimism sets in our souls and dominate our weary and hopeless hearts as we watch the malnourished waste away, the sick given fake drugs, children are either brainwashed or forced to fight as terrorists. We watch new forms of slavery emerge as our youths pay their way, coerced and trafficked within and outside the shores of Nigeria, youths take to drug addiction with no hope for a future. Let us not give up. Let us always remember the words of Isaiah: Do not be afraid, ...should you pass through the raging waters, you shall not drown (Isaiah 41:10).

⁹⁶Iwuoha, N. (2012). *Walking in the wisdom of the "Worn Out" shoes of Blessed Catherine Kasper: A symbol of transformation*. Donaldson, Indiana U.S.A. Poor Handmaids of Jesus of Christ Publications.

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

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ABSTRACT

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

INTRODUCTION

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

God calls persons to the consecrated life by way of special invitation to His service through purely human situations. He sets apart such individuals for the emulation of the gospel values and for the salvation of His people. They are set

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apart for a life of witness. Although the consecrated life is as old as the Church and has suffered a lot of changes, challenges and losses in vocation, it has never lost its relevance in the Church and to the world. Men and women have lived and still live the religious life style, to deepen their relationship with God, their love and devotion in a continued striving in the imitation of the Virgin, Poor and Obedient Christ of the Gospels. Yet, no one takes this honour upon her or himself(Heb. 5: 4).

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

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

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

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

CONSECRATED

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

The word "consecration" connotes setting something or someone apart for some holy or sacred responsibilities. It is the act of declaring a person, or an object, for sacred use by a deity. Consecration is the noun of the verb, to consecrate and is mostly employed in Christian / Catholic religious circles and ceremonies to denote dedication of persons, places and things to the service of God. Etymologically, its

origin is the Latin "*consecrationem*"⁹⁸ and the Anglo-French word "*consecratiōn*", its past tense "consecrated", which is our concern in this presentation. We wish to explore the reason for which God calls, why He calls these persons. In the same vein, discuss the procedure of discerning this call as well as its missionary relevance in the contemporary post modern society.

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

The apostles affirm that they hadn't received any commandment concerning virginity; nevertheless, they left it to the power of those that are willing to take it⁹⁹. Thus attesting to the understanding that, the consecrated life is not given to all. It is an invitation to those who have been chosen to live the audacity of Christ's life. In corroboration with the apostles, the fathers of the church opine that following the example of Christ, the apostles offered their lives in self commitment to be consecrated. To them, vocation to the consecrated life is a gift, a call given only to those who ask. This explains Origen when he said: "*Ask and it shall be given to you (...) God therefore will give good gifts, perfect purity in celibacy and chastity, to those who ask with their whole soul (...)*"¹⁰⁰. That virginity will be given to the one who asks is the view of St Jerome. And John Chrysostom in corroboration states that: "*He that is able to receive it let him receive*"¹⁰¹. Indeed, the fathers of the church believed strongly that the consecrated life is a gift, an invitation from God to those who can, to share in the life of His incarnate Son. It is given only to those who can live it. To this end, Pope John Paul II explains that: "*In the consecrated life, individuals commit themselves to the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience. Their lives testify to the values of the Kingdom of God. The profession of chastity, poverty and obedience rejects the idolatry of anything created and points to God as the absolute good*"¹⁰². By way of explanation, the phrase individuals commit themselves to the evangelical counsels connotes that the consecrated persons are driven as it were by some invincible force to stay faithfully engaged to the life of Sacred solitude for the sake or the kingdom. Certainly, based

⁹⁸Cf. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/consecration> consulted on the 13th April, 2018.

⁹⁹Cf. Constitutions of the apostles, book IV Sec II. <http://www.pathoflove.com/fathers-on-vocation.html> consulted on the 17th may 2018.

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.pathoflove.com/fathers-on-vocation.html> consulted on the 22th May, 2018.

¹⁰¹Ibidem

¹⁰²John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (VC),87-92 march 25th 1996

on personal reflection and spiritual experiences, the fathers in their wisdom made a categorical observation; that the consecrated life is not open to all rather only to those God has called to this way life. The question often asked today is; why are people consecrated? Why waste so much time and human resources when there is a lot of charity work to do? In fact some go so far to ask, what for? To what avail?

CONSECRATED FOR WHAT?

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

It is worthy of note that the consecrated life is as old as the church, because right from the earliest generation of Christians, particularly in the *judeo-christian* churches there were virgins, ascetics or the coenobites who lived consecrated lives without an institutionalised form. They lived lives of asceticism and celibacy without renouncing their normal social situation¹⁰³. This does not deny the fact that there were those who lived already the life of the gospels in groups and under rigorous observation as virgins¹⁰⁴ and strict asceticism, both men and women. Indeed, one is consecrated in response to the motivation of the spirit of Jesus Christ to imitate His life as seen in the Gospels and to the glory of God, popularly designated as the evangelical councils. And this is a radical departure from the habitual norm of amassing wealth, giving in to marriage and authority. One is consecrated to image Him the Christ, as the ideal model of perfect charity by living as he lived, showing love and compassion to those in different kinds of needs. One is consecrated to follow Christ "*in answer to his call to be a living and radical witness to his love on earth (...)*"¹⁰⁵, and to keep these vows so as to be ennobled to live perfect charity and fraternal love in the manner that Christ lived them. The person is consecrated to a radical self challenge by way of living out practical love "*agapae*", reconciliation and forgiveness lived in community, mercy, and in constant loving communion with the Lord in prayer. Thus corroborating the new code of the canon law which states that:

The consecrated life is the form of a stable life by which the faithful (...) give themselves totally to God loved above all else (...) for the construction of the church and the salvation of the world "in order to achieve" the perfection of charity in the service of the kingdom of God and, having been made an outstanding sign in the church, foretell the heavenly glory¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰³Cf. Don Armand VIELLEUX, *Vie religieuse en général*, <http://www.scourmont.be/Armand/arm-fr-3.htm> consulted on the 16th April, 2018.

¹⁰⁴Cf. Acts, 21: 8-9, the four virgin daughters of « Philip the Evangelist » who lived and prophesied in his house.

¹⁰⁵ The formula for the vows in the congregation of the missionary sisters of Our Lady of Apostles

¹⁰⁶"*The New Code of Canon Law*" 573§1. http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P1Y.HTM consulted on 28th April, 2018.

Consecrated therefore to a total self - offering to God and to love this God consciously and contentiously over and above all else, in a total self abnegation. One Consecrated to be different in a radical manner that refuses the world's style but tells the happy story of the glory of the children of God in the authentic witnessing to true love. The individual is consecrated not just to live mechanically the religious life. Rather to live a life that adapts to the changes and the challenges of the world and the church. A person consecrated to enunciate a new paradigm, born of obedience, humility, care and compassion, positively influencing a confused, harassed and lost planet that is our world today. In our contemporary world at the moment, everybody is an authority and so it becomes very difficult to exercise or expect the virtues of obedience and humility¹⁰⁷. To the world, obedience kills, it humiliates! But by this vow, the consecrated not only offer themselves, but they offer themselves as burnt offering in a mysteriously positive/spiritual manner, making atonement for everyone else's sin of pride, just as Christ did from the *crèche* to the cross. "*Unless the tree is pruned, it will bear no fruit in due season*" said my mother to me. That is the work of obedience in the life of the consecrated person. Obedience prunes the consecrated of all the vices namely; pride, negative self esteem, narcissism, ambition, temper and all the vices associated with that which is not humble. This pruning engenders newness of life in all its ramifications; piety and honesty, joy and self control, availability and generosity, humility and charity, sacrifice and joy, fraternal love in community life etc. Indeed, obedience is the mortal enemy of pride in the life and spiritual battle of the consecrated person. Consecrated at baptism as children of God, why does one have to be consecrated again and why are we called? Why the choice of an individual?

WHY ARE INDIVIDUALS CHOSEN?

There is a common saying that runs thus, I was looking for somebody to do something, till I realised I was somebody¹⁰⁸. Isn't it typical of all of us? We would wish it were someone else but, not me. Is it that God has not gifted me as much as those others, to be challenged too?

Am not sure God chose one from the midst of one's family, siblings, friends or kindred for his or her outstanding qualities, nor for his or her goodness, least of all, not even for his or her fidelity to God! No, God chose you and consecrated you gratuitously to make you holy for He our God is holy¹⁰⁹. It is you that God wants to have offered as a living and fitting sacrifice, dedicated and acceptable for His service¹¹⁰. Consecrated to give up all claims on one's life but rather put oneself completely in His hands. He picked you, purified and consecrated you because He wants you to bring His name to the remotest parts of the earth and to those who

¹⁰⁷In a display of utter disobedience and pride, a young doctoral student dressed in bikini to present her thesis. She did not resonate with her professor who corrected her for dressing off the normal cooperate code set for thesis presentation by the institute.

¹⁰⁸Cf. Lily TOMLIN, https://www.brainquote.com/quotes/lily_tomlin_386397 consulted on the 26th may 2018

¹⁰⁹Cf. Lev, 19:2

¹¹⁰ Cf. Rm, 12:1

have never heard His name¹¹¹. He desired that you be the one to bear witness to His unconditional love through enduring pain, persecution, suffering and even death¹¹². That through your endurance many will come to know, believe in Him and be saved. One is consecrated that through the profession of the evangelical councils, the wounds inflicted by the original sin may receive some care and perhaps healing. These vows governed by obedience as it were, are in opposition with the sin of Adam and Eve which was their rejection of God's authority over theirs. For John Paul II, the wounds inflicted by disobedience receive therapy through the continued attempt and committed efforts of the consecrated persons¹¹³. They, by the application of a contrary force, contradict the arrogance of the enemy of our humanity and thus bring hope and soothing to an otherwise broken humanity. He consecrated you above all, to be the sign of a radical contradiction to the world. To this end, Akinwale in defining the religious /consecrated life explains that: "*the religious is a sign of contradiction, one who believes in God, one who believes that God is love and who freely and prophetically detaches himself or herself from things most valued in this world in order to be free to bear witness to the fact that God is love*"¹¹⁴. A sign of contradiction; living contrary to the post-modern world, its life styles and expectations. Called to live a radical sign, an expression and a foretaste of the eschatological kingdom of Christ where conjugal life does not exist¹¹⁵. It is choosing a life of poverty in place of riches, pleasure, and money at all costs. One is called to a life of chastity instead of a life of promiscuity, of debauchery, of lust and orgies. The individual is chosen for a life of obedience instead of disobedient pride; insisting on my way, on my will and on my decision as the absolute. The consecrated person is offered the life of humility, meekness and of opprobrium, instead of a life of arrogance and power, pride and dissension. The person called is consecrated to follow the Gospel Jesus Christ in His choice of the cross and of all that it represents. Called to an active participation in the life of his Son Jesus the chaste, poor and obedient one (Mtt.8:20; Phil. 2:8) and that the immeasurable reaches of his mystery may be present in our world and possibly draw everyone towards the kingdom of God. It is worth noting that the cross of Christ stands not only for pain and passion, it also stands for joy and victory over evil beginning with the repentant thief¹¹⁶ whose response to the taunts of his non-God fearing companion must have put a smile on Jesus' blood stained face. As such, one is consecrated to help the people of God, "*the men and women of this present time to recognise the traces of God in the beauty of their existence*"¹¹⁷. In effect, one is consecrated to bear witness to the truth of the Resurrection, singing the *Alleluia* in honour of the Risen Christ, through their communal fraternal life. And like the Samaritan woman of John chapter 4, and the

¹¹¹ Cf. Acts, 9 :15

¹¹² Cf. Acts 9 : 16

¹¹³ Cf. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 87.

¹¹⁴ Anthony AKINWALE, *Charisma and contradiction Theological reflections on consecrated life*, Ibadan, 2016, P. 9

¹¹⁵ Cf. Mk. 12: 24-26

¹¹⁶ Cf. Lc. 23:39-43

¹¹⁷ Cf. José Maria ARNAIZ, "Introduction" in *Passion for Christ Passion for Humanity, acts of congress on consecrated life*, Nairobi, Kenya, 2005, p. 30

two to Emmaus, announce their joy at their reception of the good news and at the breaking of bread while bringing the same good news to those in the shadows. In this way, they live out their vocation as missionaries, constantly discerning and re-discerning their missionary vocation in the light of what the Lord desires of those whom He has consecrated. The consecrated life without the Eucharist is empty. To buttress this, Pope John Paul II opines that:

The secret of this spiritual ardour is the Eucharist, it is the inexhaustible source of fidelity to the Gospel, for in this sacrament, the heart of ecclesial life, the deep identification and total conformation with Christ to which consecrated persons are called, is completely fulfilled. In the Eucharist all forms of prayer come together, the Word of God is proclaimed and received; relationships with God, with brothers and sisters, with all men and women are challenged. It is the Sacrament of filiation, of communion and of mission¹¹⁸.

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

VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

Christians in general are called initially by baptism to become perfect and holy children of God. Our prime vocation in this regard is God's call to us to be holy for "I, Yahweh, am holy"¹¹⁹, what Lumen Gentium (LG) called the "Universal call to Holiness"¹²⁰. This initial call to holiness extended to all God's children is deepened by the choice we make to remain celibates for the glory of God, for the service of the Church in perfect charity and for the salvation of our eternal souls. This we could name our secondary vocation which is an avenue to live practically a life in consonance with who we are made to be, "holy" as we indicated above. Vocation then is a call, "vocare". A call from God your creator, the Father who loves you and traces a way for you, a plan for your eternal happiness which is hidden in the service of others as Christ did. For Cleary believes that; the fullness of the human being is realised in one's availability and total self-giving¹²¹. This could be realised through self-giving in an audacious and a radical replicate of the life of Christ, who emptied Himself for the love and life of His creatures; (notre *model par excellence de la vie caritative*) our model of perfect charity par excellence. Vocation is not therefore simply an ordinary invitation to a life other than that which we are used to, it is rather an invitation received from God and at the same time a response to collaborate with God (who initiates the call) for the furtherance of his kingdom here on earth and for the salvation of our eternal souls. Suffice it to say that the Divine

¹¹⁸Pope John Paul II, Special message for World Day of Consecrated life, 2 Feb. 2005

¹¹⁹ Lev. 20:26; "Be consecrated to me, for I Yahweh, am holy and shall set you apart from these peoples, for you to be mine".

¹²⁰ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium* (LG), 40

¹²¹Cf. William CLEARY, *Spiritual life and mission since Vatican 2*, wipf and stock, suite 3, Eugene, USA, 2018, pg.39

needs the collaboration of the mortal to reach and save the mortal. This Divine call is therefore a reality which affects the whole Church¹²². We have been called, each to a particular way of life pattern or particular vocation. It is to this way of life that one after discernment orients one's gifts and talents for a higher good.

Vocation in a larger sense is limitless, involving all works of life engaged in by individuals or groups for their personal and or common good: teaching, nursing, engineering, medicine, agriculture, etc. But the Christian / Catholic understanding of vocation, is synonymous to; vocation to the married life, to the religious life and or to the priesthood. And the two often spoken about are vocation to the priesthood and to the religious life.

Does one truly have a calling, an invitation, or a vocation to the consecrated life? It is a question to be pondered over a period of time. Vocational discernment to the consecrated life is not a day's journey. When one senses the tingling or sensations or strange emotions at the sight of a consecrated person, a liking to approach, be noticed; be with, etc, it is not to be glossed over. For many invitations, vocations and calls engendered from such emotions and should be explored and tested¹²³. The love of God and the love of God's business are the driving forces or factors in these feelings enumerated above. And since God speaks through pure human media, the church advocates and admonishes that these interior sensations, feelings or movements mustn't be treated with kids' gloves, but rather be examined, questioned, dialogued with, explored or discerned. How then can we describe vocational discernment?

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

DISCERNMENT

Discernment in this regard is different from a professional decision or for a mundane style of life. It is discernment to choose (*entre deux biens apparent*) out of

¹²²Cf. VC n° 3, Op. Cit.

¹²³Cf. 1 Jn : 4, 1

two positive options or choices. In one hand, to follow and live intimately the ministerial priesthood of Christ and so become a *pontiff*, an *alter Christi*, become all things to all peoples, bringing the gospel message to the extreme bounds of the world or to choose the sacrament of matrimony. On the other hand, a choice to respond to the invitation to the consecrated life, sharing the intimate union of the virginal, poor, obedient and prayerful life of Christ who gave his life for the salvation of his subjects or choosing matrimony. No matter what choice is made, an honest vocational discernment is near impossible if it is not heavily anchored or engrained in prayer, listening, liberty/freedom, dialogue, truthfulness etc.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The consecrated person today is urged not to be contented with being just an apostle; her /his mission today is to actively and eloquently challenge her/his world with the combined audacity of the apostle and of the prophet of old. In a world

bedevilled by the whirlwind of change, where does the mission of the consecrated person find its place?

MISSION TODAY

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

In the face of these challenges, the consecrated person has the responsibility to lead the people of God as the prophets of the day, not permitting her or himself to be swept off the ground by the whirl wind of change. The evangelical councils through which they are apostles, stand them out and firmly rooted to rise up to any challenges. Thus modeling their lives on their masters' example, they respond to the needs of the time. Convinced as the charismatic leaders they are by the Gospel values which is already their way of life, they rebuke the storm and bring calm to the troubled and uncertain soul¹²⁴.

Religion today is tending towards becoming a private affair as predicted by Weber over a century ago as cited by Bell¹²⁵, God has a fifty/ fifty place in what most people do and or engage in. It is almost as though he were dead as Nietzsche claimed¹²⁶. The gospel of relativism is preached in every nook and cranny, nothing is good or bad, only thinking matters since "God is dead". Man therefore tries to replace God; he is the "superman, spider man, cat woman, axe men" etc, who brings the offender to book and reward or vengeance to the just and oppressed. In the same vane, he justifies all age long anomalies contrary to moral, ethical and natural laws and values like legalisation of same sex marriage, conception outside the uterus, abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia, harvesting of human organs, organised prostitution, sale of arms etc. In the face of such attack, the mission of the consecrated person is to stand up as the conscience of the world. Drawing strength spiritually from the community, offering her resources of spiritual and mystical dimensions deeply rooted in the human heart by the Creator; as stated in Jr. 31: 33.

It behoves the consecrated person to intensify efforts in the mission through their apostolate to teach and act godly, honestly living like open bibles in charity, respect for human life, fear of God, practical love (*agapae*), continence, all for the glory of God and for the evangelisation of his people and their eternal salvation. Sanctity is reinstated via teaching the children, the young and the innocent and this is done better by example. To this end therefore, it is imperative that the holistic education of these cadre must not be minimised. All natural, moral, societal as well as the Christian values must be inculcated through the education apostolate. The values of recognising the Supreme Being; God and the creator of the universe, prayer the means of communicating with Him, respect for God and all that He made,

¹²⁴Cf. Mk. 4 :39

¹²⁵Cf. *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Peter SCOTT & William T. CAVANAUGH (editors) Blackwell publishing, Malden, USA, p 462, 2004.

¹²⁶Cf. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/.../nietzsche-god-is-dead-americans> (consulted 7th June, 2018).

respect for human life, love, generosity, justice, selflessness and others must continue to be proclaimed without compromise. These Gospel values are never out modeled nor are they to be relativised nor compromised.

Though the world and its ideologies are fast changing and largely in a manner that ruins, the gospel moral values that Christ taught will never change and Christ's (*paroussia*), the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is real. "He will come again in glory, to judge the living and the dead (...)" as we pray in the Apostles' Creed. In today's mission, the consecrated persons must act as practical custodians of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus as custodians of Christian values, they have the mission to protect and to preserve the world in their milieu from destruction via corruption, violation of human life, dishonesty and all forms of vices contrary to the spirit of the Gospels bedevilling the world today. They are a reflection of the light of Christ and the salt of the earth¹²⁷ and are to influence their community, their world unobtrusively, quietly creating positive changes in every sphere of life they encounter on daily basis. The mission of religious life is to live in the world as a fundamental sign of the reign of God's kingdom which Jesus Christ initiated; they have the responsibility to cooperate with Grace to bring it to fruition.

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

CONCLUSION

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

¹²⁷Cf. Matt. 5 :13

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

The women and men of our world today are called and consecrated because Christ believes in their ability to preserve the Gospel as well as the Christian values hidden in the vows. These vows give worth to the Church and only those who can live the challenges of the vows are invited to be consecrated, and they receive support from their life in community, living together as one family and companions on the same journey, breaking Bread and sharing love.

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

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

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

Oseni J. Ogunu, OMV¹²⁸

ABSTRACT

Although expressed in different manner, the Consecrated life is often presented, essentially, as a beautiful and precious treasure, a calling and way of life rooted in our baptismal vocation and founded on the Triune God. The desire of those who are called is to follow Jesus Christ more closely by loving and serving God and fellow human persons, according to the spirit and charism of the

¹²⁸ Rev. Oseni Ogunu, OMV, a member of the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin, served for many years as a member of Formation team of the Seminaries of his Religious Institute (in Nigeria and Brazil). He is a lecturer in Theology at the Dominican Institute (Ibadan, Nigeria), and the Founder of “Foundation for Human Rights and Development of African Christian Heritage”.

Founder/Foundress. In order to faithfully achieve this aim, the Institutes of Consecrated life endeavour to form or educate its members. The Church has constantly showed concern and encouraged the formation of consecrated persons. She offers guidelines and directives in response to new questions and emerging difficulties, and changing situations both in the Church and in society. The article presents some orientations of the Church and, then, the challenges that face formation in religious life in an African country (Nigeria) today. Notwithstanding the real challenges, the formation in consecrated life is a call to commitment and witness to Christ in the church and in the world today.

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

Introduction

“Consecrated life is beautiful, it is one of the Church’s most precious treasures, rooted in baptismal vocation. Thus it is beautiful to be its formators, because it is a privilege to take part in the work of the Father who forms the heart of the Son in those whom the Spirit has called. At times one may feel this service to be a burden, as if it detracted something more important from us. But this is a mistake, it is a temptation. The mission is important, but it is equally important to educate for the mission, to educate in the enthusiasm for proclaiming, to educate in that passion of going to whatever place, to every periphery, to tell everyone of the love of Jesus Christ, especially to those who are distant, to communicate it to the little ones and to the poor, and to let oneself also be evangelized by them. All of this requires a firm foundation, a strong Christian framework and character which today even families are rarely able to provide. This increases your responsibility.”¹²⁹

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

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

¹²⁹ Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis To Participants Of A Meeting For Formators Of Consecrated Men And Women Sponsored By The Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life. (Saturday, 11 April 2015)

In this regard, a periodic reassessment and fraternal sharing and evaluation of experiences may be helpful.

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

At the same time, in the midst of the ongoing changes and transformations, the Church is mindful to ensure the preservation and promotion of the essential elements, the constant values, of Consecrated life. The Consecrated Life, especially in Africa, wants to promote and strengthen “*life*” and “*family*”, not only among members of one’s own Institute, by living its values. With the first African Synod, even amidst the problems confronting Africa, consecrated persons can say: “Christ, our Hope, is risen. He has met us, has walked along with us. He has explained the Scriptures to us. Here is what he said to us: ‘I am the First and the Last, I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold, I am alive for ever and ever and I hold the keys of death and of the abode of the dead’¹³⁰. Through its witness and mission Consecrated Life in Africa, too, “want to say a word of hope and encouragement to you, Family of God in Africa, to you, the Family of God all over the world: Christ our Hope is alive; we shall live!¹³¹

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

1. SIGNIFICANCE AND SOURCES OF CONSECRATED LIFE

When Pope St. John Paul II visited Nigeria in 1982 he responded to a basic question on identity and mission: Who are Consecrated persons?. Addressing Consecrated persons, he states: “You are ambassadors” for the

¹³⁰ Apoc. 1:17-18; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* (henceforth abbreviated: EA), 13

¹³¹ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 13.

Church¹³². As ambassadors, he says, it is their role to show everyone the way to holiness, to advance communion and cooperation. Consecrated life are called to not only indicate to all the call to holiness but also to witness to fraternal life in community¹³³.

Consecrated Life has deep-rooted foundations. The *Ecclesia in Africa* and *Vita Consecrata* offers a beautiful approach to the Christological, Trinitarian, and Ecclesiological sources of Consecrated Life. The First African Synod explained the approach of the *Vita Consecrata*: 'Christ our hope is alive; we shall live!'¹³⁴. This conviction implies that at the heart of our lives there is Jesus Christ, that he is in us, and that he walks with us. To evangelise is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ: He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Therefore, according to *Ecclesia in Africa*, the new evangelisation should be centred round the encounter with the living person of Christ¹³⁵. Similarly, *Vita Consecrata* teaches that the gospel foundation of consecrated life is to be sought in:

- the existential relationship woven between Jesus and some of his disciples during his journey on earth;
- the search for the perfect life, abandoning the world, leaving everything, and offering one's own life at the service of God and the advancement of one's brethren;
- And in the close imitation of the form of life that Jesus chose for himself¹³⁶. This form of *sequela Christi* (the following of Christ), which originates in the Father, appears as a call, an election and a mission. It has 'an essential Christological and pneumatological meaning'¹³⁷. This initiative, a call from the Father, awaits a devoted response from those he has chosen¹³⁸. However, it is the Holy Spirit who brings forth the desire for a full response. He accompanies the growth of this wish. It is He who shapes and moulds the spirit of those who are called, configuring them to the chaste, poor and obedient Christ. Thus, there is the Trinitarian dimension of consecrated life.

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

"Make your life a long conversion with Jesus as he makes himself known in the Gospels. Do not skimp on time given to prayer, to meditation on the Word

¹³² Address of John Paul II to the Religious Men and Women. Ibadan (Nigeria). Monday, 15 February 1982 (Nigeria), n.1, In: http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1982/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19820215_religiosi-nigeria.html (Accessed: 15/9/2018)

¹³³ EA, 94.

¹³⁴ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 1995 (Henceforth, abbreviated: EA), nn.13, 57

¹³⁵ EA, 57.

¹³⁶ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, 1996 (Henceforth abbreviated: VC), 14; Mt 19:21

¹³⁷ VC, 14.

¹³⁸ VC, 17.

of God, sharing with your brothers and sisters this word that gives life'. To sum up, make Africa the 'second homeland of Christ' (Pope Paul VI).

Moreover, Consecrated life is a sign of communion in the Church¹³⁹. Institutes of Consecrated Life have the responsibility to nurture a sense of communion between peoples, races, ethnic groups and cultures and to bear witness to it¹⁴⁰. For this reason, Consecrated persons are asked to:

(a) Be true experts of communion and to practise the spirituality of communion: "witnesses and architects of the plan for unity"¹⁴¹;

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

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

(d) To "face in a creative way the challenge of inculturation, while at the same time preserving their identity"¹⁴².

In a word, the Consecrated life was a great help and support for the Church in the past, but it is even more also a precious and necessary gift for the present and future of the Family of God, since it is an intimate part of her life, her holiness and her mission¹⁴³. Hence, the Church entrusts to consecrated persons the task of developing the spirituality of communion at three levels: in their own institutes; in the ecclesial community; and in the world, in constant dialogue, cultivating the noble dialogue of charity in truth.

Important is also the place and role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Consecrated life and in formation of candidates¹⁴⁴. John Paul II's *Vita Consecrata* recognises it, for "the consecrated life has always been seen primarily in terms of Mary – Virgin and Bride"¹⁴⁵. She is the first disciple, who willingly put herself at the service of God's plan by the total gift of self. Every mission begins with the attitude expressed by Mary at the Annunciation "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38)¹⁴⁶. The *Vita Consecrata* presents the Virgin Mary as model of consecration and discipleship¹⁴⁷. Members of Religious Institutes are aware that, "following in the footsteps of Mary, the New Eve, consecrated persons express their spiritual fruitfulness by becoming receptive to the Word, in order to contribute to the growth of a new humanity by their

¹³⁹ VC, nn.46-62

¹⁴⁰ VC, 51

¹⁴¹ VC, 46

¹⁴² VC, 51

¹⁴³ VC, 3

¹⁴⁴ Congregation for Catholic Education, "The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation. . ." (1988); Conference of Mons. Norberto Rivera, *The Blessed Virgin Mary In The Life And Ministry Of The Priest* (Yamoussoukro, Wednesday 9 July 1997)

¹⁴⁵ VC, 34

¹⁴⁶ VC, 18

¹⁴⁷ VC, 28

unconditional dedication and their living witness. Thus the Church fully reveals her motherhood both in the communication of divine grace entrusted to Peter and in the responsible acceptance of God's gift, exemplified by Mary¹⁴⁸. John Paul II's prayer of Invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary¹⁴⁹ aptly summarizes the vital place and mission of the Virgin Mary in the journey of Consecrated Persons towards eternal Blessedness.

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

In addition, Consecrated persons know that the contemporary world and the society to which they called to mission today are undergoing rapid and profound changes at different levels. The Church as well experiences reforms. Even new forms of Consecrated life are emerging today that were hardly none in times past¹⁵⁰. The scenario of vocations is making a drastic geographic shift; this is a motive of hope and new opportunities but it also poses new questions and challenges¹⁵¹. Generally, in her concern for consecrated life, the Magisterium of the Church has proved and called all to be aware of both the importance of a formation that is adapted to the changes and transformations in the church and in the society so as to meet the present-day challenges, and also acutely conscious of the necessity of faithfulness to the essential elements of consecrated life.

2. A CONSTANT SOLICITUDE

The Church has always show solicitude for the formation of consecrated persons and clergy, a concern that increased since Vatican Council II (1962-1965)¹⁵². The Council gave doctrinal principles and general norms in Chapter VI of the dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* and in the decree *Perfectae caritatis*. Pope Paul VI reminded Consecrated persons that, whatever the variety of ways of life and of charisms, all the elements of a religious life should be directed toward the building up of "the inner man"¹⁵³. Pope John Paul II frequently addressed matters of consecrated life and of religious formation, also during his pastoral

¹⁴⁸ VC, 34

¹⁴⁹ VC, 112

¹⁵⁰ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n.919, Bishops will strive to discern new gifts of consecrated life granted to the Church by the Holy Spirit; the approval of new forms of consecrated life is reserved to the Apostolic See. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn.915-930

¹⁵¹ Several Church documents refer to the background or context of present challenges of vocational discernment and formation and recommend guidelines to address them. For example, Cf. *Pastores dabo vobis* (1992), Nos.41-69; *Vita Consecrata* (1996), Nos. 63-65; *Starting Afresh from Christ* (2002), Nos. 16-18; Congregation of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes* (1990); Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation. Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (8 December, 2016).

¹⁵² Cf. *Enchiridion della Vita Consecrata: Dalle Decretali al rinnovamento post-Conciliare* (885-2000).

EDB/Ancora, Bologna (2001).

¹⁵³ *Evangelica Testificatio* 32; cf. 2 Cor. 4.16; Rom 7.22; Eph 4.24.

visits to Africa¹⁵⁴; the Code of Canon Law indicates in precise norms the exigencies required for a suitable renewal of formation¹⁵⁵. Pope Benedict XVI encouraged formation to Consecrated life¹⁵⁶. Moreover, since the beginning of his pontificate, and in numerous discourses Pope Francis speaks about Consecrated Life and formation¹⁵⁷.

On its part, in 1969 the Congregation for Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) published the instruction *Renovationis causam*, which expanded certain canonical dispositions then in force, in order to make a better adaptation of the entire formation cycle not only to the mentality of younger generations and modern living conditions, but also to the present demands of apostolic mission, while remaining faithful to the nature and the special aim of each institute¹⁵⁸. In 1990 CICLSAL published the "Directives On Formation in Religious Institutes", a document addressed to Major Superiors of religious institutes, and to the members of their Institutes in charge of formation. The threefold purposes and reason of this document are to: help Religious Institutes to elaborate their own programs of formation (*Ratio*); recognize that Consecrated persons have the right to know the position of the Holy See on the present problems of formation and the solutions which it suggests for resolving them; and help newly established Religious institutes and those Institutes which presently have few means of formation and information at their disposal. Subsequently, in 1996, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, was published. These last two documents – the *Directives* and the *Vita Consecrata* – are landmarks and continue to play a fundamental role in the formation of consecrated persons, being among the most important reference points for formation in Consecrated Life since Vatican II. The present study therefore frequently refers to them.

Other documents published later by the Vatican Offices do not deal directly with formation in Religious life, but they nonetheless touch it under one or another important aspect. For instance, there are the "Mutual Relations"

¹⁵⁴ John Paul II in Porto Alegre, 5 July 1980: IDGP III.2, 128; in Bergamo, 26 April 1981: IDGP IV.1, 1035; in Manila, 17 Feb. 1981: IDGP, IV.I, 329; to the Jesuits in Rome, 27 Feb 1982: IDGP, V.1, 704; in Nigeria, 15 February 1982: http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1982/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19820215_religiosi-nigeria.html (Accessed: October 1, 2018); to the Capuchin Masters of Novices in Rome, 28 Sep 1984: IDGP VII.2, 689; in Lima, 1 Feb 1985: IDGP VIII.1, 339; to the UISG in Rome, 7 May 1985: IDGP VIII.1, 1212; in Bombay, 10 Feb 1986: IDGP, IX.1, 420; to the UISG, 22 May 1986: IDGP IX.1, 1656; to the Conference of Religious of Brazil, 2 Jul 1986: IDGP IX.2, 237.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. CIC 641-661

¹⁵⁶ *Address of Benedict XVI to participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for Catholic Education*. (7 February, 2011); Benedict XVI, *Letter to Seminarians* (18 October 2010)

¹⁵⁷ For example, Pope Francis, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants of a Meeting for Formators of Consecrated Men And Women Sponsored by the Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life*. (Saturday, 11 April 2015; Pope Francis, *Address of his Holiness to Participants at Meeting with the Students of the Ecclesiastical Roman Colleges*. Paul VI Hall, Friday 16 March 2018.

¹⁵⁸ Instruction *Renovationis Causam*, Introduction AAS 61 (1969) 103 ff.

published in 1978¹⁵⁹, "Religious and Human Promotion" (in 25-28 April 1978), "The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life" in 1980¹⁶⁰ and "The Essential Elements of the Teaching of the Church on Religious Life" in 1983¹⁶¹. While the cited documents concern specifically Religious Institutes and Religious life, there have also been exhaustive instructions concerning diaconate and priesthood on the part of the competent Vatican Offices, "which instructions are also pertinent to religious who are to be ordained for these ministries"¹⁶². Among these instructions are, for example, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March, 1992), and the Congregation for the Clergy's "The Gift of the Priestly Vocation": *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (8 December 2016). Formation houses and seminaries will find it useful to refer to these different documents, "since the formation of religious must be given in complete harmony with the pastoral directions of the universal Church and of particular Churches, and in order to assist in the integration of 'interiority and activity' in the lives of men and women religious dedicated to the apostolate. Activity 'for the Lord' will thus not fail to lead them to the Lord, the 'source of all activity.'"¹⁶³

Several Episcopal Conferences and local churches have, at different forums and levels, addressed questions relating to the Consecrated Life and its related challenges. Noteworthy are the interventions and pastoral orientations of Catholic Bishops in Africa on this theme¹⁶⁴, as also the growing reflections of African scholars¹⁶⁵, and the contributions of many Conferences of Major Superiors

¹⁵⁹ CRIS and the Congregation for Bishops, AAS 70 (1978) 473 ff.

¹⁶⁰ CRIS, EV 9.181 ff.

¹⁶¹ CRIS, EV 7.414 ff

¹⁶² *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes* (1990), n.5

¹⁶³ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, n.3.

¹⁶⁴ For example: Uganda Episcopal Conference, A Situation of Priestly Formation in Eastern Africa (October 1990), in: *The African Enchiridion*, Edited by Oseni Ogunu, vol.III [EMI, Bologna: 2006]:.1902-1903; Episcopal Conference of Zaire (now DR Congo), La formation des Prêtres dans le circonstances actuelles. Cas du Zaire", *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III: 1843-1845; Episcopal Conference of Zaire (now DR Congo), "La Formation des Seminaristes au Zaire", in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III: 1899; Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, Commitment to the Formation of Priests today (October 1990), in : *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III: 1899-1990; Episcopal Conference of Tanzania, "Celibacy and Christian Family". In: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III: 1904-1905

¹⁶⁵ For instance: Vicente Carlos Kiaziku, *Consecrated Life in Bantu Africa*. Pauline Publications-Africa(2007); Benezet Bujo: *Religious Life: A sign of Contradiction*. Paulines Publications Africa. (2017). Prof. Fr. Jacques SIMPORE, *Consecrated Life In Africa: The Challenges Of The Third Millennium*. In: <http://www.camilliani.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/simopre-inglese.pdf> (Accessed: 28 Sept.2018); Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR, *When You Leave Religious Life, What Then? Accompanying Persons In The Process Of Discontinuation From Religious Formation*, in: <http://www.internationalunionsuperiorsgeneral.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/when-you-leave-religious-life-what-then.pdf> (Accessed: 29 Sept.2018), also In: *Religious Life Review*, Volume 55, Number 300, September/October 2016. . *The Catholic Voyage* itself, in pursuit of its aims, publishes articles concerning on formation in Consecrated Life. For example, see: Dr. M. Nkechinyelu Ezeanyino, DDL. "The Place And Role of the Family in the Formation And Mission of Priests and Consecrated Persons", in *The Catholic Voyage*, vol.12 (2016); Rev. Fr. Festus Ejiofor, MSP, "Responsibility For The Finances And Economic Growth Of The Religious Community: From The Formation of Candidates to the Living Witness Of Professed Members of the Institute", in: *The Catholic Voyage*, vol.12 (2016); Rev. Fr. Emmanuel N. Ogu, OP, Ph.D, "Religious Formation: A Call To Radical Following Of Christ", in: *The*

of institutes of Consecrated Life in Africa themselves which share experiences and periodically undertake reflections and promote meetings, studies and researches. The *Ratio Institutionis* of each Institute specifies how the formation of its members is to be carried out in the light of the Church's teachings and directives.

At the level of structures, various initiatives are taken at different levels to promote, albeit with differing approaches and contexts, the initial and ongoing formation and training for Consecrated persons and clerics. At the African continental level, the Confederation of Conferences of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar (COMSAM)¹⁶⁶ does it through its Formation Commission¹⁶⁷. In Nigeria, CMSN and NCWR jointly run the *Institute for the Formation for Formators*, in Du, Jos, and the *Formators Association of Nigeria*. In Nairobi, Kenya, there is the Psycho-Spiritual Institute (PSI) founded by the *Lux Terra Leadership Foundation* (Nigeria), in collaboration with *Missio Aachen* (Germany), with the stated aim of "training and graduating experts in Psycho-Spiritual Therapy and Christian Counselling for English-Speaking African Countries", as its website states, and it is open to members of institutes of Consecrated Life.

The essential elements of the Church's teachings on the religious life¹⁶⁸ and her directives on formation are an invitation to keep in mind the scope and stages, content, challenges and the stages of an integral formation, which includes vocational discernment. To highlight some aspects of these, let us now turn to the Church's orientations on formation in Religious institutes.

3. THE CHURCH'S ORIENTATIONS ON FORMATION IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

3.1. Promotion of Vocations and the Vocational Discernment

Catholic Voyage, vol.12 (2016); EHJ Novitiate Community (Nigeria), "Religious Community Life as a Family Life: The Contributions of candidates in formation in advancing family values, and the experience of mercy and healing, within the Religious community life", in: *The Catholic Voyage*, vol.13 (2017) 119-131; Fr. Jude A. Ossai, OSA, "The Charism of the Institute of Consecrated Life and the Personal Charism and Talents of its Members: Divine Gifts, the Tensions and Paths to Harmony for the Common Mission.", in: *The Catholic Voyage*, vol.14 (2018) 16-23; Rev. Sr. Dr. Nkechinyelu Ezeanyino, DDL, "The Study of Consecrated Life in Diocesan Seminaries And Institutes For Theological Formation: The Value, Urgent Need And Implications", in: *The Catholic Voyage*, vol.14 (2018) 156-165; Sr. Josephine Enenmo, OLA, "Mercy in the Dynamics of Religious And Priestly Formation.", in: *The Catholic Voyage*, vol.14 (2018) 167-185

¹⁶⁶ According to its website, the Confederation of the Conferences of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar (COMSAM) is composed of Regional and National Conferences of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar. It is a juridical and international organism of pontifical right. Founded during the Constitutive Assemble held in Cotonou (Benin) from 3rd to 8th May 2005, the Confederation was erected by the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) through the approval of its statutes. (<http://comsam.aecoltd.com/en/history/>).

¹⁶⁷ Cf. <http://comsam.aecoltd.com/en/formation/>

¹⁶⁸ For example, Cf. Sacred Congregation For Religious And For Secular Institutes, *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching On Religious Life As Applied To Institutes Dedicated To Works Of The Apostolate* (31/5/1983)

The promotion of vocations¹⁶⁹ and the discernment of vocations are crucial and related needs that involve the whole Church. The outcome in these areas can impact, positively or negatively, the future, the quality and effectiveness, and the life and apostolate of an Institute of Consecrated Life.

a) *The promotion of vocations*

It is true the mission and the vitality of Consecrated Life depend on the faithful commitment with which consecrated persons respond to their vocation. However, consecrated persons have a future to the extent that still other men and women generously welcome the Lord's call. In some regions, great energies are being expended in the promotion of vocations but the results do not always match expectations and efforts. In Nigeria, as many other parts of Africa, vocations to the consecrated life and priesthood are flourishing, while vocations are, generally, not increasing in countries that were traditionally rich in vocations¹⁷⁰. In either case, this difficult situation put consecrated persons to the test. In some regions institute ask themselves questions such as, "Have we perhaps lost the capacity to attract new vocations?": the Church, therefore, encourages them to have confidence in the Lord Jesus and entrust themselves to the Holy Spirit. The regions with flourishing and fertile vocations feel as well, even palpably, the need for discernment in the screening, selection and admission of candidates. Religious institutes deal particularly with questions of screening and selection process, many of them desiring and aiming more at quality during recruitment and accompaniment of vocations. In this, too, we need the help of the Holy Spirit to see and accept those whom Jesus has called to consecrated life in the spirit and charism of the respective religious institute. Even when and where there is "vocation boom", there is still need for prayer for vocations – for good and holy vocations--; however, it is equally essential to act, by means of explicit presentation and appropriate catechesis. The aims of such catechesis are to: (a) encourage in those called to the Consecrated life a free, willing and generous response to the grace of vocation heard from the Lord; (b) present the attraction of the person of the Lord Jesus and the beauty of the total gift of self for the sake of the Gospel. Hence, it is encouraging to see in many dioceses in Nigeria the organization of "vocation rally" or similar initiatives to sensitize, enlighten and educate prospective aspirants to Religious Life and priesthood. One of the

¹⁶⁹ *Vita Consecrata*, n.64

¹⁷⁰ According to the latest edition of the "Church's Book of Statistics" published (updated to 31 December 2016) regarding members of the Church, church structures, healthcare, welfare and education, "The number of major seminarians, diocesan and religious decreased this year, they are globally 683 units, reaching a total of 116.160. Increases occurred in Africa (+1.455) and in Asia (+9) [...] Religious Seminarians increased only in Africa (+396), while decreased in America (-1.139), Asia (-301), Europe (-583) and Oceania (-55). http://www.fides.org/de/attachments/view/file/Dossier_Statistiche2018_FIDES_ENG.pdf (Accessed 4/10/2018)

consequences is that the consecrated persons have the responsibility to propose with courage, by word and example, the ideal of the following of Christ, and then to support the response to the Spirit's action in the heart of the aspirants who are called. The enthusiasm of the initial meeting with Christ is followed by constant struggle of everyday life.

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

b) *Discernment*

Discernment is a time-honoured practice in the Christian tradition. In essence, discernment is a decision-making process that honours the place of God's will in our lives. It is an interior search of the individual or the community that seeks to align our own will with the will of God in order to learn what God is calling us to. Every choice we make, no matter how small, is an opportunity to align ourselves with God's will. For this, tools are sometimes made available to help people concerned¹⁷¹.

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

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

¹⁷¹ For example, see <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/discernment-tools.cfm> ; <https://www.marquette.edu/faith/ignatian-principles-for-making-decisions.php> (accessed 12/9/2018)

help. Not with that defence that is bread for today and hunger for tomorrow.¹⁷²

Vocational discernment is a necessary part of a holistic education to enable, in freedom, respond to God's call to know the truth and to love and service. As Pope Francis puts it: "Initial training, this discernment, is the first step of a process intended to last a lifetime, and young people should be formed in the humble and intelligent freedom of letting oneself be educated by God the Father every day of one's life, at every age, in mission as in fraternity, in action as in contemplation."¹⁷³

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

Hence it is not surprising that the necessity and importance of vocational discernment is frequently emphasized¹⁷⁴. No one wants the "vocation boom" to turn into "vocation doom", the blessing to be turned into a curse. The First African Synod offers some guidelines, in part a recap of the directives found previous church documents. First, it recognizes the necessity to foster religious vocations to the contemplative and active life but it also insists that such fostering should be done, above all, by screening and choosing them "with great discernment". Secondly, the candidates must receive an integral formation that includes the human formation, spiritual and doctrinal, apostolic and missionary, biblical and theological dimensions. Thirdly, this formation is to be faithfully and regularly updated¹⁷⁵. In the *Ecclesia in Africa*, St. John Paul II recalls that, in addition to the major challenge of marriage and family life, another fundamental responsibility which the African Synod Fathers highlighted "is concern for vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. It is necessary to discern them wisely, to provide competent directors and to oversee the quality of the formation offered. The fulfilment of the hope for a flowering of African missionary vocations depends on

¹⁷² Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis To Participants Of A Meeting For Formators Of Consecrated Men And Women Sponsored By The Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life. Saturday, 11 April 2015; Congregation for Clergy, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation* (Dec.8, 2016) speaks extensively about "discernment" through the various stages of formation

¹⁷³ Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis To Participants Of A Meeting For Formators Of Consecrated Men And Women.

¹⁷⁴ On vocational discernment and preparation of formators, see, for example: Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines For The Use Of Psychology in the Admission And Formation Of Candidates For The Priesthood*, nn.1-12

¹⁷⁵ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n.94

the attention given to the solution of this problem, a flowering that is required if the Gospel is to be proclaimed in every part of the Continent and beyond.”¹⁷⁶

In other words, in the formation for Consecrated life and priesthood, discernment is decisive. “Discernment is crucial”¹⁷⁷, for several reasons. First, because, as Sr. Ezeani explains, unlike matrimony, the priesthood and consecrated life do not enjoy the natural pull or attractions that draw men and women together. Why? It is because Consecrated life and priesthood “exist because of the Incarnation. Only Christ the High Priest gives legitimacy to a celibate priesthood and makes becoming a priest a justifiable option for a young man. There is no such thing as a natural inclination or yearning towards remaining celibate.” Secondly, it is necessary to be attentive to identifying candidates who are unsuited to a specific congregation, but also where else a particular candidate might be better suited, happier and well-adjusted¹⁷⁸.

At the same time, it is necessary to consider that in relation to young aspirants who apply to enter religious life (and these, in Nigeria, are generally between 17-25 years old), the work of vocational promotions demand that vocations directors and formators must know and take into account, during the discernment process, the multiple contexts the young people are coming from. In fact, “The sensitivity of young people profoundly affects their perception of the values of justice, non-violence, and peace.”¹⁷⁹ The Final Document of the recent XV Ordinary General Assembly Synod of Bishops on “Young people, Faith and Vocational Discernment”¹⁸⁰ and the Vatican’s directives on formation present some traits and the social-cultural and ecclesial contexts of your young people¹⁸¹. The variety and complexity of the human background unveil the problems posed for vocation promotion and for formation. Regarding the discernment of vocations, the intention or motives of the aspirant seeking admission do matter. In some countries, some candidates for the religious life present themselves because of a more or less conscious search for social gain and future security; others look upon the religious life as an ideal place for an ideological struggle for justice. Finally, there are others of a more conservative nature who look upon the religious

¹⁷⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n.50

¹⁷⁷ Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR, *When You Leave Religious Life, What Then?*

¹⁷⁸ Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR, *When You Leave Religious Life, What Then?* Cf. R. Cessario, ‘Thomas Aquinas and Vocational Discernment’, *Religious Life Review*, volume 54, number 291, March/April 2015, p. 70. Sr. Ezeani goes on to suggest some questions that could be helpful in this regard, and concludes that “Formation directors need therefore to ensure that they are personally attuned to the voice of the Spirit in their day to day living. They are to assist those they are guiding to equally progress in attentiveness to God speaking through the daily experiences of themselves, the whole of life and the actual work with them. Discernment ‘allows the Spirit of God to shape not only our actions but also our ‘hearts’, the centre from which those actions flow. By responding in daily life to the call of the Spirit, we are allowing God’s will to be done in us...”

¹⁷⁹ John Paul II, *Christifidelis Laici*, n.46

¹⁸⁰ See “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 Ottobre 2018), nn.5-20, and 21-31, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018). The provisory translation of this document from the original text in Italian, as used in this article, is by the present author.

¹⁸¹ Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, nn. 86-89

life as if it were a place for saving their faith in a world which they regard as being hostile and corrupt. These motives represent the reverse side of a number of values, but they need to be corrected and purified.”¹⁸²

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

Discernment is sustained through prayer, which is one of the authentic criteria for discerning what is happening. “Prayer is always a return to the first call. Any prayer, perhaps a prayer in need, but it is always a return to that Person who called me. The prayer of a consecrated man or woman is a return to the Lord who invited me to be near him. A return to the One who looked me in the eye and said to me: ‘Come. Leave everything and come.’. [...]. Seek the Lord, the One who called you. Prayer. Not just in the morning... Each one must find how to do it, where to do it, when to do it. But do it always, pray. One cannot live the consecrated life, one cannot discern what is happening without speaking with the Lord.”¹⁸³

In sum, with Sr. Ezeani we say that, “the journey, not the arrival, matters; the voyage, not the landing”, and that “For those accompanying them and for the individual as well, the love of Christ and the courage to make the journey are the root of all endeavours in the formation process and the exercise of discernment.”¹⁸⁴ Moreover, “the most authentic way to support the Spirit's action is for Institutes to invest their best resources generously in vocational work, especially by their serious involvement in working with youth.”¹⁸⁵

3.2. Religious Formation and Culture

The Church in Africa recognizes the necessity and importance of formation. According to the *Ecclesia in Africa*, in all areas of Church life formation is of primary importance. People who have never had the chance to learn cannot really know the truths of faith, nor can they perform actions which they have never been taught. For this reason "the whole community needs to be trained, motivated and empowered for evangelization, each according to his or her specific role within the Church". This community includes the bishops, priests, consecrated persons, and all the lay faithful¹⁸⁶. In the same sense, Pope Benedict XVI encouraged bishops and institutes of consecrated persons who facilitate the education of children, promote among Christians and young people the study of

¹⁸² Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, n.89

¹⁸³ Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis To Participants In The Conference Organized by the Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life. Paul VI Audience Hall. Friday, 4 May 2018

¹⁸⁴ Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR, *When You Leave Religious Life, What Then?*

¹⁸⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, n. 64.

¹⁸⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, n.75.

the educational sciences in view of transmitting knowledge of full truth and of life. They are also to “ensure that personnel in the Church’s educational institutions, and indeed all Church personnel, receive just remuneration, in order to strengthen the Church’s credibility”¹⁸⁷.

The centrality and necessity for formation is especially evident in the Consecrated Life. The first African Synod insisted on the need for formation of candidates to Consecrated Life¹⁸⁸. John Paul II’s *Vita Consecrata* asserts that formation is of “decisive importance”¹⁸⁹

3.2.1. Purpose of Formation

The Church’s teaching on Consecrated life and priesthood rightly insists on the integral formation that includes the whole person and every aspect of his personality.¹⁹⁰ The immediate aim of the formation of candidates is to introduce them to religious life and make them aware of its specific character within the Church-as-Family of God. It primarily aims at assisting consecrated men and women to realize their unity of life in Christ through the Spirit, by means of the harmonious fusion of its spiritual, apostolic, doctrinal, and practical elements¹⁹¹. In other words, the objective of the formation process “is to prepare people for the total consecration of themselves to God in the following of Christ, at the service of the Church's mission”, for the person called by the Lord has the inescapable duty “to say “yes” to the Lord's call by taking personal responsibility for maturing in one's vocation”¹⁹². That is to say, the candidate who is called is an agent of her/his own formation, a process in which other agents will participate. Hence, he/she must be open to the action of the Holy Spirit with attitude of generosity and faith. Consequently, the expectation is that formation should have a profound effect on the individuals in formation. The principal and non-negotiable purpose of formation, as indeed for Consecrated life itself, is “the conformity to the Lord Jesus in his total self-giving”¹⁹³. This is a path of gradual identification with the attitude of Christ. This growing in the sentiments of Jesus is growing in the freedom to love and give oneself up for others.

Taking the purpose of Consecrated Life into account, the African Synod Fathers recommend that the manner of preparing for Consecrated Life “should include and express the character of wholeness”. This means that initial formation must be integral: “Formation should involve the whole person, in every aspect of the personality, in behaviour and intentions”¹⁹⁴. To ensure this complete in the formation process implies that it must include every aspect of Christian life. Since it aims at the transformation of the whole person, the commitment to

¹⁸⁷ Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, n.134

¹⁸⁸ *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 53

¹⁸⁹ *Vita Consecrata*, n. 65;

¹⁹⁰ *Vita Consecrata*, No. 65, *Pastores dabo vobis*, nn.43-59.

¹⁹¹ *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes*, nn.1, 6

¹⁹² *Vita Consecrata*, 65

¹⁹³ *Vita Consecrata*, 65

¹⁹⁴ *Vita Consecrata*, 65

formation is a continuous effort. Thus, consecrated persons should be offered opportunities to grow in their commitment to the charism and mission of their Institute. Therefore, it must provide a human, cultural, spiritual and pastoral preparation: all these aspects should be harmoniously integrated. Moreover, it is recommended that sufficient time should be reserved for initial formation, which is a process of development which passes through every stage of personal maturity – from the psychological and spiritual to the theological and pastoral.

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

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

- Be familiar with the path of seeking God, so as to be able to accompany others on their journey.
- be able to point out obstacles in their journey which are less obvious;
- disclose the beauty of following Christ and the value of the charism by which this is accomplished;
- Combine the spiritual wisdom with the human means, which is helpful both in discerning the call and in forming the new candidates, until they are genuinely free. Among these instruments, special attention is given to personal dialogue, “a practice of irreplaceable and commendable effectiveness”¹⁹⁵. The *Vita Consecrata* also recommends the establishment and sustenance of appropriate structures for the training of the persons responsible for formation and suitable directors of formation.

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

(a) Clear objectives in each principal dimension of life -- human, spiritual, intellectual, charismatic, pastoral -- in relation to the progressive stages of formation, namely, Aspirancy / Candidacy / Pre-Postulancy, Postulancy, novitiate, Temporary Vows, Perpetual Vows/Solemn Vows¹⁹⁶;

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

(c) Different mediators are needed who can assist and accompany the candidates in formation in their formative itinerary. The formator himself/herself needs to be equipped for accompanying the formandi and be supported by the

¹⁹⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, n.66.

¹⁹⁶ Though the names and duration of the phases can vary, there are similarities among the stages of formation in a religious congregation. Much of the formation of religious is governed by Canon Law as well as by the Constitutions and Norms/Directory of the Congregation or order.

expertise of therapists, spiritual guides and counsellors. Such a collaboration calls for clarity of goals, roles and the boundaries proper to each role.¹⁹⁷

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

“One of the qualities of a formator is that of having a great heart for young people, to form in them great hearts capable of welcoming everyone, hearts rich in mercy, full of tenderness. You are not only friends and companions of the consecrated life of those who are entrusted to you, but real fathers, real mothers, capable of asking and of giving them the best. To generate life, to give birth to a religious life. This is possible only through love, the love of fathers and mothers.”¹⁹⁸

Another major agent of formation is the *community* of the person in formation: “Initiation into the hardships and joys of community life takes place in the community itself”¹⁹⁹. Through the fraternal life in common each one learns to live with other members of his/her community. In this process, he/she accepts their positive traits together with their differences and limitations. The candidate in formation learns to share the gifts received for the building up of all, because "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). At the same time, from the moment of initial formation, community life must unveil the essential missionary dimension of consecration. Hence, the Church recommends that during the period of initial formation, Institutes of Consecrated Life, along with their Formation houses, should provide practical experiences which are prudently followed by the formators; these pastoral works enable candidates to test, in the context of the particular society and local culture, their skills for the apostolate, their ability to adapt and their spirit of initiative.

The formation process is not a static one-way exercise nor must it encourage a passive attitude, as if the candidate was a mere consumer of goods. Rather, consecrated persons need “gradually to develop a critical judgement, based on the Gospel, regarding the positive and negative values of their own culture and of the culture in which they will eventually work.” Conversely, “they

¹⁹⁷ Mathew Vattamattam, CMF, *Challenges of Formation For Priestly And Consecrated Life Today*. In: <http://www.claretianformation.com/challenges-of-formation-for-priestly-and-consecrated-life-today/> (Accessed: 14 August, 2018). From the viewpoint of themes, the author echoes generally some elements in the directives of pertinent Church documents. Cf. Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation in Religious Institutes* (1990), nn. 126-132, 133-135, Part III (“The Stages of Religious Formation”) ; John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis; Vita Consecrata*, nn. 66-68; Cf. Timothy Costello, “Integrating Formative Roles” in Alessandro Manenti, Stefano Guarinelli and Hans Zollner (eds.), *Formation and the Person*, Peeters, Leuven, 2007, pp. 241-256.

¹⁹⁸ *Address Of His Holiness Pope Francis To Participants Of A Meeting For Formators Of Consecrated Men And Women Sponsored By The Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life. Saturday, 11 April 2015*. In: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/april/documents/papa-francesco_20150411_raduno-formatori-consacrati.html (Accessed: Sept.3, 2018).

¹⁹⁹ *Vita Consecrata*, n.67.

must be trained in the difficult art of interior harmony, of the interaction between love of God and love of one's brothers and sisters; they must likewise learn that prayer is the soul of the apostolate, but also that the apostolate animates and inspires prayer."²⁰⁰

3.2.3 The *Ratio institutionis*

The *Vita Consecrata* called upon all institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life to draw up "a complete and updated" *Ratio institutionis*,²⁰¹ that is, a formation programme inspired by their particular spirit and charism. This *Ratio* should present clearly and in all its stages the course to be followed in order to assimilate fully the spirituality of the respective Institute. The *Ratio* is needed, firstly, in order to pass on the Institute's spirit so it will be lived in its integrity by future generations, in different cultures and geographical regions. Secondly, because it explains to consecrated persons how to live that spirit in the different stages of life on the way to full maturity of faith in Christ. Formation is a dynamic process by means of which "individuals are converted to the Word of God in the depths of their being and, at the same time, learn how to discover the signs of God in earthly realities. This Plan of formation has a twofold importance: it leads consecrated persons to continue to "see" God with the eyes of faith in the world, as well as to be effective in making God's presence in some way "perceptible" through the witness of their charism²⁰². The *Ratio* must be adapted to the cultural and social milieu of the region where the formation is taking place.

3.2.4. *On-going Formation*

Evidently, the formation process is not limited to the initial phase, though this paper is concerned primarily with this phase. Continuing formation "is an intrinsic requirement of religious consecration." It is "very important" for every Institute to provide, in its *ratio institutionis*, a precise and systematic description of its plan of continuing formation. The *Vita Consecrata* explains the major purpose of this plan of formation, namely: "to provide all consecrated persons with a programme which encompasses their whole life". For just as no one is exempt from the obligation to grow humanly and as Religious, so also no one can be over-confident and live in self-sufficient isolation²⁰³. Formation reveals itself as an essential element of Consecrated life.

3.2.5. **Agents and Stages of Religious Formation**

²⁰⁰ *Vita Consecrata*, n.67.

²⁰¹ *Vita Consecrata*, n.68.

²⁰² *Vita Consecrata*, n.68.

²⁰³ *Vita Consecrata*, n.69. *Vita Consecrata* nn.70 and 71 go on to speak of the constant search for faithfulness throughout one's life in Consecrated Life, and of the dimensions of continuing formation.

Religious Institutes enjoy a diversity of gifts – a variety which is explained by the diversity of the "charisms of their founders,"²⁰⁴ -- to be cultivated and maintained. However, there are in every Institute aspects that are common to all stages of religious formation. Among these aspects are the agents and environment of formation, the Human and Christian dimension²⁰⁵, asceticism²⁰⁶, and sexuality and family²⁰⁷.

Members of the Religious Institutes to which the candidate belong and those of the diocese, the local Church where the formation of candidates is taking place all share responsibility for the formation of candidates in Consecrated Life and in the priesthood at different levels and according to different ways and competencies. So, the agents of formation and environments include the Major Superior of the Institute (or his/her Delegate), as the moderator of the life and mission of the institute in that region; the Diocesan Bishop, as the pastor responsible for the diocesan community; the Community of the formandi, who provide spiritual and pedagogical formation²⁰⁸; members of the Religious Institute, the Community of Formators or Instructors (Superiors and other persons Responsible for Formation), Professors, who provide intellectual support and make integral formation possible; the administrative personnel, professionals and Specialists, who contribute their own witness of faith and life, and provide assistance in various particular fields; and, finally, the candidates in formation themselves, as the protagonists of the process of reaching integral maturity, along with their family, parish and other ecclesial communities, the collaborators from other institutes of Consecrated life/Diocesan clergy and Laity²⁰⁹. The candidate is called to a journey of on-going growth in human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral areas, taking into consideration his own personal and family background. The candidates in formation are bound to demonstrate, both in external behaviour and in interior convictions and attitudes -- that they have internalised

²⁰⁴ *Evangelica Testificatio* n.11; The "Charisms of their founders" "appears as 'an experience of the Spirit,' transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth. 'It is for this reason that the distinctive character of various religious institutes is preserved and fostered by the Church' " (*Mutuae Relationis*, n.11). Therefore, there is no uniform way for observing the evangelical counsels, but each institute is asked to define its own way "keeping in mind its own character and purposes." (CIC 598.1) This is true not only for what refers to the observance of the counsels, but also with regard to all that concerns the style of life of its members (Cf. CIC 598.2).

²⁰⁵ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, nn.33-35

²⁰⁶ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, nn. 36-38

²⁰⁷ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, nn. 39-41; Congregation for Catholic Education, *Directives on Formation of Seminarians Concerning Problems relating to marriage and family* (19 March 1995); Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n.203; Cf. Pontifical Council For The Family, *Vademecum For Confessors Concerning Some Aspects Of The Morality Of Conjugal Life*. (12 February, 1997).

²⁰⁸ *Vita Consecrata*, n.67

²⁰⁹ Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, nn.19-32; Congregation for Clergy, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation*, Chapt.VI, pp. 54-63;

authentically the way of religious life proper to his/her Institute, in love, humility and service to others.

Let us focus a bit on one of the agents of formation on which the Church frequently speaks in recent times: the family. The influence and role of the family in the formation process of candidates for religious life and priesthood must be acknowledged²¹⁰. Many African bishops and Christian communities emphasize it. On the one hand, there is the consciousness that vocation usually grows within the context of a community, in which the candidate has had a significant experience of faith. Both the family and the parish of origin, or the parish to which he or she belongs, or other ecclesial communities, contribute to sustenance and nourishment of the vocation of the person called to the consecrated life or to the priesthood²¹¹. In fact, according to the Catholic Bishops of Rwanda, the sustainment and encouragement the families of the candidate in formation are necessary in order that the formation for the priesthood – or the Consecrated life – may yield expected results. Describing the decisive role in the priestly or religious vocation, they acknowledge that “the family is the first nursery of vocations for priests, religious and laity”²¹²; the Tanzanian Bishops similarly describes the Christian family as “cradle of genuine vocation”²¹³. Along this line, Pope Francis teaches that, “Family bonds are essential for reinforcing healthy self-esteem. It is important for the family to be part of the seminary process and priestly life, since they help to reaffirm these and keep them well grounded in reality”²¹⁴.

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

So, formation houses and seminary should not only undertake an educational enterprise with the candidates in formation, but also a true engagement with their families. Candidates should know how to recognise and accept their own family situation realistically and with human and Christian maturity. They must also know how to deal with the problems that may arise and, wherever possible, how to share with the family their vocational path. The pastoral engagement with the families of the candidates ought to contribute to

²¹⁰ The theme of formation in relation to the family is recognised as particularly important. “The Synod fathers repeatedly called for a thorough renewal of the Church’s pastoral practice in light of the Gospel of the Family and for replacing its current emphasis on individuals. For this reason, the synod fathers repeatedly insisted on renewal in the training of priests, deacons, catechists and other pastoral workers with a greater involvement of families.” (June 2015 *Instrumentum Laboris on the Family*, 87)

²¹¹ Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n.68

²¹² Episcopal Conference of Rwanda, “La famille et la formation au sacerdoce” (Intervention by Bishop Thadée Nsengiyumva in the name of the Episcopal Conference at the Synod of Bishops, Vatican City, 1990). In: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III, p.1901.

²¹³ Episcopal Conference of Tanzania, “Celibacy and the Christian Family” (An intervention presented in the name of the Episcopal Conference “under the auspices of AMECEA” by Bishop Amedeus Msarika). In: *The African Enchiridion*, vol. III, p.1905. This intervention focuses on the situation of celibacy after priestly ordination.

²¹⁴ *Amoris Laetitia*, n.203

their own Christian development. It should also help them to accept the vocation to the Consecrated life or the priesthood of one their members as a blessing to be valued and supported all through life.

Moreover, it is to be noted that the formation for consecrated life and priestly training is specific in so far as it is distinguished from training from secular professions, even though the academic part of formation of Religious and clergy follow the pattern of any other training. According to Vattamattam, we must consider a major distinction of training religious and clergy from other professions. He argues, for example, that while training in other professions is largely focussed on information and skills needed to perform tasks external to the person, the central focus in religious training is the transformation of the subject, the whole person of the formandi. Besides, "another serious limitation of priestly and religious formation in comparison to training for secular professions is the lack of adequate and systematic pedagogical methods consistent with the objectives of formation"²¹⁵. The distinct character of the formation for consecrated life also permits us to appreciate the need for an integral or holistic approach to the formation of candidates for this form of life.

3.2.6. Integral Formation

Although Consecrated life is confronted by disconcerting challenges in formation,, there are also trends that give hopes for better responses to these challenges. For instance, there is the trend of openness of secular sciences and theological disciplines for mutually enriching dialogue. The interdisciplinary approach to deal with human issues by a fruitful collaboration of psychology, theology and spirituality is particularly beneficial for integral human formation. Formation for Consecrated life and priesthood has much to gain from this rapprochement of different disciplines. Consecrated persons are dedicated and committed to various areas of evangelisation. They teach, educate, train, accompany, provide care and work for social development in the name of Christ, of the Church, and for the Church. Still, as the AMECEA Bishops teach, "in our changing world Religious have to be enabled to read and respond effectively to the signs of the times, so as to be credible and authentic agents of change and promote Gospel values in today's society." Therefore, the Bishops conclude, the formation of Religious should "be integral and inculturated and formators be carefully chosen and prepared, so as to form men and women able to radiate God's love and compassion among our people".²¹⁶

3.2.7. Formation and Culture: Towards an inculturated formation

²¹⁵ Matthew Vattamattam, *Challenges Of Formation For Priestly And Consecrated Life Today*.

²¹⁶ AMECEA, "The Formation of Agents of Evangelisation for the Church as a Family of God" (8/8/1999), n.12, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol. IV, p.3208

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

The concept of "culture" has many meanings.²¹⁷ In its general sense, the Vatican Council II's *Gaudium et Spes* describes it as "all those factors by which man refines and unfolds the manifold spiritual and physical qualities that enable him to master his condition and his destiny"²¹⁸. For this reason, culture may be said to be "that by means of which the human person becomes more human," and that "it is always situated in an essential and necessary relationship with what the human person is."²¹⁹ However, "while the profession of the evangelical counsels involves the renunciation of goods that undoubtedly deserve to be highly valued, it does not constitute an obstacle to the true development of the human person, but by its nature is supremely beneficial to that development."²²⁰ Consequently, there is an affinity between the religious life and culture.

In practical terms, this affinity calls attention to certain points. Jesus Christ and his Gospel transcend all cultures, even if they are entirely penetrated by the presence of the risen Christ and of his Spirit²²¹. On the other hand, every culture should be evangelized, that is to say, purified and healed of the wounds of sin. At the same time the wisdom which culture contains has been surpassed, enriched, and perfected by the wisdom of the Cross²²².

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

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

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

²¹⁷ Kroeber, A.L. and Kluckhohn, Clyde, *Culture: A Critical review of concepts and definitions* (Vintage books, New York, 1963); Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An introduction to Faith and Culture* (Paulist Press, 2003), pp. 173-176

²¹⁸ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, II, Ch. II, nn. 53-62, here at n.53

²¹⁹ John Paul II to UNESCO, 1980, nn. 6-7. For a short anthology of meaning of “culture”, see: Michael Paul Gallagher, S.J.: *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (New York: Paulist Press 1997), pp. 173-176, and for Gallagher's clear discussion on “Cultural discernment”, see pp.129-144 of this same book.

²²⁰ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, n.80

²²¹ International Theological Commission, *Faith and Inculturation*, 8-22: cf. *La Civiltà Cattolica* 140.1 (1989) 159-177.

²²² Idem; see also John Paul II, *Christifidelis Laici*, n. 44.

of it. Faith must become culture: "Faith that does not become culture is not wholly embraced, fully thought or faithfully lived"²²³

- to initiate religious who are living and working in a culture that is foreign to their own native culture into a knowledge and esteem for this culture, in keeping with the recommendations of the conciliar decree *Ad gentes* n. 18.²²⁴

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

In Church communion the various states of life are bound together among themselves, by being ordered one to the other. They all share in the deeply basic meaning of being the manner of living out the commonly shared Christian dignity and the universal call to holiness in the perfection of love. They are different yet complementary, in the sense that each of them has a basic and unmistakable character which sets each apart, while at the same time each of them is seen in relation to the other and placed at each other's service.²²⁵ In fact, religious and members of the laity have the actual experiences of sharing of work but also sometimes in prayer and at meals. As regard the relations between religious and the laity under the specific aspect of ecclesial movements, the "Directives on formation in Religious Institutes" offers helpful orientations. It recognizes that Ecclesial movements have always been manifest in the Church-Family of God, inspired by a desire to live the Gospel more intensively and to announce it to others: Some of these Ecclesial movements are closely connected with religious institutes, and share their specific spiritualities. An increasing number of new movements appeared more independent of the structures and style of the religious life than in the past. Their beneficial influence on the Church is frequently recalled, provided that they observe a certain number of criteria of ecclesiality²²⁶.

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

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

²²³ *Address Of His Holiness John Paul II To The Plenary Assembly Of The Pontifical Council For Culture, n.1* (Consistory Hall, Friday, 18 March 1994); cf. John Paul II, *Address to the Italian National Congress of the Ecclesial Movement for Cultural Commitment*, 2 [16 Jan. 1982].

²²⁴ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, n.91.

²²⁵ *Christifidelis Laici*, n.55

²²⁶ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifidelis Laici*, n.30

Consequently, a dialogue and sharing within the Church presumes that each institute is well aware of what it is.

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

c) These exigencies remain after the religious profession, so as to avoid appearance of divided loyalties, either on the level of the personal spiritual life of the religious or on the level of their mission. The reason is that "if these requirements are not respected, the necessary communion between religious and the laity risks degenerating into confusion on the two levels mentioned above"²²⁷.

3.3. Evangelical Counsels

Among the essential elements Consecrated Life²²⁸ the evangelical counsels -- chastity, poverty, and obedience -- appears prominently. Hence, they cannot be ignored during formation process²²⁹. John Paul II reminds that Consecrated chastity has great witness value in a world rampant with selfishness and the misuse of sex. In his address to the Religious women and men in Nigeria, he

²²⁷ Congregation For Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies Of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes (1990)*, nn.92-93

²²⁸ Cf. Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*; Vatican Council II, *Perfectae Caritatis*; Congregation For Religious And For Secular Institutes, *Essential Elements In The Church's Teaching On Religious Life As Applied To Institutes Dedicated To Works Of The Apostolate* (31 May, 1983) ; John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, nn.41-58. The Vatican document on "Essential Elements", n.4, succinctly lists some of the essential elements of religious life in the following way (and the document subsequently confines itself to a clarification and re-statement of these essential elements):

"Religious life itself is a historical as well as a theological reality. The lived experience, today as in the past, is varied and this is important. At the same time, experience is a dimension which needs to be tested in relation to the Gospel foundation, the magisterium of the Church, and the approved constitutions of an institute. The Church regards certain elements as essential to religious life: the call of God and consecration to him through profession of the evangelical counsels by public vows; a stable form of community life; for institutes dedicated to apostolic works, a sharing in Christ's mission by a corporate apostolate faithful to a specific founding gift and sound tradition; personal and community prayer; asceticism; public witness; a specific relation to the Church; a life-long formation; and a form of government calling for religious authority based on faith. Historical and cultural changes bring about evolution in the lived reality, but the forms and direction that the evolution takes are determined by the essential elements without which religious life loses its identity". On its part, the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (nn.41-58) presents the "permanent values" of consecrated life under the following titles: In the image of the Trinity; Fraternal life in love; The task of authority; The role of the elderly; In the image of the apostolic community; "Sentire cum Ecclesia" (*Communion with the Church*); Fraternity in the universal Church; The consecrated life and the particular Church; Fruitful and ordered ecclesial communion; A constant dialogue animated by charity; Fraternity in a divided and unjust world; Communion among different Institutes; Coordinating bodies; Communion and cooperation with the laity; For a renewed spiritual and apostolic dynamism; Associates and lay volunteers; The dignity and role of consecrated women; New possibilities of presence and action.

²²⁹ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, nn.11-15

acknowledges that, for the African, “the sacrifice of fatherhood or motherhood is no small matter”²³⁰. On their part, African Catholic Bishops reiterate value of chastity. Recognising that chastity is a baptismal demand and the different faces of this virtue, Bishop Barthelemy Batantu (Diocese of Brazzaville, Congo) proposes some means of living chastity²³¹. For Bishop Jean-Baptiste Some, the vow of “obedience, far from being an organizational and disciplinary disposition, finds in the African concept of the family a stepping-stone: indeed in the organization of its African Family, the members obey under the authority of the chief, but always in the supreme interest of the whole; this mode of obedience, which does not necessarily imply a prior consultation of the individual, does not exclude also a dialogue with the individual”²³². Pope Benedict XVI’s *Africae Munus* teaches that,

“Through the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, the life of consecrated persons becomes a prophetic witness. Hence they can be examples in the area of reconciliation, justice and peace, even in circumstances marked by great tension. Community life shows us that it is possible to live as brothers and sisters, and to be united even when coming from different ethnic or racial backgrounds (cf. Ps 133:1). It can and must enable people to see and believe that today in Africa, those men and women who follow Christ Jesus find in him the secret of living happily together: mutual love and fraternal communion, strengthened daily by the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours”²³³.

3.4. Apostolate

The mission of the Church is to evangelize, following the mandate and example of Jesus. Religious men and women are consecrated for mission at the service of God and humanity. The evangelizing mission of Church-as-Family is a co-responsibility that is at the heart of Consecrated life. Apostolate is an essential, non-negotiable element of Consecrated life. In many and diverse ways Consecrated Persons are called to exercise apostolate, that is, to collaborate in the cause of evangelization. Through a whole network of ecclesial initiatives Consecrated persons “pursue the definitive aim of catechesis (...)”²³⁴; they serve in the fields of education, health care and medicine, care of orphans and elders, immigrants and migrants, Social communication, promotion of family and life, social justice and human rights advocacy, science and technology, the world of

²³⁰ John Paul II, *Address To The Religious Men And Women*, n.1.

²³¹ Barthelemy Batantu, *La Chasteté Chrétienne: exigence du Baptême*. (Lettre Pastorale, 1990).In: *The African Enchiridion*, vol. III, 1925-1926.

²³² Jean-Baptiste Some (Bishop of Diebouyou, Burkina Faso), “L’Obéissance e le Concept Africaine du Famille” (Intervention at the Synod of Bishops on Consecrated Life 1994), in Oseni Ogunu, *The African Enchiridion*, vol. IV, pp.2747-2748

²³³ Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, n.117; Cf. 7. *Message to the People Of God of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops*, n.21

²³⁴ *Address Of John Paul II To The Religious Men And Women*, n.2

arts and culture, etc. But whatsoever the form of apostolate, John Paul II adds, “prayer and union with God always remain the soul of your apostolate”²³⁵.

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

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

1. There shall be proper screening of candidates for consecrated Life, involving the parishes, schools and local Christian communities with a view of discerning their true motivations and their suitability.
2. Formation shall be integral taking into consideration the human, spiritual, cultural, intellectual, pastoral and social dimensions.
3. There shall be a personalised and inculturated approach to formation to form mature, committed and responsible religious who are capable of coping with the realities of today’s life.
4. Mature and suitable religious shall be identified, trained and appointed for houses of formation”²³⁶.

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

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

The Final document of the Synod of Bishops on “Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment”, frequently refers to consecrated life and consecrated persons, mostly in relation to formation/education and mission. The Synod Fathers expressed their gratitude to consecrated persons and all the clergy and laity, and offer some reflections and propositions concerning formation, accompaniment, and the value and prophetic mission of Consecrated life, keeping in mind the situation and contexts of young people and the challenges of youth apostolate in the world and in the church today²³⁷.

4.1. Gratitude and Encouragement

²³⁵ *Address Of John Paul II To The Religious Men And Women*, n.2. Also, cf. John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, nn.38-39

²³⁶ AMECEA, “The Formation of Agents of Evangelisation for the Church as a Family of God. Resolutions”, n.9, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.IV, p.3206

²³⁷ Cf. “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), nn.5-20, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018); Cf. Final Document from the Pre-Synodal Meeting (Rome, 19-24 March 2018), Part 1, nn.1-5.

The Synod Fathers thank and encourage Consecrated women and men, along with lay men and women and the bishops. Gratitude, because, in general, they “with honesty and dedication commit themselves to the service of young people. The Synod expressed its gratitude, in particular, to those who have courageously denounced evil immediately²³⁸. They are, in this way, encouraged to persevere in their honesty and dedication to service and in the courageous denunciation of evil.

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

The Synod Fathers reiterate the prophetic value of Consecrated Life as a joyous witness of the gratuity of love. When the religious communities and new foundations authentically live fraternity they become school of communion, centres of prayer and contemplation, a place of witness of intergenerational and intercultural dialogue and a place of evangelization and charity. “The Church and the world cannot do without this vocational gift, which constitute a great resource for our time”²³⁹

4.3. *Formation*

Listening is a key moment in the ministry of pastors and evangelizers, who must also teach. The Synod speaks of the “necessity” of the preparation of consecrated persons and lay people, men and women, who are competent to accompany young people. The accompaniment of young people involves “listening”, a form of ecclesial service which the Synod describes as “charism” that the Holy Spirit offers to some members of the community²⁴⁰.

The Synod highlights especially personal Spiritual accompaniment, in which one recognises, interprets and chooses in the prospective of faith, listening to what the Spirit suggests within everyday life²⁴¹. The Synod Fathers, therefore, suggest and desire that there should be a “rediscovery”, in the sphere of personal spiritual accompaniment, of great regenerative resource of the consecrated life (particularly female) as well as of lay people –adult and young – that are well formed²⁴².

4.4. *Formation House and Seminary*

²³⁸ “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n.31 in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

²³⁹ “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n. 88, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

²⁴⁰ “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n.9 in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

¹¹⁴ Cfr. Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium*, nn.169-173

²⁴² “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n.97 in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

The Synod Fathers describe the Formation House and Seminary as places of “great importance” for the deepening of vocational choice and maturation of the following of Christ. At the same time, contrary to certain past experiences, these environments of formation should adequately take into account the past experiences of the candidate, rather than undermining their importance. These must not exclude their family experiences²⁴³. Not taking them into consideration “blocks the growth of the candidates and risks leading to the assumption of formal attitudes instead of the development of the gifts of God and the profound conversion of the heart”²⁴⁴.

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

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

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

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

- celibacy as a gift to be recognized and verified in freedom, joy, gratuity and humility before admission to Holy Orders or to first religious profession;
- the contribution of psychology as a help towards affective maturation and integration of personality to be inserted into the itinerary of formation;
- the figure of the rector or the person responsible for formation as important for the unification of the formative journey in order to arrive at a realistic discernment, consulting all those involved in the formation process and to make decision concern eventual interruption of the formative journey of the candidate.

²⁴³ Cf. “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n.87, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018): Concerning the roles, experiences, environment, situations, problems and possible contributions of the family, see nn. 10,19, 25, 27, 32,34, 38,42, 43, 72,87, 120, 128, 132, 138, 143, 162, 164.

²⁴⁴ “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n.20, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

The Synod Fathers goes on to draw attention to the need for permanent formation and for the accompaniment of priests and consecrated men and women, especially the younger ones²⁴⁵.

Finally, the Synod emphasizes the importance of what it calls the “Synodal form” of the Church. The Synodal form is important, it says, for the proclamation and transmission of the faith. One of the characteristic trait of this Synodal way of being a Church-Family of God is the valorisation of the charisms the Holy Spirit gives according to the vocation and role of every one of her members, through a dynamism of co-responsibility. In this sense, the Synod Fathers speak of a participative and co-responsible Church. In this context, therefore, the Synod recognises and welcomes the rich contribution that female and male Institutes of consecrated life and the lay faithful bring into the Church, a family of God, and into the world²⁴⁶.

4.6. Formation of seminarians and of consecrated men and women

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

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

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

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

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

e) Numerical consistency of the formation house: this should neither be too large (so as to avoid the risk of depersonalization of the formation journey and of inadequate knowledge of the young persons in the journey) nor too small (so as to avoid the risk of being suffocated and subjected to the logics of dependency). In these cases, the Synod proposes the establishment of interdiocesan seminaries

²⁴⁵ “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n. 100, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018).

²⁴⁶ “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n. 123, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

or houses of formation shared by two or more religious provinces, with clear formative projects and well-defined responsibilities²⁴⁷.

Finally, the Synod made three proposals in favour of the renewal of formation of young people, particularly in formation houses and seminaries: at least two these proposals explicitly involves Institutes of consecrated life. The first proposal calls for a “joint formation of lay people, consecrated persons and priests”. Young people and young candidates in formation should be permanently kept in contact with the daily life of families and of community in such a way that the formation will be rooted in concreteness of life and characterised by a relational trait capable of interacting with the social and cultural context. Secondly, the synod proposes the insertion of a specific preparation for the pastoral care of young people into the curriculum of preparation for the priesthood and consecrated life. The third proposal calls for an evaluation of the possibility of verifying the formative journey of candidates in the experiential and communitarian perspective within the context of an authentic discernment of persons and situations according to the vision and spirit of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*²⁴⁸. As to this last proposal, it is up to the Conferences of Bishops to establish the formula and modality of such verification, according to their national *Ratio*.

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

5. THE CHALLENGES OF FORMATION IN CONSECRATED LIFE

²⁴⁷ “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n. 163, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

²⁴⁸ “Documento finale e Votazioni del Documento finale del Sinodo dei Vescovi al Santo Padre Francesco” (27 ottobre 2018), n. 164, in: *Bolletino Sala Stampa della Santa Sede*, N.0789 (27 Ottobre 2018)

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

5.2. The challenge of Vocation and Formation

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

“How can they receive formation that directs them towards witness to Christ in a world that is no longer Christian? What civic, philosophical, theological and spiritual formation can be offered to them? How can ongoing courses of formation and updating be organised for religious who have been active for a long time in the field of ministry? There is a need for criteria for an authentic choice at the level of formation. Our world also needs consecrated people who are specialised in some fields of the religious and ‘profane’- secular sciences: in both these fields our institutes need providers of formation for the men and women who are receiving formation, for teachers of the postulancy, of the novitiate, and of initial and ongoing formation. But we have to pose some questions to ourselves. Do these men and women providers of formation love and cultivate a sense of belonging to their institutes? Do they really know the charism and the spirituality of their Congregations so as to be able to transmit it and provide formation to young people in the spirit of their founders? Did they live – at least for two or three years – experiences of ministry and apostolate that are specific to their institute before entering the field of formation? Do we really need a piece of paper to provide this service? At times, a young religious, after his studies, slams the door and goes elsewhere: who is to blame for this? Discernment is not always easy and can be a source of conflict within institutes. There are so many questions, so many difficulties and so many challenges: what should be done? Those who do not risk, obtain nothing. Today we have specialisations within specialisations.

Should we keep up with the world, applying to ourselves the same rhythm of the world, or do we prefer, with a false modesty, to give up?"²⁴⁹

A consecrated person who is dead to the world, when he or she obtains a specialisation, does not enter a competition for diplomas: for a consecrated person, specialisation should be a work necessity, a question of greater efficiency and competence in his or her ministry. Hence, in "individual institutes the formation of all the members is to be continued after first profession so that they lead the proper life of the institute more fully and carry out its mission more suitably"²⁵⁰. The required *Ratio* (plan of studies) "is to be systematic, adapted to the capacity of the members, spiritual and apostolic, doctrinal and at the same time practical. Suitable degrees, both ecclesiastical and civil, are also to be obtained when appropriate"²⁵¹. Consequently, we must invest young forces in formation, for today's sacrifice is the wealth of the future²⁵².

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

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

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

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

It is necessary also avoid the danger of intentionally, surreptitiously or inadvertently creating, for lack of better word, a total predominance and hegemony of solely one national, say Nigerians, Kenyans, Congolese, who happened to be perhaps the sole or almost 100% majority members of the institute in that nation at this time. At first, such predominance may appear psychologically *albeit* momentarily satisfying, comforting and arousing pride, somehow massaging our collective ego as it were. However, it may reveal itself short-sighted, ultimately self-destructive in so far as it may boomerang, like time-tomb, on the

²⁴⁹ Prof. Fr. Jacques SIMPORE, *Consecrated Life In Africa.: The Challenges of The Third Millennium*. In: <http://www.camilliani.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/simopre-inglese.pdf> (accessed 12/10/2018)

²⁵⁰ *Code of Canon Law* (henceforth abbreviated: *CCL*), 659 §1.

²⁵¹ *CCL*, 660 §1.

²⁵² Prof. Fr. Jacques SIMPORE, *Consecrated Life In Africa*, §3.1

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

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

The formation house must have a clear and specific process (or modality of procedure) approved by the Superiors for the screening, selection and admission of new aspirants into the Postulancy and Seminary and into subsequent main stages of initial formation²⁵³. The corresponding functions of the main players involved in these phases is a particularly important and delicate matter in the context of places where individual's bond to his/her place of origin (ethnic group or tribe, diocese of origin) tend to be deeply felt, though this in and of itself is certainly not bad thing. There is, however, the temptation of abuse, of being too personally or "dangerously" attached or involved, or to have a too personal

²⁵³ Cf. Jorge Carlos Patron Wong, Candidates for the Priesthood and Religious Life. Selection, Screening and Formation, in: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/resources/upload/PatronWong-Selection-Screening-Formation.pdf>

interest or “agenda” in the admission of this rather than the other particular aspirant. It becomes important, therefore, to avoid eventual conflict of interest, and to have in this process a few teams for the decision-making in each of the main phases of the screening, selection and admission process. The members and the role or function of each of these phases will need to be clearly defined from the outset, taking into account the current directives of the Church, the orientations of the Constitutions and Norms and the *Ratio* of the Institute concerned.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The admission itself effectively ought take place *after* an initial contacts and accompaniment of the aspirant, the examination of written requests for admission, the interviews, the common vocational discernment, and the initial selection of the aspirants made jointly by members of the Vocation Team.

In sum, the above suggestion emphasizes: decisions not based on tribalism and favouritism; the need for justice or fairness in the process; giving

equal opportunities to all applicants and aspirants; and favouring quality, rather than quantity, in the selection of aspirants. All things be equal – in terms of the aspirants' quality and meeting the requirements – an Institute can admit the number of candidates it can financially afford to accept, accommodate, train and sustain.

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

The onus is on the initial Formation team and the Superiors to discern, verify and accompany in truth and justice whether the voice of God was actually heard by the aspirant or candidate who knocks at the door of the Congregation (through its Formation House), and claims to be called to the service of God and Humanity by entering a Consecrated life. In case where necessary, the Superiors and the formation team may need to discern and determine whether their own Institute is the place for this particular aspirant and is able to accept this applicant and help him/her to nourish and fulfil his/her vocation. This discernment process demands a lot of labour, energy, time and, not infrequently, financial expenses. Unfortunately, there are the favouritism, and sometimes the lack of courage to decide and directly and honestly inform aspirants that they cannot be admitted. And so, the temptation is to resort, in practice, to unhelpful short-cuts, illusory personal agendas, subterfuges or arbitrary criteria, all just in order to, as they say, "weed-out" the "unwanted" applicants. Those responsible for admission must

find ways to honestly and discreetly inform applicants they are not admitted, even if it were simply to cut down the number of affordable intakes at all cost. We must be careful not to present vocation discernment and formation simply as a 'weeding out' period. Vocation discernment requires an openness and attention to the candidate's interior movements and his motivations. The initial verifications of the objective requirements and the dispositions required, and the guidelines offered for screening, selection and admission, the criteria for discernment and the requirements are usually indicated in the Constitutions/Norms and the *Ratio* of Institutes. In general, it should suffice to follow not only by the Universal Church but also those established by the Constitutions/Norms and the *Ratio* and/or approved by the appropriate authorities of each Province or Delegation of the Religious institute.

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

Any admission process is not invulnerable. Mistakes can and may sometimes happen: "Errors in discerning vocations are not rare, and in all too many cases psychological defects, sometimes of a pathological kind, reveal themselves only after ordination to the priesthood. Detecting defects earlier would help avoid many tragic experiences"²⁵⁴. However, such errors will probably be involuntary²⁵⁵. So, it is important to encourage and strengthen the trust placed on the members of the team of Vocation ministry, the formation team, and the admission team; however, these should not see themselves nor be treated as being above fraternal corrections and the policies of the Institute.

5.3. The Challenge of the Evangelical Counsels

The evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience present a distinct set of challenges. They impel the Church-Family, and consecrated persons in particular, to clarify and testify to the profound anthropological significance of the counsels. They are the same challenges as ever, posed in new and diverse ways, and perhaps more radically, by contemporary society and cultures, at least more forcefully in some regions of the world. The decision to

²⁵⁴ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines For The Use Of Psychology In The Admission And Formation Of Candidates For The Priesthood* (29/06/2008), n.4, citing Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy* (11 April 1974), n. 38.

²⁵⁵ Cf. Oseni Ogunu, "Growing in the Spirit of and Charism of the Congregation: The Oblate Contributions, Challenges, Lessons and Prospect in Nigeria", in: *Lanterianum* Dec.2017, pp.149—161

follow the evangelical counsels do not involve an impoverishment of truly human values: it leads instead to their transformation. The evangelical counsels should not be considered as a denial of the values inherent in sexuality, in the legitimate desire to possess material goods or to make decisions for one. Insofar as these inclinations are based on nature, they are good in themselves. However, human beings, since they are weakened by original sin, run the risk of acting on them in a way which transgresses the moral norms. The profession of chastity, poverty and obedience is a warning not to underestimate the wound of original sin; while affirming the value of created goods, it also relativizes them by pointing to God as the absolute good. In this way, while those who follow the evangelical counsels seek holiness for themselves, they propose a sort of spiritual "therapy" for humanity, because they reject the idolatry of anything created and in a certain way they make visible the living God. "The consecrated life, especially in difficult times, is a blessing for human life and for the life of the Church."²⁵⁶

However, questions are asked, albeit in different social and cultural contexts and with varying intensity, about the possibility and opportunity of reviewing the vows of the consecrated persons. How should the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience be understood and lived in a world that is increasingly secularised and disconnected? In what way should inculturation of the vows of poverty and obedience be practice?²⁵⁷.

5.3.1. *The Challenge of Consecrated Chastity*

One major challenge in this sphere is that of a hedonistic culture. This separates sexuality from all objective moral norms, often treating it as a mere diversion and a consumer good, and justifying a kind of idolatry of the sexual instinct. The results are evident: transgressions of every kind, with resulting psychic and moral suffering on the part of individuals and families. The consecrated life respond to this challenge through, above all, the joyful living of chastity, understood as a witness to the power of God's love shown in the weakness of human condition. The consecrated person attests that in Christ it is possible and liberating to love God with all one's heart, putting him above every other love. This testimony is necessary today because many people do not believe in, and there is little understanding of the meaning of celibacy in the world, including in "an Africa thirsting for fertility"²⁵⁸, though in itself this thirst is not totally exclusive to Black African societies²⁵⁹. People do not always understand the vow of chastity, at least

²⁵⁶ *Vita Consecrata*, n.87

²⁵⁷ William Reiser, S.J., "Should We Reformulate the Religious Vows?", in: William Reiser, SJ, *Getting to Know the God We Believe in Some Lessons from Religious Life*. (Chapter 13), 2016; Also in: *Review of Religious Life*" 54, 4 (July-August 1995); Vincente Carlos Kiaziku, *Consecrated Life in Bantu Africa*. Paulines Editions (2007), Chapters 5 and 6.

²⁵⁸ Matungulu Marcel, *Les consacrés de l'an 2000*, as cited in: Prof. Fr. Jacques SIMPORE, *Consecrated Life In Africa. The Challenges Of The Third Millennium*, §3.2.1

²⁵⁹ It has been noticed, for example, in China Cf. P. Hugh O'Donnell C.M, "Inculturating the Vincentian Charism: Vows and Virtues in the Congregation of the Mission", in *Vicentiana*, Volume 40, Number 4 Vol. 40, No. 4-5 Article 8.

as it is presented to them. To some extent, this is also true of celibacy and its Christian motivation, which, according to Michael Coleman, “is simply not understood and misinterpreted by our society. The whole idea is often foreign to African culture and is seen as an encouragement for psychologically immature and fringe people to apply for seminary training”²⁶⁰. In addition, the shallow and at times irresponsible behaviour of some consecrated people suggests that religious play at being hypocrites. We must recognise this challenge. In a word, this testimony is more necessary than ever today because it is so little understood by our world. On the other hand, even when there is clear conceptual understanding of what is the Church’s official doctrine and theology on the “vow of chastity” for Consecrated Life (at least in the Latin Rite Church), there are pondered claims and reiterated appeals that there are more than one ways of understanding and expressing the evangelical counsels, vow of chastity included, which in Africa today largely still need to be inculturated in Consecrated Life²⁶¹.

The testimony of chastity is offered to everyone – young people, engaged couples, husbands and wives and Christian families – in order to show that the power of God's love can accomplish great things precisely within the context of human love. Finally, it is a witness which also meets a growing need for interior honesty in human relationships. The consecrated life must present to today's world examples of chastity lived by men and women who show balance, self-mastery, an enterprising spirit, and psychological and affective maturity. Thanks to this, human love has as a stable point of reference the pure love that Consecrated persons draw from the Trinitarian love revealed to us in Christ. Consecrated persons are, thus, capable of a radical and universal love; this love gives them the strength for the self-mastery and discipline so as not to fall under the domination of the senses and instincts. Consecrated chastity in this way “appears as a joyful and liberating experience.”²⁶²

5.3.2. *The Challenge of Poverty*

There is the challenge of a materialism which craves possessions. It is unmindful of the needs and sufferings of the poor and weak; it has no concern for

²⁶⁰ Michael Gower Coleman (Bishop of Port Elizabeth, South Africa), “The formation of Seminarians in the Context of the Local Culture” (Intervention during the Synod of Bishops, Rome, 1 October 1990). In: Oseni Ogunu (Ed.), *The African Enchiridion*, Vol.III, p.1990. Coleman’s intervention proposes the “Africanisation of Christianity in the specific sphere of seminary formation, including the area of celibacy. In his view, “It is essential, in our situation especially that student formation be far more contextualised and redesigned to integrate with the indigenous culture”; haven giving some examples -- relating to the power of oral tradition with a history of deference for the spoken word, celibacy, and the basis of moral behaviour of candidates in formation –, Coleman concludes: “The great challenge facing the Church is how to shed the image of being a borrowed reality which has barely begun to reflect the riches and value of African creativity. In terms of the impetus given by Vatican II we aim at the Africanisation of Christianity.”

²⁶¹ Cf. Aylward Shorter, *Celibacy and African Culture*, Paulines Edition-Africa, (1998); Aylward Shorter, *Religious Poverty in Africa*. Paulines Publications-Africa (1999); Joan F. Burke, *These Catholic Sisters are all Mamas!: Towards the Inculturation of Sisterhood in Africa, an Ethnographic Study*. Leiden – Boston Kohl – Brill: 2001; Bénézet BUJO, *Religious Life: A Sign of Contradiction*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications-Africa. (2017)

²⁶² *Vita Consecrata*, n.88

the balance of natural resources. As a response, the consecrated persons accept the profession of evangelical poverty. With a gratuitous, free and detached heart, a consecrated person offers his/her own hands that are engaged in life; this wants to signify that the poverty that she/he has embraced is not the life of a lazy person, a life of leisure. Rather, it is a life of work for ourselves but above all else for other people, for the needy and the poor.

Poverty in itself is an evil, it is a lack because it makes human person less a human. He is deformed. Poverty and riches are principal enemy of man in his search for God. But evangelical poverty "is a value in itself, since it recalls the first of the Beatitudes in the imitation of the poor Christ."²⁶³ Evangelical poverty means to attest that God is the true wealth of the human heart. Consequently, evangelical poverty challenges the idolatry of money. The call of evangelical poverty is felt also among people who are aware of the scarcity of the planet's resources and who invoke respect for and the conservation of creation -- whether by reducing consumption, by living a more simple lifestyle and by placing a necessary brake on their own desires.²⁶⁴ Consecrated persons therefore are called to bear an evangelical witness to self-denial and restraint, in a form of fraternal life inspired by principles of simplicity and hospitality. Following the footsteps of Jesus, evangelical poverty in fact leads to humility, to simplicity, appreciating small things, directing them and aiming them at the apostolate. This witness must be accompanied by a preferential love for the poor and will be shown especially by sharing the conditions of life of the most neglected.

Evangelical poverty can be lived in different ways and is often expressed in an active involvement in the promotion of solidarity and charity. For example, Consecrated persons devote themselves to education, training and professional formation, preparing young people and the elderly people to become builders of their own future. Consecrated persons dedicate themselves in the service of the poor, marginalized, and the migrants and refugees; they work to train future educators and leaders of society. They fight to overcome hunger and its causes; they inspire the activities of voluntary associations and humanitarian organizations; and they work with public and private bodies to promote a fair distribution of international aid. In these various and complementary ways, the consecrated life shares in the radical poverty of the Lord Jesus, and fulfils its specific role in the mystery of his Incarnation and Death²⁶⁵. Therefore, "nations truly owe a great deal to these enterprising agents of charity, whose tireless generosity has contributed and continues to contribute greatly to making the world more human"²⁶⁶.

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

²⁶³ *Vita Consecrata*, n. 90

²⁶⁴ *Vita Consecrata*, n. 90

²⁶⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, n.90

²⁶⁶ *Vita Consecrata*, n.89

“Which goods can or should young candidates forgo before their religious profession? What is the meaning of the concept ‘forgoing-abandoning’? Could religious life not appear to some a form of promotion, given what is abandoned by religious vows compared to what will be obtained thereafter? Other practical questions are posed in various institutes: should religious who are on holiday have money in their pockets? How much money should they have? What form of transport should they use to move about? Does the institute have the duty to build a house for the family of a religious? What are the dynamics of the African family? The danger for religious is having to live in their communities as places to ‘plunder’ for themselves, with the pretext of helping their families in an African sense. And yet we do not become religious in order to bring with us our families. It is certainly the case that a religious cannot ignore his family but the help that is given must be offered, in agreement with his Superiors, in a spirit of humility, of simplicity and of poverty. When a community is erected in deep Burkina Faso, whatever is decided, a solid house of cement is built, there are forms of transport, and the standard of living of the religious will always be greater than the people who live in the same village. How can one speak about a vow of poverty, of voluntary forgoing, if these consecrated people already see themselves at the highest level of the common life of the people! This is the challenge. Can one speak about the same form of poverty in Paris, in London, in India and in Peru as in Ouagadougou?”²⁶⁷

As *Vita Consecrata* itself recognizes, there are many communities which live and work among the poor and the marginalized; they embrace their conditions of life and share in their sufferings, problems and perils²⁶⁸.

At the level of poverty one of the great challenges today is the financial self-reliance or self-sustenance, that is to say, the economic autonomy of religious institutes in Africa. Western Europe has made great sacrifices to support us. But now, with the problems of Eastern Europe, and the dwindling population and/or decrease involvement of the faithful in Church’s sacramental life, together with the growing secularisation it is suffering, the difficulties are many in number. “It is therefore urgent that the particular Churches in Africa have the objective of providing for their own needs as soon as possible, thereby assuring their self-sufficiency”²⁶⁹. This has direct economic and financial implications for the training

²⁶⁷ Prof. Fr. Jacques SIMPORE, *Consecrated Life In Africa. The Challenges Of The Third Millennium*, §3.2.2

²⁶⁸ *Vita Consecrata* 90

²⁶⁹ *Ecclesia in Africa*, n.104.

and sustenance of candidates in formation houses and other formation and pastoral projects. Generally, “in Nigeria, as elsewhere, a formation house depends for its sustenance almost entirely on the financial support from the authorities of the religious Institute and the contributions from benefactors and donors”²⁷⁰ Religious women and men in Africa must not expect manna to fall from on high. Rather, they should learn to become increasingly responsible, creative and committed, taking necessary initiative. Were this not to happen, this dependency syndrome would create the temptation to live almost permanently above what they can afford and thus not to favour the management of the communities themselves. But how should the religious Institute behave? Each institute needs to find its own strategies to maintain a balance without compromising its charism and its religious identity. This is difficult because it requires discretion, though it is the path to follow towards shared and balanced solutions. It requires a certain clarity (about each institute’s vision and mission), boldness and foresightedness and addressing issues. A sharing of ideas and practical experiences in the sphere of poverty may be mutually helpful. In any case:

We should fundamentally redefine the way of living poverty today in the Church and in the Church in Africa, taking into account the relationship of the consecrated person with his family, his culture and the relationship of every consecrated person with his milieu of apostolate. With regard to the relationship with the family two pitfalls are particularly to be avoided: the grip of the family on the life of the consecrated person and the radical break with his family. To meet the challenge of poverty, we must resort to the Gospel; Religious men and women, the diocesan priests and lay people must come together and commit themselves to the struggle of the poor for life. For this, it is necessary: to deepen the sense of welcome by the constitution of communities that are more welcoming; to develop a sense of solidarity and sharing in the African context; to promote actions in favour of the poor in order to help them to free themselves from their misery. These efforts involve frank and lasting collaboration between religious institutes, the laity and the local Church.²⁷¹

5.3.3. *The Challenge of Freedom in Obedience*

A Consecrated person forgoes ‘himself’ in order to carry out the will of God through the guidance of his Superiors. Obedience requires that we have a

²⁷⁰ Oseni Ogunu, “Growing in the Spirit and Charism of the Congregation”, 139

²⁷¹ Basile Mvê Engone, S.D. (Bishop of Libreville) “Le défi de la Pauvreté Consacrée”, in; Oseni Ogunu (Ed), *The African Enchiridion*, vol.IV, p.2748; also in: *Synodus Episcoporum* 1994, Bolletino Edizione Plurilingue, 2-29 October 1994, Vatican City, Bulletin 19, p.13

clear vision of faith as regards our Superiors, and esteem, always in faith, for authority: "we beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace amongst yourselves"²⁷². Obedience helps us to adopt the attitude of Jesus and of Mary: 'Lo, I have come to do your will' (Heb 10:9); 'I am the handmaiden of the Lord' (Lk 1:38). Obedience, the Vatican Council II notes, "far from lessening the dignity of the human person, by extending the freedom of the sons of God, leads it to maturity"²⁷³ A Religious should not think in the following terms: 'fortunately, we have Superiors who think for us!' Superiors should never think for us! Like a brother or sister, a Superior helps you to interpret and discover the will of God for you. Religious, "under the motion of the Holy Spirit, subject themselves in faith to their superiors who hold the place of God. Under their guidance they are led to serve all their brothers in Christ, just as Christ himself in obedience to the Father served His brethren and laid down His life as a ransom for many"²⁷⁴.

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

The challenge of obedience comes also from those notions of freedom which separate this fundamental human good from its essential relationship to the truth and to moral norms. In fact, the promotion of freedom is a genuine value, closely connected with respect for the human person. But it is easy to see the aberrant consequences of injustice, oppression or discrimination and even violence, in the life of individuals and of peoples, to which the distorted use of freedom leads. To respond to this situation consecrated person profess the vow of obedience. This obedience re-proposes the obedience of Christ to the Father and testifies that there is no contradiction between obedience and freedom. By obedience the consecrated persons intend to show: their awareness of being children of God the Father, hence they wish to take the Father's will as their daily bread (cf. Jn. 4:34), as their rock, their joy, their shield and their fortress (cf. Ps 18:2). Thus they show that they are growing in the full truth about themselves, and

²⁷² 1Th 5:12:13.

²⁷³ *Perfectae Caritatis*, 14,2.

²⁷⁴ PC, 14

therefore offering this consoling message: "The lovers of your law have great peace; they never stumble" (Ps 118:165).

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

"Inculturation of the evangelical counsels as an essential element in the following of Christ constitutes an essential part of full evangelization in the Church. The great number of priests and religious men and women in the young churches shows that the Spirit has been and still is powerfully at work. In this domain, consecrated chastity has raised and continues to raise questions. This is not the place to treat of these issues. For the missionary, it is important to sustain the action of the Spirit and to make the call of the Lord heard by his fidelity to his vocation, as well as by making manifest the joy and the freedom it gives. This is not always easy to do. The missionary must be up to living his vow in the context of cultures, mentalities and customs which can vary considerably from what he is used to."²⁷⁵

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

The central idea of *Ecclesia in Africa* to give vigour to evangelisation is symbolised by the concept of the Church-as-family of God. This symbol "emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust"²⁷⁶. Consecrated life has its vital place and role in the Church-as-Family of God. make a great contribution in the field of solidarity, dialogue and forgiveness.

But the question, today, is: Are individualism and the mass media capable of appreciating and valuing this task of dialogue in the religious community as understood and live in the Church-Family? In the face of a widespread and growing anti-life mentality and initiatives, the appeal of the African Bishops is: "Do not allow the African family to be ridiculed on its own soil!"²⁷⁷. Just as the African family is to be saved, so must we save the religious community, albeit at a different level and ways, so it can in its own way advance its promotion of the spiritual values in favour of a life, health and family experiences within the Institute, such that it leads to justice, peace, reconciliation and development. Thus, the great challenge for a community is dialogue. According to the *Ecclesia in Africa*, "Openness to dialogue is the Christian's attitude inside the community"²⁷⁸; "dialogue is the new name of charity"²⁷⁹. The worst offence for a fellow religious is to be ignored. The religious women and men of Nigeria in our time are meeting

²⁷⁵ Hans Josef Trumper, "Chastity", in: <https://www.omiworld.org/lemma/chastity/#fifth> (Accessed 11/10/2018)

²⁷⁶ EA, 63.

²⁷⁷ EA, 84.

²⁷⁸ EA, 65.

²⁷⁹ Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam* (6 August 1964), AAS 56 (1964), p. 639.

the challenge of community life in order to give true value to evangelisation. Rather than fleeing from community, an attempt will be made to build a small Bethany. A community, says Jean Vanier, "is not a community when a majority of its members achieve a move from the community to me, but when I convert, moving from myself to the community"²⁸⁰.

5.5. The challenge of inter-ethnic community life

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

5.6. The challenge of inculturation

The proclamation of Christ "is the permanent priority of mission" and is directed towards conversion, that is, to full and sincere allegiance to Christ and his Gospel. The process of inculturation has a role to play in the missionary activity. "The challenge of inculturation ought to be taken up by consecrated persons as a call to fruitful cooperation with grace in facing cultural diversity."²⁸¹ This presupposes a serious personal preparation, mature gifts of discernment, faithful adherence to the criteria of doctrinal orthodoxy, moral integrity and ecclesial communion. Consecrated persons must approach cultures other than their own with the attitude of Jesus, who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil 2:7). Besides humility, it also requires patient and courageous efforts to initiate dialogue, to establish contact with the most diverse peoples, proclaiming to all of them the way of salvation. Today, as in the past, many consecrated persons can and should seek and find in the history of individuals and of entire

²⁸⁰ Vanier Jean, *La communauté, lieu du pardon et de la fête* (Paris, Fleurus, 1979), p. 7, 31, as cited by Simpo.

²⁸¹ Vita Consecrata, n.79

peoples the traces of God's presence. For African consecrated persons themselves such a search is advantageous in the sense that the values discovered in their different cultures can in fact prompt them to deepen their own understanding of the Christian tradition of prayer and contemplation, community sharing, hospitality, respect for persons and attention to the environment, way living the evangelical counsel, and so on.

A genuine inculturation requires attitudes of love and meekness, following the example of Jesus. In this sense the consecrated life makes its members well suited to face the complex work of inculturation, because it accustoms them to being detached from things, even from some features of their own culture. Applying themselves with these attitudes to the study and understanding of other cultures, consecrated persons can better discern the real values in them, and the best way to accept them and perfect them with the help of their own charism. However, it must also be noted that in many ancient cultures religious expression is so deeply ingrained that religion often represents the transcendent dimension of the culture itself. In this case true inculturation necessarily entails a serious and open interreligious dialogue with African Traditional Religion²⁸²

In truth, scope of inculturation is extensive, as the Nigerian bishops made clear in their reflection on the commitment to and the major areas of inculturation to be explored and actualised²⁸³. In Africa, many regional Episcopates (e.g. IMBISA, AMECEA, AECAWA [now integrated into RECOWA] and national Episcopal Conferences have on different occasions and levels presented the theme of inculturation, highlighting its necessity, scope and urgency and pleading for its implementation²⁸⁴. The Church in Zimbabwe expressed this commitment to inculturation:

“We will work towards ways of expressing our Christian life and Christian faith in a more African manner: We need to discuss and work out ways to understand better the message of

²⁸² Cfr. *Vita Consecrata*, n.79

²⁸³ The Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, *The Church in Nigeria: Family of God on Mission - Lineamenta for the First National Pastoral Congress*, nn.141-152 Lagos, 1999; Also in: Oseni Ogunu (Ed.), *The African Enchiridion*, vol. IV, pp.3290-3292. Also, at a practical level, the final Report of the 2nd Synod of the Catholic Diocese of Enugu (Nigeria) offers pastoral insights into the necessity and importance of inculturation, convinced that: “We owe a duty to our people to seek to preserve, promote and transform the riches of our culture in all their varieties. We realize that if the Church’s presence is to be felt in our Diocese, and in fact, the whole of Igboland, inculturation should be expended to embrace both theological thinking and moral behaviour” and that “the spirit of inculturation should permeate our Homily and talks”. Catholic Diocese of Enugu (Nigeria): “A Report on Inculturation”, in: Oseni Ogunu (ed.), *The African Enchiridion*, vol. IV. p.3547

²⁸⁴ For example, Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA), *Inculturation. The Faith that takes roots in African Cultures. A Study Document on Inculturation for IMBISA 3rd Plenary Assembly* in Gweru, Maputo, February 1992. In: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III. pp.2277-2291; Gregory Ochiagha Ordlu Diocese, Nigeria), “Faith Transforms Culture”, Lenten Pastoral Letter, 1992, in: *The African Enchiridion*, vol.III. pp.2303-2304. See Denis Chidi Isizoh, *The Attitude of the Catholic Church Towards African Traditional Religion and Culture: 100 Excerpts from the Magisterial and Other Important Church Documents*. Lagos: Ceedee (1998). *Passim*.

Jesus and to make it a genuine part of our daily life. The Church, the family of God, must become more relevant to all people, so that more and more people will be attracted to follow Jesus together with us. We must also challenge our culture where it is wrong and unjust, so that it is transformed by Gospel Values in the light of the death and Resurrection of Jesus"²⁸⁵.

The question is: How can Institutes of Consecrated Life inculcate their charisms in a society and live in the present the ideal of life that was proposed in the past by their founder/foundress? 'The most urgent task', according to Sidebe Sempore, 'is to create conditions so that the gospel, the whole of the Gospel, is rooted in hearts and our customs'²⁸⁶. Inculturation is often misunderstood. For some people, inculturation is placing culture to the fore, replacing Christian liturgies with local rites, with the establishment of one's own culture, with the justification of a purported Asian, American or European 'morality' in the Pacific or in Africa, according to the environment in which one finds oneself. The process of the insertion of the Church in cultures requires a great deal of time – it is not a simple exterior adaptation. By inculturation 'is meant the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through the integration of Christianity, of the various human cultures'²⁸⁷. This integration must be experienced by the people of God, including Consecrated persons, who are called to dedicate themselves and their communities to creating a synthesis of the human sub-stratum with Christ.

From this point of view, the Church embodies the Gospel in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples and cultures into her own community; she transmits her values, starting from the sound assumptions that are in them, renewing it from within. The challenge of inculturation in Africa lies in forming disciples of Christ who know increasingly fully how to assimilate the gospel message²⁸⁸.

The inculturation of the consecrated life

For its part, the consecrated life itself is the bearer of Gospel values; where it is authentically lived, it can make an innovative contribution in meeting the challenges of inculturation. Inculturation can elicit a positive reaction in people's

²⁸⁵Episcopal Conference of Zimbabwe, "You are my witnesses to make Christ known", (Pastoral Letter, Advent 1996), in: Oseni Ogunu, *The African Enchiridion*, vol.IV, 2928

²⁸⁶ Jacques SIMPORE, *Consecrated Life In Africa. The Challenges Of The Third Millennium*, §3.5

²⁸⁷ Extraordinary Synod for the twentieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council, final report voted by the fathers, 7 December 1985. "The process of inculturation may be defined as the Church's efforts to make the message of Christ penetrate a given sociocultural milieu, calling on the latter to grow according to all its particular values, as long as these are compatible with the Gospel. The term inculturation includes the notion of growth, of the mutual enrichment of persons and groups, rendered possible by the encounter of the Gospel with a social milieu. "Inculturation [is] the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church." (International Theological Commission, *Faith and Inculturation* (1988), n.11; Cf. John Paul II, *Slavorum Apostoli* (2 June 1985), 21.

²⁸⁸ EA, 78.

consciences. Inculturation serves as a Gospel leaven within a culture, purifying and perfecting it. The Gospel way of life is an important source for proposing a new cultural model. In fact, Communities of Religious Institutes and of Societies of Apostolic Life can offer concrete and effective cultural proposals. They do this when they bear witness to the evangelical manner of practising mutual acceptance in diversity and of exercising authority, and when they give an example of sharing material and spiritual goods, of being truly international, of cooperating with other Institutes, and of listening to the men and women of our time. The manner of thinking and acting of Consecrated Persons gives rise to a true and proper point of reference for culture; it serves to point out all that is inhuman; it bears witness that God alone strengthens and perfects values. In turn, a genuine inculturation will help consecrated persons to live the radical nature of the Gospel according to the charism of their Institute and the character of the people with whom they come into contact. This fruitful relationship can give rise to ways of life and pastoral approaches which can bring enrichment to the whole Institute, provided that they are consistent with the founding charism and with the unifying action of the Holy Spirit. In this process, which entails discernment, courage, dialogue and the challenge of the Gospel, a guarantee of being on the right path is offered by the Holy See²⁸⁹. Without allowing oneself to be paralyzed by fear of errors, but rather animated by deep sense of commitment, perseverance and hope, the first step in this process is to begin it.

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

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

“the Church in Africa, faithful to its vocation, stands resolutely on the side of the oppressed and of voiceless and marginalized peoples. I strongly encourage it to continue to bear this witness. The preferential option for the poor is ‘a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole Tradition of the Church bears witness ... The motivating concern for the poor – who are in the very meaning of the term ‘the Lord's poor’ – must be translated at all levels into concrete actions, until it decisively attains a series of necessary reforms’²⁹⁰.

²⁸⁹ VC, n.80

²⁹⁰ Ecclesia in Africa, n. 44

The Church must continue to perform her prophetic role and be the voice of those without a voice.²⁹¹ Evangelisation necessarily does include development and liberation. "Development" refers to the development of every person and the whole person. Evangelisation means the proclaiming the Good News, but it also includes denunciation: evangelization must denounce and combat all that degrades and destroys the person. But proclamation is always more important than condemnation, and the latter cannot ignore the former²⁹². To achieve her prophetic role and be the voice of the voiceless effectively, the Church must be an energetic witness to justice and peace in her structures and in the relationships among her members.

The Church in Africa is also aware that, "insofar as their own internal affairs are concerned, justice is not always respected with regard to those men and women who are at their service. If the Church is to give witness to justice, she recognizes that whoever dares to speak to others about justice should also strive to be just in their eyes. It is necessary therefore to examine with care the procedures, the possessions and the life style of the Church"²⁹³.

As a part of the Church-Family of God, how can consecrated persons be the voice of those without a voice -- the voiceless persons, families and the poor and marginalised -- and indeed give back the voice to them, so they can be organized, liberated, speak out for themselves and advance in their pursuit of justice, development and peace? In relation to the voiceless people, how can Consecrated persons contribute to the actualisation of the appeal and hope that the Church addressed to everyone: "In the name of God: respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life! Only in this direction will you find justice, development, true freedom, peace and happiness!"²⁹⁴ The promotion of life and integral human liberation of the voiceless persons and peoples, which are closely connected, advance and express the profound desire and quest for life and to "have it more abundantly" (John 10:10b). On the threshold of the twenty-first century, which is full of contradictions, how can consecrated people fight for the rights of humans and peoples, the rights of families, of minorities, or fight against torture, the death penalty, human trafficking, the principal endemic diseases, social injustice and arbitrary imprisonment? More specifically, how can consecrated people be the voice of those without a voice in Nigeria or other African society today? How can they push international agencies, the NGOs and States to create solidarity funds for the vulnerable, the marginalised and those at risk, people with AIDS or chronic illnesses? How can they help orphans, immigrants, people with handicaps, victims of child prostitutions, refugees, elderly people without resources? How can they promote the culture of life, combating all that contradict life such as abortion, contraception, euthanasia, the death penalty? 'Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel' (1Cor 9:16) proclaimed Paul of Tarsus.

²⁹¹ *Ecclesia in Africa*, nn. 70, 106

²⁹² *Ecclesia in Africa*, 70.

²⁹³ *Ecclesia in Africa*, n.106

²⁹⁴ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), n.5

More than times past, Consecrated people are called to act, to comfort, to heal, to listen, to accompany the wounded...in front of their Teacher who whispers in their hearts: "you give them something to eat" (Mt 14:16); 'do not be afraid, I have defeated the world'; 'they will change their swords into ploughshares' (Is 2:4). No more wars! How can we promote and maintain peace and justice in the land of Africa, the cradle of Homo Sapiens? These are some inevitable challenges. Are we ready to meet them? May the Almighty help us!"²⁹⁵

5.8. Authenticity, Consistency and Accountability

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

Authenticity, consistency and accountability are always necessary in the formation and mission of consecrated life and priesthood but they are increasingly keywords and demands above all since the last few decades. "To be joyful witnesses of the Gospel it is necessary to be authentic and consistent"; authenticity "is a primary responsibility of all adults, of formators. And it is your responsibility, you formators who are here: to set an example of consistency to the youngest. Do we want consistent young people? Are we consistent? On the contrary, the Lord will say to us what he said to the People of God about the Pharisees: "Do what they say but not what they do!". Consistence and authenticity! However, you too, in turn, seek to follow this road."²⁹⁶

In Africa many cultures hold the religious man and woman in high esteem and look to them for moral and spiritual guidance. Religious symbols and people in religious garb elicit reverence from people. But many economically and technologically advanced societies critically look at religion and are outspoken about the aberrations and inconsistencies in religious life. The episodes of sexual abuse by clergy and religious in some countries have done much harm to the Church. People no longer accept pulpit proclamations unless they are backed by authentic life of the preacher. The global acclaim of the lives of Mother Theresa

²⁹⁵ Jacques Simpore, *Consecrated Life in Africa. Challenges of the Third Millenium.*

²⁹⁶ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130706_incontro-seminaristi.html (Accessed: 12/09/2018).

and Pope John Paul II are clear manifestations of the world's appreciation for authenticity and need for gospel mystique.

Most institutes of consecrated life live the pain of having a certain percentage of immature members whose lack of integrity and emotional balance drain much emotional and apostolic energy and at times cause serious economic burden on their institutes. Sometimes, it happens that promising missionary ventures or certain pastoral projects suffer serious setbacks due to the immaturity and lack of apostolic zeal of the Religious. Various forms of compromises in radically living evangelical counsels can erode the vitality and enthusiasm of the religious communities. The future of any institute depends on the quality of commitment of its members in accordance with their charism in the Church. An effective formation process should support and ascertain certain level of spiritual and emotional congruency, an affective maturity, in the candidates. When an authentic formative journey is not embarked, the longer years of formation seem to end up as seeds sown on rocky ground or among the thistles. It is after final vows or ordination that the mundane motivations, often unconscious, come to the fore and actively direct behaviour in seeking comforts, positions and power²⁹⁷. While expressing the joy of having crowded seminaries in some countries, Pope Benedict XVI insists on the need for proper discernment and cautioned against the dangers of mundane motives that may attract vocations²⁹⁸.

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

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

"The context in which we live continually asks us to "account" in this way, and it is a good thing, because it helps us to take nothing for granted. Today we cannot take anything for granted! This civilization, this culture... we cannot. But it is certainly also demanding, it requires a good, balanced formation which

²⁹⁷ For a critical look at vocations from the third world, Cf. Antony Malaviaratchi, "Religious life in the Third World, a Shangri-la", in *Review for Religious*, 65.1, 2006.

²⁹⁸ Cf. *Address of Pope Benedict XVI to the clergy of Aosta*, July 25, 2005

combines all the dimensions of life, the human, the spiritual, the intellectual dimension with the pastoral. In your formation there are the four fundamental pillars: spiritual formation, that is, the spiritual life; intellectual life, this means studying "in order to account for"; apostolic life, beginning to go out to proclaim the Gospel; and fourthly, community life. Four. And for the latter, formation must be undertaken in community, in the novitiate, in the priory, in seminaries.... I always think of this: the worst seminary is better than no seminary! Why? Because this community life is essential. Remember the four pillars: spiritual life, intellectual life, apostolic life and community life. These four. You must build your vocation on these four elements."²⁹⁹

6.10 . *The Challenge for Excellence*

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

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

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

6.11. **Challenge of Faithfulness**

²⁹⁹ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130706_incontro-seminaristi.html (Downloaded 2/9/2018)

Another challenge refers to faithfulness or fidelity³⁰⁰. This challenge comes from the global, consumerist and hedonistic post-modern culture that pervades all societies with the offer of very many false attractions. The mystery of the cross, renunciation, and values of evangelical counsels are held in disdain. The consumer culture plays on base emotions to thrive, but devours the victims for sensational news, especially when they are clerics and religious. When a person is not grounded enough in Christian values, it is easy to be caught up in the game and fall for the lure of money, easy life and immature affective adventures. For example, the lure of internet, in spite of being a great blessing, lure people into addiction by offering easy, accessible and affordable private world of substitutive gratifications in the present world. Analysing the departures from religious institutes, clerical state, and formations houses, it is found that a good number of the departures were due to questions of affective life, psychological problems and autonomy issues³⁰¹. Economic security and independence seem to underlie the numerous secularizations of religious priests who hike into diocesan life.

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

5.9. Coherency between Faith and Life for a Credible Witness

According to Pope Francis, "it is necessary that the faith be reflected in the daily lives of Christians. Their lives must be coherent with the faith, that their witness may be credible; likewise, I invite you to arouse in your communities, at every level, an effort to deepen the faith in order to live it in an ever more vigorous way. This invitation is addressed first to the clergy and the consecrated. The priesthood and consecrated life are not means to social advancement, they are a service to God and humanity. Special attention should be paid to the discernment of priestly and religious vocations both in the dioceses and in the different Institutes of consecrated life. Chastity and obedience are to be held in high esteem, and it is left to you to remind others of this ceaselessly; these virtues must be presented and lived without ambiguity by formators in both seminaries and novitiates. The same holds true with respect to temporal goods and prudence in their management. Counter-witness in this area is particularly harmful because of the scandal it raises, especially in the face of a population that lives in poverty."³⁰²

³⁰⁰ Mathew Vattamattam, CMF, *Challenges of formation for priestly and consecrated life*

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

³⁰² http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/march/documents/papa-francesco_20140328_ad-limina-madagascar.html

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

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

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

As a result of the financial limitations it may turn out not possible, for example, to adequately implement elements in the formation program as foreseen in the Constitutions and Norms and in the *Ratio* of the Institute. In addition, there is need for funds to carry out and adequately sustain the pastoral mission, and for the establishment and maintenance of the needed or existing structures. This is particularly the case in a situation where an Institute has no income-generating structures or projects to rely upon for its economic self-sustenance³⁰³. In Africa, if the presence of Religious Institute is to continue to be significant and effective, the question of availability and stability of funds to sustain its members and its mission will need to be explicitly addressed; and adequate plans and initiative must be made to ensure the sustainability.

³⁰³ Cf. "Oseni Ogunu, "Growing in the Spirit and Charism of the Congregation, .138-140

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

One of the largely skipped issue in the discussion about formation, and yet an important and delicate challenge, is the question of separation, that is to say, dismissal and departure of candidate from the institute's formation programme or from the seminary. Little seems to have been written about the accompaniment and preparation of persons for discontinuation from the Religious Institute during the course of the actual formation process. Ezeani describes the question of discontinuation – whether dismissal or free and voluntary departure – as a “crucial aspect” of religious formation, it is a ‘pastoral issue’³⁰⁴. Concerning the various forms of separation from the Congregation – whether temporary or permanent, whether voluntary or imposed – the norms of universal laws of the Church and the proper laws of the Congregation should be most carefully followed. It is uncertain, as Ezeani notes, how much attention seminary rectors, bishops, leaders of religious congregations and formators have accorded the issue of how persons leaving the seminary or houses of formation can be adequately prepared and accompanied to leave, living joyfully, and still continuing the practice of their faith.³⁰⁵ Hence, it is suggested that more discussion and reflection are needed on “how to accompany persons humanely and creatively, who after they have entered formation, come to a point when indicators begin to surface as to the need to seek paths of the Christian journey other than the religious life or priesthood”³⁰⁶.

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

1. Possible Signs for Discontinuation

It is not always easy to completely identify and enumerate the reasons why a person may need to discontinue her/his religious formation. This is because of the complexity of life and the unique spiritual nature of religious life. Religious Life is obviously not a perfect state for perfect persons. Therefore, it should not be about impeccability of a candidate. The religious formation and growth in Christian maturity is a process, and this implies that it is gradual and

³⁰⁴ Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR, “When You Leave Religious Life, What Then? In the context of candidates for the priesthood, the recent Vatican document, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation*, 197, considers only the case of “dismissal” by the community of formators and, in this regard, recommended these general requirements: (a) consult the Bishop; (b) give to the decision in writing to the candidate, and keep a copy of it; (c) provide in the text a prudent explanation of the decision, at least in a summary but clear form, along with the discernment that led to the decision.

³⁰⁵ Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR, *When You Leave Religious Life, What Then?* p.

³⁰⁶ Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR, *When You Leave Religious Life, What Then?* p.

life-long. The religious formation and growth in Christian maturity is a process. However, certain criteria and levels of maturity are required of individuals at the beginning of the journey of religious formation. Some Institutes clearly states in their particular laws, the *Ratio*, Directories, or other relevant documents³⁰⁷. He or she should be found capable of assuming all of the obligations of the religious life, not immediately, but progressively³⁰⁸.

No one must be asked to discontinue formation merely at the whim of the formator, owing to tribal bias. or simply out of pure personal displeasure with an individual. One important aspect, which requires much patience, is suitable preparation of people before they are admitted to religious formation. Hurry or need to increase the number of candidates is not a good way to handle the admission of candidates for formation for consecrated life. But if issues that will warrant discontinuation from formation arise, in spite of all the initial preparations done, the candidates must still be adequately followed. Among the criteria required by many religious institutes are good health – both physical and psychological³⁰⁹; intellectual/academic qualification/competence, capacity to live community life; joylessness in a person in an early stage of religious formation; personal qualities and dispositions such as having the right intention and the moral integrity; spirit of prayer; closeness to the Church (especially through the Holy Eucharist); and direct experience in Parish societies and any Catholic association.

a) *Good Health*

Depending on the nature and charism of the group, the health requirements for applicants vary. For some, if a candidate has certain medical problems that could hinder fuller participation as a member and ability to engage in the ministry and the demands of the life, it could warrant letting the person go. The person might find a home with other groups with different health requirements, or else, seek another way of life altogether. In certain instances, an individual could conceal a serious matter in their medical history during the admission process and it is discovered later in the course of formation. When this happens, it can be very difficult for all parties. At times, the congregation might recommend withdrawal to that individual. Giving proper care to the person would be the first approach, and a charitable one. Afterwards, sound medical advice could be sought before making a decision about that person's future in the

³⁰⁷ See, for example, *The Constitutions and Norms of the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary* (2017), Art.68; *The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus* (August 2012), Art.93; "Secular Institute Schoenstatt Fathers", in: *Official Directory Conference of Major Superiors of Nigeria*, p.131

³⁰⁸ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes* (1990), No 42.

³⁰⁹ According to the Code of Canon Law, even though contracted after profession, a physical or psychological infirmity which, in the judgment of experts, renders the member in temporary profession unsuited to lead a life in the congregation, constitutes a reason for not admitting the member to renewal of profession or to perpetual profession, unless the infirmity was contracted through the negligence of the congregation or because of the work performed in the congregation (Canon 689 §2, but see the entire §§1-3).

congregation. In the instance where a candidate would have to discontinue for health reasons, it might be helpful to bring the family into the picture so as to be prepared and plan on-going care of the person after his return home.

(b) Intellectual Factor

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

c) Capacity to live community life

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

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

To be effective in the accompaniment and discernment in the formation work, those assigned to the formation ministry are to be familiar with the particular nature and requirement of their congregation, and with the realities of their context or mission. This will help to identify and be confident about whether a particular individual candidate's personality, gifts and disposition fit. Sometimes, a person may pass through serious inner struggle and considerable resistance to some necessary change required for the way of life that he or she is being prepared to embrace and live. When a candidate tends consistently to utter statements like: 'You should accept me as I am, this is who I am, and there's nothing anyone can do about that'; 'I am used to this, and this is the way I function', there could be cause for concern. Statements such as the above can mask

an unwillingness to transformation through the formation experience and exposure to new ways. Does the formation environment seem to stifle the individual and prevent him or her from living authentically as the person deems right? Discontinuation from the programme might be a healthier option for a person; for Jesus came that we might have life abundantly, not suffocated (cf. Jn. 10:10).

e) Motivations/Intentions

Human nature is complex. For this reason, it is not surprising to find that for some individuals, at the time of admission into the formation programme, there can be a confusion and mix-up of motivations. A young entrant might be motivated by youthful exuberant infatuation for some perceived ideal of life. It is hoped, however, that as the individual progresses in the spiritual journey, prior motivations can become clearer. Entering religious life, it is not unusual for one to have both conscious and sub-conscious motives for doing so. Almost always, the ideals can be quite high, but upon entry, they begin to discover that religious life may not be exactly as they had expected. Sometimes, a person is unable to reconcile their stereotyped notion of the religious life with the reality of the human condition, accepting their own human vulnerability in it all. This can adversely affect them in a way that warrants exit from the programme. For some, the initial enthusiasm for religious life can just wear out quickly. Spiritual stagnation can set in as a result, and there will not be much emotional stamina to engage fully in the formation process. For instance, a novice or seminarian can show signs of growth in gaining insight into some significant personal weakness. However, he or she can tend to glory too much in the growth, without showing a matching ability to progress to any further step of utilising the fruit of the self-discovery for change. More often than not, this can be simply a basic inability: A person's level of awareness is the door to change, but it does not mean that they will go through it. There are those who can't and those who won't but generally formators are dealing with blindness, not ill will³¹⁰

f) Joylessness

Another possible indicator is apparent visible joylessness in a person in an early stage of religious formation. Pope Francis maintains that Consecrated men and women can respond to the invitation to follow Christ in the Consecrated life first, by "being joyful": "Show everyone that to follow Christ and to put his Gospel into practice fills your hearts with happiness." For him, this happiness should be contagious, and lead people to seek the reason for this joy, so that they too can share in it. It is indisputable that "Where there are religious, there is joy." Hence, when a person in formation goes around with a long sullen face and infects

³¹⁰ M. Drennan, 'Special Issues in Formation', in B. McGregor and T. Norris [eds], *The Formational Journey of Priests: Exploring Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Dublin 1994, p. 89.

everyone around with negative energy, it will be worth exploring with the person what is happening with him or her, and whether they are in the right place³¹¹.

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

2). Preparation of persons who are to separate

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

3). What Formators can expect³¹²

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

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

3.2 Reactions from companions of the candidate who departs

Considering the reality of peer affiliation and mutual support, it is understandable when companions in the programme of the particular individual in the process of leaving feel or react angrily to their formator who is 'sending

³¹¹ Cf. *Apostolic Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, passim.

³¹² Sr. Chinyeaka C. Ezeani, MSHR, *When You Leave Religious Life, What Then?*, pp.23-26

away' their companion. Their reactions can also be ambivalent. With the sense that perhaps the person needed to leave anyway, they nevertheless struggle with fear for themselves who could be 'the next' to be asked to go. It is not uncommon too that in many cases, the other candidates had perceived the one going as the one who is really doing everything right in the formation. Hence, they wonder: 'If this person who seems so perfect is leaving, what could become of me?'

3.3. Reactions and judgment from other Members

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

3.4. Resistance from the part of the Candidate leaving

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

in life and embrace other opportunities and ways that Life will open up for them. One can only do this with a healthy letting go of what has passed, having honoured it as part of their graced life story/journey. The feelings experienced by those who leave can be comparable to those who lost their jobs. Formators need to pay attention to this and not take it for granted. The skills to facilitate this important process are greatly required on the part of the formators.”

3.5) Reactions of the Family of the Candidate

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

4). Some Strategies for accompanying candidates discontinuing from formation

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

Hence, it is likely there will be feelings of fear, apprehension and worry about what the future could bring. For all these reasons, significant consideration is required in finding adequate ways of accompaniment and care in handling the exiting process. It is very important that those who leave are accompanied to do so graciously, not with bitterness and ill feeling. Human beings are individuals and

unique, so it is not easy to prescribe any single strategy to suit the needs and temperament of every candidate in the process of preparing to leave a religious formation programme. Nevertheless, since human nature is basically universal, there are certain values that might have a wide appeal irrespective of personality or context. Some of the possible strategies are as follow:

4.1. *Sensitivity and Empathetic accompaniment*

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

4.2. *Utmost care and Gentleness*

Irrespective of the reasons for discontinuing religious formation, the individual in question needs to be dealt with gently and humanely. Undoubtedly, the more tenderly and humanely persons are accompanied in the process of leaving, the more likely there will be positive results in terms of their personal response and equanimity. In other words, persons who are shown genuine love and consideration when it comes to helping them withdraw from the formation programme are more likely to have less resentment and strong negative reactions towards the formators and the congregation. It is likely that the necessary re-adjustments and finding their way in life will be easier for them. For this reason it is more important to work hard at building up their esteem and self-appreciation, than repeatedly harping on their shortcomings. A strong temptation that a formator could face is highlighting the weaknesses of the candidate to justify the decision and assuage feelings of inner struggle and pain that often accompany such decisions. This way of coping with the situation would produce more

negative thought and reactions. It is not enough to say, 'yes, I have warned her time without number that she is heading for the door if this carry-on continues!' Formation accompaniment and discernment are not about warning. Such threats are more likely to increase the fear or self-doubt of candidates, which can lead to compliance to avoid being 'sent home'. That a person does not fit in a particular congregation does not mean that he or she is no good and cannot make an excellent life in another setting or another congregation for that matter³¹³. It is good always to bear this fact in mind.

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

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

Candidates exiting from religious formation process need to be sensitively cared for and counselled. However, it seems even more important to pay special attention to those in whose case the initiative to discontinue had not come from the individual but instead from their Religious Institute. This is crucial because of the possible inclination to link their being asked to leave as a personal failure which has shaken the very foundation of their ability as a person. Gallianza therefore wisely counsels formators to "take care that their message does not diminish the person's self image or self-esteem. The decision to tell a person to depart from the formation programme is never an evaluation of his or her worth, goodness or loveliness..."³¹⁴ This is crucial, as fairness and respect for the individual are at stake.

4.4. *Honest and transparent Feedback*

³¹³ As regard the admission of seminarians coming from other Seminaries or Institutes of Formation: Cf. Congregation for Clergy, *The Gift of Priestly Vocation*, n. 198; *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*, n. 16 says: "It is contrary to the norms of the Church to admit to the seminary or to the house of formation persons who have already left or, a fortiori, have been dismissed from other seminaries or houses of formation, without first collecting the due information from their respective bishops or major superiors, especially concerning the causes of the dismissal or departure. The previous formators have the explicit duty of furnishing exact information to the new formators", *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 25 (2011), 1284; cf. can. 241, § 3; *Instruction to the Episcopal Conferences on the Admission to Seminary of Candidates Coming from Other Seminaries or Religious Families*. In some Religious Institute, the particular laws stipulate the terms and conditions for the admission of candidate or perpetually professed coming from another institute of Consecrated Life: for instance, cf. *The Constitutions and Norms of the Congregation of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary* (2017), Art.66.2

³¹⁴ J. Gallianza, "The Ministry of Initial Formation", in *Human Development*, Vol. 10, number 4, 1989, p 7.

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

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

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

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

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

4.7. Ritualising the Transition experience

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

4.8. Family education and involvement

It can be helpful to initiate discussion with the candidate in preparation on how and when they want to involve their families in anticipation of their imminent exit from the formation and return home. In addition, feelings can be processed with the candidate around this. In some congregations, before the start of initial formation, parents/families of the candidates are invited to a ‘family meeting’. At these ‘family meetings’, parents are educated on what religious/vocation discernment entails and the need for them to give their son or daughter all the support he or she needs on the journey. The opportunity is equally employed to educate them on realistic expectations of their wards in this venture. This prior preparation has helped in getting parents and family members attuned to the realities of religious formation and discernment. For some, it had

helped them to welcome back their son or daughter with open arms when discernment points them to other paths in life. This has in many cases gone a long way in motivating and empowering those individuals to engage in life and live it fully after their exit from formation.

4.9. *Support for the Formator*

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

4.10. *Post departure support*

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

4. RELIGIOUS FORMATION IS FOR COMMITMENT AND WITNESS

As earlier hinted, in initial formation there are the four fundamental pillars: the human dimension, spiritual dimension, intellectual dimension, apostolic dimension, to which a Religious institute adds community life. These dimensions are integrated during the major stages of formation of candidates: Aspirancy /Candidacy/pre-postulancy, postulancy, Novitiate and Temporary Religious Profession, Perpetual Vows/Solemn Vows, which will be followed by ongoing formation³¹⁵ or, for some formandi, the departure from or leaving the Religious Institute. The formation received by candidates is for a commitment and witness to Christ and his Gospel, through love and service of the people entrusted to us today.

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

Faithfulness to commitment and witness to Christ may, in some cases, lead to the point of martyrdom. In practice, the formation process that candidate for Consecrated life undertake is in view of commitment and bearing witness in all the dimensions of his/her life through living a community life, in spiritual life, listening to the Word of God, in the apostolate of evangelization, in the preferential option for the poor and the promotion of justice, the promotion of life and family, in the care of the sick, in promotion of education, evangelization of culture, in the field of social communication, and so on³¹⁶.

CONCLUSION

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

The existing challenges are also opportunities for improvement and growth. As people of faith, formation is taken not as 'a merely human enterprise'

³¹⁵ Cf. Congregation For Institutes Of Consecrated Life And Societies Of Apostolic Life, *Directives On Formation In Religious Institutes*, nn. 42-71.

³¹⁶ *Vita Consecrata*, nn.84-96; Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus* (2009), n.134

but God's. It is God who really calls. One needs to be aware of this, and totally surrender oneself to God's guidance in this whole enterprise. At the same time, the persons responsible for formation must continually strive to carry out their delicate and important mission, be humble and courageous to undertake periodic update when needed and opportunities are offered. Sharing and mutual support among formators, even if belonging to different Religious Institutes, can be helpful.

By

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Abstract

Unity, peace and progress are cardinal and germane to the issue of development of any society hence the Nigerian government and many other nations of the world cannot overemphasize the sine qua non of the foregoing concepts. A closer look at the Nigerian coat of arm is the vivid inscription "Unity, Peace and Progress" pointing to the imperativeness of these concepts in the development of Nigeria. It unfortunate that this expected environment seems elusive and seriously threatened by an atmosphere of crisis, conflict and obnoxious spilling of innocent blood. Nigerians recently have continued to live in fear and tension. In spite of the acclaimed efforts by the government to beef up security in the nation, senseless killings of innocent Nigerians, continue especially in the north central part of the country but has failed in that responsibility. This unfortunate situation no doubt places a gigantic question mark on the extent and sincerity of the acclaimed unity, peace and progress in Nigeria. In the face of sustained attacks by the herdsmen marauders on Christian churches and farmers in Nigeria, what can the consecrated persons do to forestall the eroding unity, peace and progress in Nigeria which are inseparable to development is the crux of this paper. The writer observed that consecrated persons have been both proactive and active in using their God given platforms in spreading the messages of peace and tolerance and warns that they might not be able to guarantee the elasticity of the patience exhibited by their subjects as this continually has been misconstrued as cowardice.

Keywords: consecrated, consecrated person, unity, peace, progress, development

INTRODUCTION

Transformation of societies into united, peaceful and progressive social orders, and the development of an enabling environment capable of maintaining this arrangement, requires a continuum of building of bridge activity across ethnic and

religious divides. It is critical to explore both current and potential capacity for consecrated persons in these regard with respect to the whole range of activities and potential impact. Past efforts by the community of consecrated persons around Nigeria aimed at engendering change will be illustrated and other potential approaches required to serve as a catalyst in the sustenance of unity, peace and progress will also be highlighted. This is aimed at ensuring integral development of Nigeria.

The call for a contribution to the project of unity, peace and progress for all from consecrated persons actually corresponds to the idea of accountability to God or to holy texts. The test of this accountability must be whether they fulfilling these responsibilities for the Nigeria society, since all are created and in equal need of unity, peace and progress for their well-being, safety, and happiness. Traditional values and religious practices must show our willingness to care for all. Consecrated persons accountability to God, particularly as representatives of faith traditions and communities first established in certain limited contexts must be broader, since the community has now become part of a wider and eventually a global fellowship. Faithfulness to God and traditional values must be tested by answering these unavoidable questions: are you serving all people, and their need for unity, peace and progress, whatever race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, generation or gender they are?

Today consecrated persons knowing well that what they do or fail to do somehow has an impact on the whole. There is no way to turn back to merely national interests, or to local or tribal realities, ignoring the present reality of our Nigerian environment where unity, peace and progress are fast eroding. Consecrated persons have means of communication that can serve unity, peace and progress in Nigeria and globally and the economy will thrive better in an atmosphere of unity, peace and progress.

Unity, peace and progress are cardinal and germane to the issue of development of any society hence the Nigerian government and many other nations of the world cannot overemphasize the sine qua non of the foregoing concepts. A closer look at the Nigerian coat of arm is the vivid inscription "Unity, Peace and Progress" pointing to the imperativeness of these concepts in the development of Nigeria. It unfortunate that this expected environment seems elusive and seriously threatened by an atmosphere of crisis, conflict and obnoxious spilling of innocent blood. Nigerians recently have continued to live in fear and tension. In spite of the acclaimed efforts by the government to beef up security in the nation, senseless killings of innocent Nigerians, continue especially in the north central part of the country, while the issues kidnappings and periodic murders are on the increase.

The failure of government at all levels and her security agencies to provide adequate security for all Nigerians is a grave form of abuse of human dignity. This unfortunate situation no doubt places gigantic question mark on the extent and sincerity of unity, peace and progress leading to distrust of government and her allied authorities. Evil tends to increase and dangerous arms being paraded and used to unleash mayhem on innocent rural dwellers by criminally minded herdsmen. In the face of sustained attacks by the herdsmen marauders on Christian

churches and farmers in Nigeria, what can the consecrated persons do to forestall the eroding unity, peace and progress in Nigeria which are inseparable to sustainable development is the crux of this paper.

The writer observed that the recent crisis is as a result of the present government insensitivity and inaction. It has been observed that this is dangerous to the unity, peace and progress of Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Consecrated

To make or declare sacred; set apart or dedicated to the service of a deity

Consecrated life, in the canon law of the Catholic Church, is a stable form of Christian living by those faithful who are called to follow Jesus Christ in a more exacting way recognized by the Church. It "is characterized by the public profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, in a stable state of life recognized by the Church".¹ The Code of Canon Law defines it as "a stable form of living by which the faithful, following Christ more closely under the action of the Holy Spirit, are totally dedicated to God who is loved most of all, so that, having been dedicated by a new and special title to his honour, to the building up of the Church, and to the salvation of the world, they strive for the perfection of charity in the service of the kingdom of God and, having been made an outstanding sign in the Church, foretell the heavenly glory."²

What makes the consecrated life a more exacting way of Christian living is the public religious vows or other sacred bonds whereby the consecrated persons commit themselves, for the love of God, to observe as binding the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience from the Gospel, or at least, in the case of consecrated virgins and widows/widowers, a vow of total chastity. The Benedictine vow as laid down in the Rule of Saint Benedict, ch. 58:17, is analogous to the more usual vow of religious institutes. Consecrated persons are not part of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, unless they are also ordained bishops, priests or deacons.³

Unity: The state or fact of being united or combined into one as of the parts of a whole.

Peace: Peace means a lot of things to different folks. To the philosophers, peace is seen as a natural, original, God-given state of human existence. Peace from this view point is the pre-corruption state of man in a society, as God established it. Thus St. Augustine distinguished between two cities namely the city of God which is founded on perfect heavenly peace and spiritual salvation; and the earthly city of man which is founded appetitive and possessive impulse, is corrupt and torn by strife. To Rousseau, he conceptualises a peaceful original state of existence of man in which there are no desires. In that state man existed as a free, gentle savage. In this state, men were naturally good as they were born free. In contrast though, Hobbes argues that in the state of nature was rampant with conflict and violence. Life to him

was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short hence the need for a social contract where all men will surrender their defence to a leviathan.⁴

According to the University for Peace, peace is a political condition that makes justice possible.⁵ Peace can also be conceived as a normal, nonwarring condition of a nation, group of nations or the world. It also implies a state of freedom from civil commotion and violence of a community, public order and security.

Progress: Progress can be defined as a movement towards a goal or to a further or higher stage. It connotes a development activity in science, technology, etc, especially with reference to the commercial opportunities created thereby or to the promotion of the material well-being of the public through the goods, techniques, or facilities created.

What is Development?

According to Carl Pearson, "development is an ancient concept but one which, in our modern age, has acquired new meaning and purpose. Its pursuit unites two strands of human thought: the belief in progress and the conviction that man can master his destiny" ⁶ Development has varied interpretations depending from the scholar's viewpoint. The concept of development and in this case rural development in Nigeria lacks a unified definition as different scholars tend to view it from varying perspective. While some scholars look at rural development from the aspect of educational training, others view it from the angle of availability of infrastructure within a community. Koffi Annan, a former United Nations Secretary General, provides a good example of an international relations scholar who suggested in a 2003 *United Nations Human Development Program Report* that "development embraces human rights and good governance, access to education and health care and ensuring that each individual in rural and urban areas has opportunities and choices to fulfil his or her own potential"⁷ Annan's opinion no doubt underscores the very essence of establishing the local government system as a third tier of government, hence development cannot occur where individuals at the rural level are not giving opportunities to fulfil their potentials. No matter what may be said about development, it has become clear that the concept of development has undergone profound changes over the years. The very meaning of development has been altered from an almost exclusive pre-occupation with national income to a broader interpretation that encompasses the questions of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

For this study, Development in agreement with Olatunbosun will mean addressing material imperatives of the people i.e. ensuring the basic needs of the people such that facilitates their wellbeing and shows improvement is realized. These materials include quality education, primary health care, clean environment, decent shelter, etc. The Second is freedom from misery or servitude and lastly development entails enjoying respect and self worth as a result of mastering our destiny and environment as conceptualized by him. But despite this assertion, the rural areas in Nigeria are grossly neglected as far as development projects and infrastructures such as hospitals, roads, schools, markets, etc are concerned. For

instance, in terms of level of economic development, quality of life, access to opportunities, facilities and amenities, standard of living and general viability, there is ample evidence to underscore the level of under-development.⁸

UNITY, PEACE AND PROGRESS: FOUNDATIONAL TO DEVELOPMENT

Peace prevails where everyone has fair and equal access to justice and an atmosphere to live in security. Without peace there can never be unity, therefore, peace is the pivot upon which unity must rotate and the by-product no doubt is progress. Peace sustains only in a situation where everyone is able to participate in shaping their destiny and decision makers are accountable to the people. Peace is, therefore, a state of order, of freedom from fear and want, of being secure. In such a society as Prophet Micah says, "Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid" (Micah 4:4). When this type of atmosphere is created where no one is afraid of his neighbour and injustice is drastically reduced or totally eradicated then development is encouraged and guaranteed.

Worrisomely, it is a matter of serious concern today that we are forced to live in situations where unity and peace are threatened and justice being denied hence leading to stunted progress much needed for the development of the Nigerian society. The greed of powerful individuals excludes others, concentrate only in accumulation of wealth and exploitation of resources, leaving others dispossessed and impoverished. The domination of the rich and the powerful causes discord and adds deprivation. All these factors increase domination, marginalization, violence, conflicts, poverty and sufferings in human life. It is not God's will that such a situation should exist, but it contradicts the purposes of God's ways of living together as a nation. Living together in peace and unity with a collaborative spirit and mutually recognizing and respecting this atmosphere will make our nation a progressive one and engender development. A place where peace with unity and progress prevail, such a situation no doubt will provide the propelling springboard that will encourage development. Peace is basically a gift of God, and is related to God's blessing and God's graciousness therefore, the consecrated persons as the mouthpiece of God should rise up to the challenges threatening the unity, peace and progress of Nigeria.

The absence of unity and peace resulting in lack or stunted progress in the Nigerian context are to be understood not merely in the contexts of violence and other manifestations of crises. Denial of the basic socio-economic and human rights to a vast number of people basically leads to a situation where peace and unity are sacrificed on the altar of the much needed development of the Nigeria society.

Nigeria is today faced with an ever increasing level of multifaceted socio-economic, political and security challenges. A wide array of problems is precipitating in Nigerian societies, causing threat to peace, unity and lack of progress. Armed conflicts and violence, bombings, increasing poverty, inadequate

health care, economic exploitation, environmental degradation and over militarization of the society, killer herdsmen rampages, ethnic and religious conflicts, communal violence, and political unrest, suppression of opposition and muzzling of people's legitimate right to self-determination; lack of rule of law and democratic governance are part of a series of issues affecting Nigeria's quest for unity, peace and progress. There is no doubt that these factors are seriously hampering development in Nigeria.

ROLES OF CONSECRATED PERSONS IN ENSURING UNITY, PEACE AND PROGRESS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Drawing from the foregoing, in this context the consecrated persons in Nigeria are called to be peace makers and to be courageous, committed and consistent in their efforts in order to be credible voices in the household of God. Consecrated persons using the platform of the Church are also called to be instruments of God's purpose in the world and especially within the Nigerian context. This call extends to them taking concrete action in peace-building in order to move beyond conflict resolutions. The consecrated persons under the auspices of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) should extend the peace and unity within the movement to the community of people who belong to other faiths as this will help engender progress and development of the Nigerian society. Peace, unity and progress continues to be a major concern of the Nigerian society and in this context we will be highlighting some of the impacts made so far by the community of consecrated persons with a clarion call on them to do more in these regard.

The central theme of the Christian faith is *"love for one another"* and this is often seen in the regular teachings of the church aimed at promoting co-existence, peace building, unity in ethnic-diversity, tolerance, generosity, hospitality, forgiveness and justice. The Christian faith is built on the message of unconditional love for one another and even love for one's enemies. To love one's enemies means taking on the very practice of the unconditional love of God – which means regardless of the nationality, race, colour, background, gender or social or economic status of a person, the Christian message of love cuts through all the likely biases or prejudices. Such a message of love gives no room for anyone to hate or indiscriminate harm. Even when hurt or offended, the Christian message urges forgiveness rather than retaliation or vengeance. It is for this reason that the consecrated persons have been saddled with the divine mandate to provide hope for peace, unity and progress in our societies. This they have done and continued to do using their various church pulpits. By organizing religious seminars, crusades and church activities climaxing on every Sunday services messages of peace and unity are spread encouraging adherents and the larger society to embrace tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

The church stands for unity and peace and plays and continues to play its role by teaching people against unacceptable behaviour, extremism or fundamentalism that would be injurious to others and provide mediation and reconciliation in conflict situations whenever they occur. Consecrated persons at all times teach and harp on the promotion of a culture of co-existence between people in a wide

diversity of groups such as ethnicity, nationalities, multi-religious, socio-economic complexities etc.

The Bible defines the consecrated person as well as the entire body of Christ as the light of the world and the salt of the earth. This means that the consecrated persons are set as a guide to show what is right, and to preserve what is right. They have always stood out in pointing the society to what is right, correcting wrongs, and promoting values that enhance peaceful co-existence regardless of racial, social, tribal, ethnicity or political affiliations of an individual or group of persons. Without the role played by the consecrated person in this sphere the chaos in the Nigerian society would have become inevitably unmanageable.

The body of Christ's central message of love has been the anchor for peace building and unity which is not only directed to those in the congregations alone but also to everyone in society. The consecrate persons in a bid to achieve this have always urged its members to act upon the message and subsequently influencing others in the general public to act accordingly and to behave in appropriate manner. When the Church '*lives the word*', it will enable the average person in the community to emulate such conduct. (Psalms 133:1-3 *Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity...upon this (unity) God commands a blessing.*)

Consecrate persons are divinely called to be watchmen to warn people of the dangers of wickedness. Obviously, most of them they have consistently done this while a good number of others are drawn away by materialism thereby neglecting their God given mandate. "*Son of man, I have made you a watchman... give them warning from me*" (Ezek. 3:17; 33:3). The danger inherent in this mandate is that failure to heed and abide by this divine role attracts punishment from God. "*... and thou giveth him not warning, nor speakest to warn ... but his blood will I require at thine hand*" (Ezek. 3:18). The implication therefore is that consecrated persons have a critical role to play in ensuring that there is peace, unity and progress in a given society. Although they cannot do this alone without the government at all levels, it is the believe of this researcher that government synergising with the consecrated persons, civil societies and non faith-based organisations such as NGOs will help in ensuring unity, peace and progress which are the springboards to propel integral development of Nigeria.

The writer also observed that consecrated persons have been both proactive and active in using their God given platforms in spreading the message of peace and tolerance and warns that they might not be able to guarantee the elasticity of the patience exhibited by their subjects as this continually has been misconstrued as cowardice. It also pertinent to observe that most consecrated persons who do not have access to the pulpits can also use other means to promote unity, peace and progress in Nigeria. Such means include:

1. Devotion to Prayer for the peace of country
2. Works of charity
3. Catechesis
4. Evangelism through home to home visitation

The project of unity, peace and progress cannot be a one show but a united action by both the clergy and the laity. It is obvious that majority of the Nigerian population (politicians inclusive) form the bulk of laity either belonging to one

church or mosque. Therefore it beholds on all hand being on deck to assiduously strive towards ensuring unity, peace and progress for the development of the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The consecrated persons should allow and be seen to set an example for open and peaceful relationships and transfer 'this' way of life to the remainder of the society. (*Mtt.5:9 Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called sons of God.*)

One of the most profound teachings of Jesus Christ was the Sermon on the mount where he taught the 'beatitudes'. He bestowed blessings on peacemakers and that such people shall be called the sons of God. The consecrated persons ought to apply this message by ensuring that the communities and societies live in peace, promote conflict resolution and reconciliation across all forms of boundaries.

Consecrate persons should continue to Propagate the message of love (*Matthew 5:43-46 "You have heard the law that says 'love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say, 'love your enemies!'"*) (1Peter 4:8 "*Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins*")

Consecrated persons should undertake the role of observer mission as Christian Peacemaker especially in crisis environments. The observer mission role can equally extend to election observing and collations of election results as this will reduce incidences of result manipulations. No doubt this will ensure election result credibility and acceptance.

For example in Zimbabwe, a team was sent during all periods of conflict, though the most common practice has been to send them during a low level period of violence. In this regard, a combination of indigenous and external actors from the Catholic Church performed an important monitoring role in the transition leading to Zimbabwe's independence in the 1970s. The Commission for Justice and Peace (JPC), based in Salisbury, Rhodesia and the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), based in London, set up a system to monitor human rights abuses of blacks. During this war for liberation, reports from the two institutions did much to inform the outside world and provide hope to the oppressed. It was truth telling, more than the achievement of justice or peace, for which these Catholic institutions were remembered during this period.⁹The community of consecrated persons can also be remembered for taking on such mission in a bid to ensuring unity, peace and progress in Nigeria.

Another pertinent recommendation is that consecrated persons should be actively involved in area of peace-building especially a crisis devastated communities. The peace activity of the Christian Council of Mozambique, an ecumenical body of Protestant churches, illustrates an educational approach in the context of a very violent situation. In 1991, toward the end of close to thirty years of civil war, they launched a "Preparing People for Peace Program." In this program, the churches designed training courses related to political issues, such as

nonviolence, human rights, disarmament, amnesty, repatriation, land distribution and healing a war-damaged environment. Social issues like public health, trauma treatment, child development and the family were also addressed. In addition, they led seminars on biblical peacemaking, reconciliation and practical conflict resolution skills. The program was organized in two phases: a five week seminar held in Maputu for representatives from all Protestant and Catholic churches; followed by a two week follow-up seminar held in each province for district representatives. Future programs, planned as of June 1994, included a nationwide meeting of reconciliation designed to bring together the whole Mozambican family in celebration and worship.¹⁰ Consecrated persons in Nigeria can borrow a leave from this and replicate same in the crisis environment in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The research illustrates that although consecrated persons may be better prepared for certain peace-building roles, peace, unity and progress by definition requires an integral approach. This represents an enormous challenge. Its effectiveness involves bringing different constituencies and different dynamics together: multiple spiritual and secular perspectives, civil society and governmental bodies, leaders and leadership, and strategy, and services/interventions and advocacy.

Ecumenical and inter-religious collaboration offer valuable insights into the workings of process-structures, which are core to sustained pursuance of peace, unity and progress. It is believed that when this is achieved the much talked about development would be achieved.

Peace, unity and progress depend on a large extent to the situation where justice prevails, and society is free from any conflict. Conflict in any form contributes to denial of justice and dignity and rights of people and communities. Given the fact that denial of justice are often a precursor to and always a consequence of violent conflicts, churches and ecumenical councils must contribute to their witness in protection of individuals and communities by working with others to build peaceful societies. Justice includes every form of social, economic, political and ecological concerns. It is clear that human security is multi-dimensional.

Consecrated persons' unity and peace-building efforts geared towards progress must be firmly rooted in shalom (salaam, peace), affirming both justice and reconciliation and avoiding both mere pacification and a crusade mentality. Implementation of this vision of personal, relational, communal and social wholeness requires the consecrated persons to pursue an optimal integration of "social justice building" and "direct violence reducing" methodologies. Catholic social teaching/practice spells out four concrete elements involved in this process of establishing right relationships. It calls all Catholic agencies to pursue:

- Universal human rights
- Social and economic development

- Solidarity with the entire human family
- A world order based on nonviolent response to conflict

Endnotes

1. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 944. Retrieved May 28, 2018, at the Wayback Machine.
2. Code of Canon Law, canon 573 §1 Retrieved May 28, 2018, at the Wayback Machine.
3. cf. canon 207.
4. S.B. Gaya *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited 2006), 5.
5. Christopher Miller *A Glossary of Terms and Concepts in Peace and Conflict Studies*. (Geneva: University for Peace no date), 29.
6. S. Pearson, *Oil and Development*, California: 1957. 6.
7. United Nations Development Programme Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now*, New York, 2003 (hereinafter referred to as "Commission Report"), 4.
8. A. S. Adebayo, *Local Government and the Challenges of Rural Development in Nigeria (1999 to date)*, *Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, Volume 19, Issue 4, (Apr. 2014), 98.
9. Kraybill, Ron, "Transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe: The Role of Religious Actors," in *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, ed. by Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 213.
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CONSECRATED TO CATECHIZE PEOPLE FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE

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ABSTRACT

Catechizing in this work is understood as a deliberate effort to transmit religious knowledge, values, skills, attitudes, and sensibilities of a society to its progeny. Consequently, this work concerned itself with educating the people religiously to get rid of fear and estrangement transmitted by religious parochialism causing the incessant hostility among the people of Nigeria. For it was obvious that while the individual religious adherents imbibed their religious tenets very well, they paid no heed to other people and their religions. As a result they developed tightly closed religious communities. Therefore, while it was obvious that these religions were taught at home, in the places of worship or in the schools up to university level they made no difference on people, because, it was still the same domestication. In effect, the religious teachings did nothing but increased wrangling and incessant squabbles among peoples. This work understood the squabbles as the phobia of tremendous dread of strangeness between the religions. The work therefore, suggested a dialogical process as a new teaching based on the work of the Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire to rewrite the narrative of religious education from being the harbinger of wars and distress to harbinger of peace and harmony; and to be the permanent process of teaching religion in Nigeria from cradle to the grave.

INTRODUCTION

It was the veteran American professor of religion, Gabriel Moran, who once suggested that religious education has chiefly two aims, namely: (1) to teach people to practice a religious way of life and (2) to teach people to understand religion³¹⁷. These two aims obviously set pace for this essay. The first aim examines the teaching of religion from its basics. This investigates how a child begins religious journey right away from birth within the warm surrounding of the parents, siblings and caregivers. This stage includes the child's world within the primary and secondary schools. The second aim dovetails with the first in the sense that since this involves

³¹⁷ Moran, 1998, p.30

learning process, it has to begin from the early stage of human development. Hence, it appears that the two phases of religious education appear to be one process of learning with different sides of emphasis. While the first phase lays emphases on ways of developing religion as a way of life, the second phase emphasizes proper understanding of religion. This means in effect that the religion one learns as the only way to worship God from infancy is explored in the second phase to include the awareness of other religions and other people who follow those ways to the same God. As the second stage must obviously start from infancy, emphases are increased as soon as the child enters the world wider than the family and community. This means that the child should be further introduced to wider world with samples of the people who are not from his/her family and community together with the differences in the idea of the ways they have to worship God which appear different from their way of worship, yet all the ways lead to one God.

THE ROLE OF FAMILY IN RELIGIOUS FAITH FORMATION

Family, both nuclear and extended has been naturally and globally accepted as the most fertile ground for the raising of religious faith. This is because the family environment offers the child the best suitable ground for growing up. Hence, in the field of faith formation, parents occupy the first place. The reason is that they are the closest 'significant others' in the life of the child. Developmental psychologists such as Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg and of course James Fowler are of the opinion that the closest significant others in the life of a child should provide the necessary ingredients that enables a proper development and growth of a child. Other significant peoples in the life of the child are the siblings, friends, groups, models, and acquaintances. These are the significant others that provide emotional support, socialization as well as relationship with the transcendent. Perhaps that is why everything concerning basic up-bringing is mainly associated with the family. Thus, like language, community-etiquette and many other behaviors learned at infancy from the family, religion is acquired from the family right away from birth. In the words of Karen Springen, citing child psychiatrist Elizabeth Berger, author of "Raising Children with Character," the roots of morality first appear in the earliest months of an infant's life. "It begins the day they're born, and it's not complete until the day they die."³¹⁸ This follows that the 'primal faith', which starts right away from infancy, is the foundation on which a person's faith is established. Such a foundation in the words of Fowler is "nurtured in the family."³¹⁹ Within this period parents or the nearest significant others in the life of the child are required to provide the basic love that ensures trust. Berry Brazelton, a pediatrician and Stanley Greenspan, a child psychiatrist, together call this period "most critical and the most vulnerable" in child development. Citing both their own research and that of others, the duo insists that within this period "the ingredients for intellectual and moral

³¹⁸ Newsweek, p. 72

³¹⁹ Fowler, 1995, p.11

growth” of any child must be laid or face the risk of setback “two or three steps behind, no matter how hard we try to help them catch up.”³²⁰ This is why Fowler (1991) is correct when he calls the family “the incubator of human faith development.”³²¹ On this account then, every family must do whatever it takes to provide the necessary ingredients for nurturing a child to term.

Such ingredients include “gestures and emotional cues (smiles, assertive glances, frowns, pointing, taking and giving back, negotiating and the like)” for infants who cannot speak yet. The reason for these early starts say Brazelton and Greenspan is to acquaint the infants with the human behaviours. Citing human voice as an example, the duo maintains that listening to human voice helps infants to learn to distinguish sounds and develop language. Furthermore, they explain that exchanging “emotional gestures help babies learn to perceive and respond to emotional cues and form a sense of self.”³²² In the same way this paper believes that cues of faith will be learned from the caregivers when they are expressed often before the children right away from their infancy. As they distinguish sounds and form language so they will distinguish the emotional cues that form good morals and faith and then gradually form the community accepted good morals and faith eventually. Just as Brazelton and Greenspan discovered through many years of studies that family patterns that neglect the ongoing nurturing care lead infants to “significant cognitive and emotional problems,³²³” so infants, who grew up from the neglect of faith nurturing, grow faith imbalance later in life. These infants in their adolescence develop such crisis that lead some to atheism and some to one religion or the other like a rolling stone they never gather any moss in faith. Such individuals actually develop very chaos adult-faith-life without root or at best shallow root one might say.³²⁴ But when properly guarded by the cogent family environment, the child comes out a robust, fervent child of God and solid member of the society.

In the same vein, Ibrahim Syed, one of the best Islamic scholars of our time, enjoins the Islamic parents to do whatever it takes to impart education worthy of Islamic faith and culture in these words:

Parents should provide an Islamic environment, and Islamic culture. It is hypocritical to do things differently and expect the child to have Islamic values. Parents set the best examples for their children to imbibe. Like parents the role of family has also been considered important in learning and upbringing the children.³²⁵

Moreover, James Fowler claims that since human persons are naturally structured to search for meaning, the awareness is better created from infancy. In other words, since every human person is created with the faculty to literally search for the purpose of his/her being, it is necessary that the awareness is created in early

³²⁰ Ibid, p.34

³²¹ Ibid

³²² Ibid

³²³ Brazelton, T. B. & Greenspan, S. (2000, Fall/Winter), “Our window to the future”. In *Newsweek*, pp.34-36, 72.

³²⁴ Chidili, 2005

³²⁵ Syed, I. B. 2001. *Education of Muslim Children—Challenges and Opportunities*. <http://www.uscharterschools.org/>

life.³²⁶ Citing Cantwell Smith, Fowler (1995), explains meaning as purposeful “quality of human living”³²⁷ He further explains this quality as the state of “serenity and courage and loyalty and service: a quiet confidence and joy which enables one to feel at home in the universe”³²⁸ Furthermore, he maintains that it is the same quality of serene purpose that helps one to find meaning in one’s own life and by extension in the environment and people that help one to discover the ultimate, which roots us firmly in life. Fowler in the mouth of Smith insists that with such a profound foundation we can withstand any vagary of life event, come what may.³²⁹ This is to say then that a good family structure nurtures a complete cultured human person, suffused in religious faith and culture. This point is further stressed by Syed, when he insists that:

Every Muslim parent is advised to raise his or her children well and properly. A happy home, comfort, care and love, providing the necessities of life and a good education are some of the responsibilities that parents are required to fulfill. Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) said whoever is not kind to young people is not one of us and the best teaching that a parent can give a child is the teaching of good manners and character. The Muslim child absorbs the Islamic values from its parents, teachers, peers, friends and the environment, including the care-givers. Nip it in the bud is the best advice. Otherwise once the Muslim child develops undesirable habits and unethical values, it becomes extremely difficult to make the child into a good Muslim/Muslimah.³³⁰

Certainly, it is right to say that religion originates from family and cultural heritage. This is because "in all lands the social training of a child directs him to translate tribal ritual into personal habits."³³¹ Though the child may be oblivious of what is happening in his life at a time, the fact that all it respects, such as parents, significant others, and indeed the elders are performing the act, enables the child to trustfully follow and assimilate whatever the adult society is doing. This is why M. N. Getui, rightly observes that the African traditional society incorporates religious training and instruction in the day-to-day activities of the people in such a way that any person participating in these activities of the people will eventually be molded spiritually.³³² Hence Potvin and Sloane came to the conclusion that "adolescent Church membership within the major denominations is often a simple extension of parental membership."³³³ This becomes very true when we consider the contention of the cultural anthropologists that human cultures all over the world are ready fertile ground for breeding ritual and myth. Inherent in these cultures also are some leadership qualities such as priesthood or the like to preserve the religious

³²⁶ Fowler, J. W. (1991). Stages of faith consciousness. In F. K. Oser & G. Scarlett (Eds.), *Religious development in childhood and adolescence*, 27-45. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

³²⁷ Fowler, J. W. (1995). "Stages of faith" San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid

³³⁰ Syed, I. B. 2001. *Education of Muslim Children—Challenges and Opportunities*. <http://www.uscharterschools.org/>

³³¹ Allport, p. 26.

³³² Getui, 1990

³³³ Cited in Chidili, 2005, p. 96

beliefs and practices.³³⁴ These religious personnel not only preserve the cultural beliefs of a people, they also participate in transferring it to the young. As a matter of fact in some religions, they are the main custodians and transferors of faith. Muslim scholar Syed, puts it this way:

As the children grow, the teachers, community elders, their friends exert deep influence on the character of the child. The parents should choose the right schools for their children. Audio-Visual media such as TV, Video, video games, Movies, peer pressure could play an effective role in raising the Islamic personality the parents are building and deeply influence the behavior of the children for years. It takes constant and continuous effort on the part of the parents and others to keep our youth on the path of Islamic values. Otherwise they will become an American statistic. Character education, promotion of order and discipline and ending the culture of guns and drugs from schools are the important steps of Islamic education.³³⁵

Thus, religion could be said to be a culturally formulated devise for living and acting as well as a liable guide for human behavior. Its usefulness within the culture assures docile handing over from parents to children. In this case then, it follows that the children are obliged to believe what they received from their parents. Certainly, this claims that religious sentiments of an individual springs from his/her ancestral heritage, something one suckled from the mother's breast. If this is accepted, it helps us understand that any kind of behavior, good or bad could be a transferred trait from the parents and significant others to the offspring and posterity. It appears from this that if we have persistent fanaticism from Islamic or Christian religion, for instance, it follows that there are some adult fanatics who consistently pass on fanatic traits to the young. It depends on the parents and indeed all the conveyors of religious faith to expunge all evil traits in their teachings and behaviors and entrench peaceful-loving traits on their progeny. This means then that the Christians, the Muslims and indeed all other religions must desire peace and harmony and as such impart them to their young as enshrined in their Holy Books to influence their offspring so as to influence their environment. In the same vein, all religions must do whatever it takes to fish out all the bad eggs within their ranks to deter them from poisoning the minds and behaviors of the young.³³⁶

DEVELOPING A BALANCED HUMAN PERSONALITY

Moreover, child education aims at developing a balanced human personality through training of the human spirit, mental power, rational self, senses, and feelings. In other words, education frequently aims at developing human person physically, mentally and spiritually. Above all, educational policy should normally be directed to target enlightening the head and heart and illuminating the human

³³⁴Chidili, 2006

³³⁵ Syed, I. B. 2001. *Education of Muslim Children—Challenges and Opportunities*.
<http://www.uscharterschools.org/>

³³⁶ Chidili, 2006

consciousness for all round development of individual personality. This is why education enables a human being to attain the greatest possible harmony, internal and external, spiritual and material, for the fullest possible development of human potentialities and capacities. Along this line of thought, Ibrahim Syed suggests that Islamic education aims at among other things, the preparation of the young for leadership and building of character. He further points out that the final goal of Islamic education is the growth and development of an Islamic personality, which indeed is the pivot of Islamic values.³³⁷ Citing the Recommendation of the Committee of the First World Conference on Muslim Education, he summarizes the aim of Islamic education as follows:

Education should aim at the balanced growth of the total personality of man through training of the human spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings and senses. The training imparted to a Muslim must be such that faith is infused into the whole of his/her personality and creates in him/her an emotional attachment to Islam and enables him to follow the Qur'an and Sunnah and be governed by Islamic system of values willingly and joyfully so that he/she may proceed to the realization of his/her status as Khalifatullah to whom God has promised the authority of the universe.³³⁸

Certainly, all other religious faiths, Hinduism, Afrreligionism, Shintoism, Judaism, Christianity etc deeply shares in this basic aim of religious education. Obviously, this is the intention of all other religious faiths and this is what all of them understand very well and indeed raise their adherents accordingly, to the extent that any good member of any religion is soaked in their tenet to a blind point. In other words people are so awash with their own religious truth that no other religion seems to matter. This is why it appears as if all religions teach love and yet behaves hate to other people since they are closed to themselves. All their teachings are still very parochial and domesticated. Each religious community closes itself up, learns all that appertains to their religious faith, acts and behaves fully learned but relates inimically to others. Gabriel Moran puts this way, "every child acts out a religious way with a set of beliefs, symbols, and actions that relate the person to the enduring religious questions of wherefrom, whereto, and why. Every child takes up a stance toward the universe as a whole and toward the meaning of life and death, even if this way of life is not one of the traditional religions."³³⁹ Moran further observes that anyone who grows up in such an insulated religious world sees other religious faiths very strange. Each person is shocked to notice other people who behave differently from the way they behave. Foreign students know this experience very well, particularly on their first weeks of encounter with other students from other parts of the world.³⁴⁰ "On their first encountering people who are seemingly intelligent and well-meaning," says Moran, "see the individual elements within

³³⁷ Syed, I. B. 2001. *Education of Muslim Children—Challenges and Opportunities*.
<http://www.uscharterschools.org/>

³³⁸ Ibid

³³⁹ Moran, 1989, p. 31

³⁴⁰ Ibid

other people's religion as strange and even bizarre."³⁴¹ If there is nothing done to acquaint each other on one another's religious behaviors, people will remain estranged and worlds apart. Without doubt this explains how all religious faiths bring their adherents up and indeed still live in that way. From cradle through youth to the grave as it were, all religious faiths still mold their adherent in such a straight-jacket fashion. It is even worse in schools of higher learning where religions are not only hemmed along the lines of individual religious faiths but also coached in languages foreign to the local people. Surely, this makes deep understanding of religious faith very difficult. Perhaps that is why there is sporadic yells and shouts at each other now and then out of fear of unknown, among the rank and files of different religious faiths. As all these religions are shouting at each other like people in the market place, no one hears the other, and thus, continues the strangeness among them.

THE APPLICATION OF MORE SELF CRITIQUE TO REINVENT OUR RELIGIOUS TENETS

This is not to say that efforts have not been made toward bringing all religious faiths together for the sake of dialogue and acquaintance. Rather it is to say that enough is yet to be done in that regard. This means that more efforts must be made by all religions to achieve tolerance and fraternity among their rank and files. Jeff Astley suggests in this connection that Christian religious educational process should be "more self-critical of their religious beliefs, attitudes, values, emotions and actions."³⁴² This, in my judgment, is the only way that religions should evolve self-understanding and self-growth. This is mainly because self-critique enables individuals to shape and reshape oneself for better. Perhaps, this is why Astley's suggestion is the cogent proposal for all religious faiths so as to shape themselves up to understand themselves and also be fully aware of other religions and their importance to various other people who worship God through them. Self-critique therefore is the hinge for all religions' meticulous self-understanding of itself as a unique religion and other religions as unique in their own ways. At the same time it facilitates people's proper understanding of other people who access other religions for worship. The knowledge acquired from self-critique obviously enhances constant growth and deep understanding of religion per se and its universal appeal in general. This obviously is the main thrust of the second aim of religious education. This is the area I think the tertiary level of religious education should explore properly with a view to evolving a modality that should flow down the ranks and files of all religious faiths from the grassroots to the noblest of the society.

BRIDGING THE GAP THROUGH THE COLLATION AND FRATERNIZATION OF ALL RELIGIOUS TENETS

³⁴¹ Ibid

³⁴² Astley, J. (1996). "The role of the family in the formation and criticism of faith." In Stephen C. Barton (Ed.), *The family in theological perspective*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

In my opinion, it is high time we started to bridge the gap by initiating some ways of understanding one another through reasonable studies and required dialogue. Experience has shown that religious education has been hewn into two wide parts. Catechism classes or Sunday schools have been child-centered, leading the learning of faith to what Gabriel Moran calls what women do to children supervised by men. This aspect of philosophy of religious teaching and learning renders faith learning childish exercise no reasonable adult likes to mingle with. As if that was not enough, religious learning was shoved into the seminaries where faith-learning is plunged into foreign languages and high-phonated words, needing high-level of education and very select few of human society to study and imbibe. In this way religion is rendered impenetrable and scary; causing only conflicts and division. Probably, that is why very few people consider religion a worthy subject to study. At this time in human development, it appears proper period to consider seriously, the importance of religion in human life and then plan out ways of learning and imbibing the real truths embedded in religions. First there should be a broad based curriculum that will contain tenets of various religious faiths that will encourage fraternization with one another. It is only in this way that the religious faiths will whittle down the strangeness between them. I am suggesting that such tenets should start early enough in the parochial religious faiths and culminate in schools and the schools of higher learning where these tenets should be discussed, critiqued with genuine interest and understanding. This is very urgent and we must start now. As we resolve to embark on this, we will understand with Gabriel Moran that Christianity, Islam, Afrreligion, Buddhism and indeed all other religions “have different but equally valuable lessons to teach.” This discussion will enable us for the first time to recognize fully that Afrreligion, Islam or Christianity for that matter is “a religion,” utterly unique but comparable to every other religion.³⁴³

NEW UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS TENETS AS A GAME CHANGER

Our new understanding of faith automatically changes the aims and objectives of religious education. This time around, it is no more going to be each person learning only their religious faith very well, and finish palaver. No, it is going to be each person learning their religious faith very well coupled with learning other people’s religious faiths enough to interact meaningfully with people of other faiths. This is principally for the interest of knowledge that leads to fraternization and oneness of the people of God.

Hence, the aim for religious education this time will be:

- (1). To enable learners to understand the nature of their traditional beliefs and practices and the beliefs and practices of other world faiths.
- (2). To teach tolerance and challenge prejudice towards people of different faiths

³⁴³ Moran, G. (1998). *The aims of religious education*. In Harris, M and Moran, G. Reshaping Religious Education. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Press, p. 31.

through providing opportunities to develop an understanding of the value of living in a multicultural, multi-faith and multi-lingual society.

- (3). To help learners reflect upon their own needs, experiences and questions and to confront what are sometimes referred to as 'ultimate questions'.
- (4). To encourage learners to develop open minds to new and different concepts and to form their own opinions based on evidence and argument.
- (5). To maintain close links with local churches and other religious communities.
- (6). To learn from religions in addition to gaining knowledge and understanding about religions.³⁴⁴

This will mean in the words of South African Educational Policy, that religious education will provide the pupils with the life orientation that develops their capacity to respect the right of others, appreciate the cultural diversity and different belief systems. It will therefore make it imperative on the parents and teachers to impart on their progeny, the virtues of acceptance of other religions as enshrined in their respective religions. A Muslim for instance will learn from the Holy Qur'an, to respect "those who believe in that which was revealed to thee and that which was revealed before thee" (2:4). "Say, we believe in Allah and in that which has been revealed to us and in that which was revealed to Abraham and Ismail and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes in that which was given to Moses and Jesus and in that which was given to the prophets from their Lord and we do not make any distinction between any of them and to Him do we submit" (2:179). They will also learn to respect people of other religions as stated in the Holy Qur'an: "And abuse not those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest exceeding the limits they abuse Allah through ignorance" (6:108). The Christians will for instance imbibe such themes like, do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt (Ex 22:21). Show proper respect to everyone (1Peter, 2:17). Love one another as I have loved you. Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you (Lk 6: 27). Owe no one anything except the debt of love for one another (Rm 13: 8), etc.³⁴⁵

DIALOGUE AS A BASIC PHILOSOPHY OF ENCOUNTER IN THIS ASPECT OF KNOWLEDGE

To realize this proposal, 'dialogue' as suggested by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator should be applied as the medium of communication. In his "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" Freire, proposed 'dialogue' as a philosophy of knowledge. In this situation, dialogue is defined as an 'encounter between men mediated by the world, in order to name the world" (p. 88). This translates to mean that in the teaching and learning of this kind, the teacher and the learner must be the people who are curious to learn from one another, and at the same time teach one another based on the information arising from the world around them. The participants must have common purpose which must be to name the world. The world this time must be their problem within their environment. When the problem is named, each member of the discussants will have the opportunity to air his/her views without being

³⁴⁴ South African National Policy on Religion and Education (Web, 2007).

³⁴⁵ Ibid

coerced or intimidated. This means that the dialogue must be a free affair so as to be rewarding. In the process of the dialogue, there should be no imposition of any person's opinion; there should be no denigration of any person's opinion. All opinions are considered equal. All opinions are discussed with equal interest without fear or favor. This discussion must be inspired by the interest to acquire knowledge, new knowledge of what one does not know. The knowledge acquired in this discussion is meant to leverage the participants and impact on the society positively. Since the knowledge gained is intended to be used in daily life, every member of the community must be enthusiastically and genuinely concerned. The main purpose is to use the new knowledge to transform the society to become a friendly society instead of hostile community. In this case then, the knowledge gained in discussing words like 'tolerance' 'compassion' or the like, are aimed at transforming the multi-religious, multicultural or multilingual society like Nigeria to cohabit amicably.

As we pointed out earlier, the content of this new idea should be all the religious themes that speak of tolerance, peace and unity amongst people. These themes like love, compassion, tolerance have been earlier enumerated. Home and school as places of learning are very important as already hinted. But with this idea of broad based learning, Gabriel Moran suggests that while not subtracting home and school as places of learning, places of work and leisure should be added. He also suggests that the idea of religious learning being what 'women do to children, supervised by men' has become obsolete with this new idea. He then suggests that since religion is such an important theme in human life, it should be lifelong learning.³⁴⁶ This means that religious learning should be spread to include the young and the old. The teachers now will expand to be every member of the community, at different stages of life. This means then that as the young takes religious teachings from the old, so the old should prepare to receive religious teachings from the young. That is to say, as birth, death or physically challenged child teaches the mystery of God to the adult so the adult exposes the child to the traditional genesis of their religious faith. In them all are mysteries only religion can teach the people of faith.

THE CONTENT OF THE CURRICULUM

At this point, children should start learning religious diversity by exploring the more tangible forms of the religion, right away from home and then continue with the observable aspects of religious diversity found in churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, shrines, and other places of gathering for religious activity. As children advance in age, other areas of religious diversity could be addressed. Thus, in the secondary schools for instance, students should begin to study the basic component phenomena of religion, such as stories, songs, sacred places, founders, rituals and festivals, with illustrations drawn from various religious traditions and

³⁴⁶ Moran, G. (1998). *The aims of religious education*. In Harris, M and Moran, G. Reshaping Religious Education. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Press

communities in Nigeria and the world. In this connection, Oduyoye (1979) suggests that a learning of this type must necessarily include, “the meaning of everyday events, of festivals, the patterns of behavior, norms and taboos,” as well as the community religious history and any other human activities occurring in the community as a part of the religious knowledge, every young person must know.³⁴⁷ At senior secondary schools, integration of these component parts of religion could be introduced in preparation to further discussion on religious study themes in schools of higher learning. At tertiary level of education, religious studies should introduce learners to all sorts of critical thinking about significant issues of personal morality and social ethics that are often associated with religion. When religion is discussed in schools it must be positioned in such a way as to be examinable, so as to grade student’s knowledge. Students should be also assessed through practical observation to know whether they can behave in reality what they learn in theory. But when these religious themes are discussed in work places and leisure places among adults, the assessment should be on the practical behavior of the people. Thus, if tolerance is discussed for instance, the measurement will be on how the participants tolerate one another starting from that moment of discussion to infinity, anywhere and everywhere.

Since J. S. Mbiti in his “African Religions and Philosophy 1977” observed that Africa is profoundly religious³⁴⁸, it follows that every activity in Africa is religiously laced. In that case then, every learning in African community must be understood as a religious knowledge. This is why Oduyoye’s suggestion that puberty rites and indeed other rites of passage should be extended to schools and other places of learning is proper. This is necessary as puberty in particular is the beginning of proper awareness of social integration and disintegration at the same time, in Africa. At this time both male and female integrate sexually by each sex developing its individuality. In other words, males are taught to be male by learning all that appertains to males and females learn what appertains to females. On the other hand, the obvious boundaries created by this arrangement disparage the community since males learn to lord it over the females and in this way the community muzzles the individuality of the females.³⁴⁹ However, Oduyoye (1995) argues that the new education should include respect for individuality instead of subordination.³⁵⁰ This will shape the thrust of the education to include teaching equality and respect of all human persons at home, at schools, the places of work and at leisure places.

CONCLUSION

In the end, this dialogical process of learning starting from the cradle to the grave driven by context and content; will usher in the desired objective. The

³⁴⁷ Oduyoye, M. A. (1979). The Value of African religious beliefs and practices for Christian theology. In K. Appaiah-Kubi & S. Torres (Eds.). *African theology en route*. New York: Orbis Books, p. 94.

³⁴⁸ Mbiti, J. S. (1977). *African religions and philosophy*. New York: Anchor Books

³⁴⁹ Oduyoye, M. A. (1979), p. 39

³⁵⁰ Oduyoye, M. A. (1995). *Daughters of Anowa*. New York: Orbis Books, p.82

knowledge acquired in this exercise as developed above will eventually dispel the ignorance and debilitating fear hindering the familiarization of divergent religions in Nigeria. The learning will then pave the way for tolerance and respect for other people and their religion. The tolerance and respect will then lead to peaceful coexistence and harmonious neighborhood. This will then, mean that religious literacy should include cultural literacy. Creativity in this regard will amount to developing capacities for expanding imagination, making connections, and dealing with cultural differences and diversity. Furthermore, religious literacy will understand critical reflection to include comparison, cultural analysis, ethical debate, and the formulation and clarification of values.³⁵¹ In this way religions will understand each other and thus entrench enduring peace and harmony in our society.

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³⁵¹ *South African National Policy on Religion and Education* (Web, 2007).

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**THE CHURCH OF THE YOUTH AND THE YOUTH OF THE CHURCH:
A PLEA FOR THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY**

Jean-Paul TAGHEU, OP³⁵²

ABSTRACT

If we consider the average age ratio of the population, the Church of Africa is also a young Church with many young people. She can even be said to be the Church of the youth. But on the ecclesiological, pastoral, political, economic and social side, there can be some concerns and uncertainties to question and address, for the youth to be the present and future of

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Christianity in Africa. How can the African youth be the present and the future of the Church? This is the main question treated based on the two African synods held so far.

Keywords: Church, youth, education, transmission, future of Christianity, holiness and witness, African humanities and antiquities.

INTRODUCTION

If we consider the nineteenth century as the time frame of the modern age for the systematic Christian mission and evangelisation all over Africa, it can be said that the African continent is entering its third century of Christianity. Comparing to Europe, which has two millennia Christianity, African Christianity is still very young. Besides, if we consider the average age ratio of the population, the Church of Africa is also a young Church with many young people. She can even be said to be the Church of the youth. For “Young people make up the majority of Africa’s population.”³⁵³

According to the UN’s Population Commission Report, there is an immense population growth in Africa. As for the statistic of The World Bank, the population of people living in cities in Africa will double in the next 25 years reaching 1 billion in 2040, and tripling its current population by 2050. In 2017, for instance, 60% of the population in Africa was under 25 years of age. By an estimated projection, in 2100, Africa will be 4.2 billion people, representing around 80% of the global population.

Looking only at this African population rate, through the games of number and quantity, it is good news to have such a Church in Africa made up, in the majority, by youth. The match, in terms of the future, is then already won. But on the ecclesiological, pastoral, political, economic and social side, there can be some concerns and uncertainties to question and address. How are the youth of that African Church? Do young people really have the feeling of belonging to their Church? Are they fully integrated and participative in the life, action and mission of the Church? What does that mean to be young in the Church today? In the context of African political, economic and social poverty, how can a Church be built for the youth and the youth for the Church?

Our aim is to propose some suggestions for the building of a Church for the youth or the youth for the Church as being the present and future of Christianity. It is not an easy task. In engaging this issue, our reflection consists mainly of re-reading the two African synods on the parts concerning the youth in the Church of Christ. It is to see the concern for and the call up of the youth in the teaching *magisterium* so far, so as to prospect new provisions and focuses for the betterment of the Church’s young men and women in the twenty-first century.

³⁵³ Benedict XVI, Post-synodal Exhortation *Africae munus* On the Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace (Vatican City: Libreria Edictrice Vaticana, 2011), 60.

In the first part, we shall speak of the two synods of the young African Church as way to state their contents regarding the youth. The second point shall address some worrisome problems of the youth today, in the socio-political and economic context. In other words, being a young Church and young people in the young African Church has some challenges. The question of the youth as the present and the future of the Church shall our concern in the third part. For the youth to be the present and the future of the Church, we need a certain theology of the youth, of their education in the Church and a good ecclesiological and pastoral program for the care of the youth. That is why, in the four parts, we speak of patrimony, transmission and reception. The last part of our reflection proposes an integral human education for our youth, with an attention to ecology, African history, antiquities and humanities.

TWO SYNODS FOR THE YOUNG AFRICAN CHURCH SINCE VATICAN II COUNCIL

The Youth in the Magisterium of the African Synods

Despite the fact that, Africa is said to be the future of the humanity,³⁵⁴ since Vatican II Council (1962-1965), only two synods of Bishops were held in Africa. This is a sign of her neglect by the elder and mother Church. The first synod was held in 1994, on mission and inculturation. The outcome was this famous apostolic exhortation: "The Church in Africa and its Evangelizing Mission Towards 2000". The second synod took place 15 years later, in October 2009 under the theme justice, peace and reconciliation. The post-synodal exhortation outcome was: *Africae munus* or The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace. "You are the salt of the earth ...You are the light of the world" (Mt. 5: 13-14)".

Ecclesia in Africa, the very first post-synodal exhortation, given at Yaoundé on the 14th of September 1995, is made up of 144 paragraphs. It contains 21 times the word "young", among which 12 pertains to the youth. Seven times we have the words "youth". Only number 93 is devoted to young people.

Africae munus: post-synodal exhortation given at Ouidah, in Benin Republic on the 19th of November 2011. Even though shorter in length compared to the first post-synodal exhortation, it is a made up of 177 paragraphs. Of the whole book, 5 numbers are devoted to the youth (nos. 60-64). The exhortation counts 4 times the term youth and 27 times the term "young", among which about 24 are related to the youth. This already shows, since then, less consideration for the young or the lack of a proper theology on the young, in the teaching magisterium of the Church. Added to this is the age rank of Cardinals. Though we are having more and more young bishops, it is not the case among the Cardinals, especially regarding African Cardinals.

In fact, after the consistory of 28th June 2018, the Church counts now 224 Cardinals among which 124 are electors and 100 non electors. Of these 124 electors,

³⁵⁴See Abdou Diouf, "Afrique, le Continent du Futur", in René Dumont, *L'Afrique Noire est Mal Partie* (Paris : Seuil, 2012), Préface, x.

16 are from Africa representing 13%. Fifty three from Europe representing 42%, 13 from North America representing about 10%, 16 from Asia representing about 13%, 22 from South, Central America and the Caribbean Islands representing 17%, and 4 from Oceania representing 3%³⁵⁵. None of the 124 Cardinal electors, is less than fifty. The youngest is Cardinal Dieudonné Zapalainga from Central Africa Republic, who is 51; followed by Konrad Krajewski (55 years of age), and Soane Patiti Paini Mafi from Tonga, Oceania, who is 57. The majority of them are above 70. This configuration does not really favour the youth in the Church, in terms of age, nor does it favour the ecclesiology of justice and communion, in terms of their apportionment per continent.

For an African Council

In fact, because of the Global South, that is, the global shift of the gravity's centre of Christianity from the Northern Hemisphere to the Southern Hemisphere,³⁵⁶ Africa is not only the crib of humanity, but now also the present and future of Christianity. In regard to this, there is a need today for the universal Church, for Rome (the seat of the Roman Catholic institutions) to invest in the Church in Africa. This demands to cast a deep look into African political, social and economic predicaments for the sake of the universal Church. In the context of neoliberal capitalism, with the flames and smokes of secularism, de-christianisation and atheism, somehow fostered and carried out under the wind of globalization, the Church's survival and revival lies in the Global South, mainly in Africa, Latino-America and some parts of Asia. It is especially for young people of Africa that the horizon and zenith of the Church is shining, so as to rekindle the world of Christianity and the Churches of old Christendom, in Europe and North America, gravely marked by the post-Christian age of secularisation.

On this, we address a new appeal not only for other significant African Synods, but especially for an African Council (Africa I Council), in order to respond to this sign of times in the universal Church; to listen to this new wind of Pentecost of which this global shift is about. This appeal for an African Council was already launched in the seventies by theologians like Eboussi-Boulaga³⁵⁷, supported by Pierre Meinrad Hebga, and some other theologians following the dynamic of reflections inaugurated under the impulse of Alioune Diop.³⁵⁸ This council, if accepted and held, will help us to re-organize the Church and the battle of survival and revival of the entire Church from the South. Pope Francis' papacy is under what he called: a poor Church for the poor, meaning a great new beginning of mission and

³⁵⁵ See "Composition actuelle du collège Cardinalice," https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Composition_actuelle_du_Coll%C3%A8ge_cardinalice (accessed September 10, 2018).

³⁵⁶ Cf. Jean-Marc Ela, *Repenser la Théologie Africaine* (Paris : Karthala, 2003), 164 ; *Ma Foi d'Africain* (Paris : Karthala, 2009), 148 ; Walter Kasper, *L'Église Catholique* (Paris: Cerf, "Cogitatio Fidei", 2014), 58.

³⁵⁷ Fabien Eboussi-Boulaga, *A Contretemps. L'enjeu de Dieu en Afrique* (Paris : Karthala, 1991), 71.

³⁵⁸ See Jean-Marc Ela, *Repenser la Théologie Africaine*, 392.

evangelisation, no more from the centre, but from the peripheries³⁵⁹ or from the “underworld”, the less privileged and the marginalized.

The world is turning the more and more its attention to Africa, often quoted as the continent of the future. It is one of the reasons why some rich countries’ economic programs are organized considering human and natural opportunities found in Africa. What they are doing at the political and economic levels are also possible at the ecclesiological and Christian ones. The universal Church should also be involved.

YOUTH, POLITICS, ECONOMY AND SOCIETY: SOME WORRISOME PROBLEMS

African Youth: inheritances of debts, poverty, and misery

Since the year of independences in the sixties, the political and economic mismanagement of the African nations’ affairs brought about discouragement of young people in political commitment, and a total despair in the future. Since the dawn of the years 2000, great are the numbers of African young people whose dream is to travel oversea, so as to flee from misery and poverty in their own nations and continent. Many of them landed in the Mediterranean Sea, where they died and were buried, as they could not cross. Between 2000 and 2015, about 23, 000 people died when trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe³⁶⁰. Among them were about 3, 000 African young people, exiling from hunger and misery. Indeed,

The economic situation of poverty has a particularly negative impact on the young. They embark on adult life with very little enthusiasm for a present riddled with frustrations and they look with still less hope to a future which to them seems sad and somber. That is why they tend to flee the neglected rural areas and gather in cities which in fact do not have much more to offer them. Many of them go to foreign countries where, as if in exile, they live a precarious existence as economic refugees. With the Synod Fathers I feel the duty to plead their cause: it is urgently necessary to find a solution for their impatience to take part in the life of the nation and of the Church.³⁶¹

More than twenty years after the first African Synod, this situation has not changed. It has become even worse, with civil wars, wars of minerals,³⁶² wars of petroleum, of political and economic interests like those of South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Côte d’Ivoire, not to mention more others. Besides the

³⁵⁹This was already the intuition of Jean-Marc Ela in the eighties and nineties. See Jean-Marc-Ela, *Ma Foi d’Africain*, 188-193 ; *Innovations sociales et renaissance de l’Afrique noire. Les défis “du monde d’en-bas”* (Paris : L’Harmattan, 1998).

³⁶⁰See Cardinal Woelki, “Allemagne: les Cloches Sonnent pour les Réfugiés Morts en Mer.”<https://fr.zenit.org/articles/allemaigne-les-cloches-sonnent-pour-les-refugies-morts-en-mer/>(accessed June 18, 2015).

³⁶¹John Paul II, Post-synodal Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* on the Church in Africa (Vatican City: Libreria Edictrice Vaticana, 2015), 115.

³⁶²Mgr François-Xavier Maroy, “Aidez l’Afrique à Combattre les Causes des Migrations”, in *La Documentation Catholique* no. 2528, Octobre 2017, 126.

secular trauma and the after-effects of the slave trade, imperialism, the apartheid, colonization and the post-colonial dictatorial regimes, there is a raise of new forms of political and social oppressions and enslavement all over Africa coming from the West and from within Africa itself. This is why the second African post-synodal exhortation stated: "Africa's memory is painfully scarred as a result of fratricidal conflicts between ethnic groups, the slave trade and colonization. Today too, the continent has to cope with rivalries and with new forms of enslavement and colonization."³⁶³

Worthy of note, the African youth of today and tomorrow has, as their main inheritances: sorrows, worries, wars and their inherent consequences of exile, constant transhumance, historical wounds and memory's wounds, debts, etc. African political rulers have eaten their daily bread and stolen that of the future generation. They have stolen and kept for themselves alone the public goods and resources of their people. They have handed on as legacy to their youth debts to pay for years.

Being Young in an Impoverished and Very Indebted Continent

Somewhere else, young African people are the prey for religious fanaticism like Boko Haram, Al Shabab, Daesh or ISIS where they are often recruited for terrorist and kamikaze missions. Part of the reasons for this can be listed out as: the unemployment, the lack of good education, social integration and fittings for self-development; malnutrition, the lack of health care and social services, the widespread deterioration in the standard of living,³⁶⁴ and some other settings for poverty and misery. Young African people are today also the easy prey for opportunism, careerism, and some cultic societies and cultic practices like homosexuality for which they are conditioned to get jobs and offices of little or great scopes.

There are still some other factors added; like: nepotism, non-respect of constitution, election rigging, corruption of politics and economy, neo-political and economic colonization of some western and now Asian countries. "Against the background of widespread poverty and inadequate medical services the Synod considered the tragic scourge of AIDS which is sowing suffering and death in many parts of Africa,"³⁶⁵ especially among young people. As such, one can have some concerns. What is the political, economic and social future of the young people, when some African leaders and governors were born in power, gets hold of the power and do not want to release offices for the youth? What is the political, economic and social future of the young people in Africa, when many of their corrupt elders have misused and embezzled public funds and national resources? How can they be youth in a Church living within so poor and very indebted countries?

³⁶³Benedict XVI, *Africae munus*, 9.

³⁶⁴See John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 114.

³⁶⁵John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 116.

With regard to this, *Ecclesia in Africa* stated some twenty three years ago: "In the present world order, the African nations are among the most disadvantaged."³⁶⁶ She is one of the most disadvantaged continent and yet the most rich continent in the world, in terms of natural resources. Thus, it is wrong to consider Africa as a very poor and indebted continent. Rather it is good to say a continent impoverished and indebted by some inhumane agents of human destruction. Due to the world's political, economic and social injustices, Africa is still like a feast's cake enriching other nations and continents to her own detriment. At the first African Synod, Africa was compared to the young man whipped, robbed, stripped and abandoned half dead (cf. Lk 10: 30-37).³⁶⁷ Some rich countries of the West with the complicity of some African leaders maliciously support and favour Africa's underdevelopment rather than her real development.

In Africa many youth are not scholarised. Those who went to school and even graduated are unemployed. Those who are employed are not paid accordingly. It was against this background that the second African Synod for Bishops stressed on the questions of justice, reconciliation and peace. For the future of the young generation is sacrificed at the altar of injustices, wars, dictatorship, corruption, theft, embezzlement and similar predicaments. Hence, there is a need for a just order in African Nations, and between Africa and western Nations concerning the politics, economic relationships and social affairs.

"In the first place it involves working for improved socio-political relations among nations, ensuring greater justice and dignity for those countries."³⁶⁸ Secondly, it involves a new generation of African leaders arising from the youth with a new way of politicizing, with a focus stretched on the pursuit of common good, social justice, equity, human dignity and integral human development. In this regard, we propose education and conversion of mind and life; a proper theology of the polis and of citizenship as one of the ways out of these challenges. Today, the hope and the restoration of hope for the future of this continent lies mainly on the African youth, if only they are well oriented, trained and empowered to carry out their responsibilities regarding challenges for which they are called to accept.

YOUTH: THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

The Church of a Young Man: Christ

At the start of what would become the Church was a baby named Jesus, Emmanuel, Son of God and Son of man, born for the world from a young Virgin called Mary (cf. Lk 1:26; Ga 4:4). The Baby-Son-of-God and Son-of-Man grew up. He established the Church (cf. Mt 16: 16), loved her and gave himself for her as a spouse to his beloved (cf. Ep 5: 23-30). Jesus was about thirty when He started his ministry (cf. Lk. 3:23). Companions He chose to help out his mission were also mostly young, many of them still living with their parents (cf. Mk 1: 19-20; Mt 4: 21-22; Mt 20:20).

³⁶⁶John-Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 114.

³⁶⁷See John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 41.

³⁶⁸John-Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 114.

Being young, the years of his ministry were also very short: three years organized around three Jewish Pasch (cf. Jn 2: 13; 6:4; 12: 1; 19: 28, 31). With this at hand, it is neither pretentious nor fallacious to state that the Church was founded by a young man of about 30-33 years old, who loved her and died young because of her. Being a young founder of the Church and to later on die for her, is very significant to the youth of today, in terms of identification with the Church and commitment to her mission. The Church belongs to a young man, the eternally young man,³⁶⁹ Christ, just as young people belong to Christ.

In this sense, Christ's exhortation and command that we should let the children come to Him (cf. Lk 18: 16) also connotes that we should allow the youth to come to Him. The fact that "young people make up the majority of Africa's population"³⁷⁰ is, therefore, an important opportunity to seize, in terms of theology and ecclesiology of the youth, in the universal Church. "This youthfulness is a gift and a treasure from God for which the whole Church is grateful to the Lord of life. Young people should be loved, esteemed and respected."³⁷¹

We are accustomed with the saying that the youth are the future of the world and the society. In claiming this, it is as if, we are excluding and depriving them from the present. Yet they also belong to the present. Young people are not only the future of the Church and of the world. They are the present of the Church and of the world, insofar as the future starts with the present. "The Church in Africa knows well that youth are not only the present but above all the future of humanity."³⁷²

Ecclesiology of the Youth and the Youth in Ecclesiology

Through the youth of the Church, the Church is, though old, forever young. If not for the youth, the Church would never have had any hope in history. With her youth, the Church is old or older regarding her past, yet like a baby in a crib, a young person regarding her present and future. Through and with her youth, the Church has a vocation of constant renewal. A "renewal within tradition"³⁷³, that is, a renewal of continuity in the tradition she carries along with her.³⁷⁴ Just like a tree which constantly renews its leaves and rejuvenates itself through them, so does the Church with her young people.

Our duty is to awake in young people the image of a Church that ensures, and shows them the way which gives meaning to their lives. The future of the Church and of Christianity should be prepared with the youth, insofar as they are to the Church like the spring's bud to the trees. They constitute the new leaves and leaven for the mission and growth of the Church in the world. Thus, we should not

³⁶⁹See Paul VI, "Message aux Jeunes," in *Vatican II: Les Seize Documents conciliaires*, (Montréal/Paris: Fides, 1966), 653.

³⁷⁰ Benedict XVI, *Africae munus*, 60.

³⁷¹ Benedict XVI, *Africae munus*, 60.

³⁷² John-Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 93.

³⁷³ Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering, *Vatican II. Renewal Within Tradition* (Oxford: University Press, 2008).

³⁷⁴ Benedict XVI, "A Proper Hermeneutic for the Second Vatican Council," in Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering, *Vatican II. Renewal Within Tradition*, ix-xv.

put them aside from the decision making of the Church as we usually do. They should be part of the decision making of the Church at the lower and higher level, in their parishes and in their dioceses, in diocesan curia just as in the Roman curia. Thus, it is not an exaggeration to call that Rome should create a sacred congregation for the youth of the Church with a young cardinal as prefect. If it is impossible to have an entire congregation fully dedicated to the youth, we should at least create a pontifical council for youth.

The youth of the Church are in view to rejuvenate her and her institutions. That is why we speak of the ecclesiology of the youth and the youth in ecclesiology. For if the youth is the future of the Church, the Church also is the future of the youth because of her enduring patrimony; and because of Christ her Head, who "is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Heb 13:8).

PATRIMONY, TRANSMISSION AND RECEPTION: FROM ONE AGE TO ANOTHER

Patrimony and Transmission

The Church's Crypt: The past of the Church is not obsolete or out of use. The Church's crypt contains an enduring treasury for an everlasting age, because Christ is an ever ancient, an ever new and an eternal treasury in the Patrimony of the Church He transmitted to the Apostles. This treasury has been handed on through ages. That is why, at the inaugural Mass of his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI called upon the youth to have the courage of accepting Christ and to give up everything to Christ. He said: "Dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life."³⁷⁵ Christ gives everything, because He Himself is everything good a human being can need and long for; He gave all because He is all.

With this regard, rejuvenate the Church does not mean changing or destroying her root and source. The leaves rejuvenate a tree without cutting off its roots. Thus, what we need, is to have the wisdom of the past, the realism of the present and the intelligence for the future. In short, being the present and the future of the Church means renewal within tradition, renewal in continuity and permanence of the Source. It is an arm against the spirit of *tabularasa* of modernity and of the denial of all that was before hand.

In fact, modern people have the temptation to start everything fresh, as if the world just began with them. Yet, according to Alfred de Musset, we came and were born later in a so old world.³⁷⁶ In other words, the Church did not begin with us and shall not cease after us either. She has a very long and furnished *curriculumvitae* (life's profile) throughout the ages and human history. She has an everlasting history, which can trace back to God Himself through Christ, her alpha and omega, her beginning and ending (cf. Rev 1: 8; 21:6; 22:13). The present youth of the Church

³⁷⁵ Benedict XVI, *Africae munus*, 64.

³⁷⁶See Alfred de Musset, "Rolla", in *Poésies Nouvelles* (Paris : Charpentier, 1857).

have to write their own history after the footsteps of all the saints of the Church counted in thousands of thousands. Thus, being young in the Church does not mean ignoring the root and source of the Church; the root and source we all come from as Christians.

However, young people cannot transmit what they do not receive, nor forward very well what they have not been well forwarded. That is why there should be an intergenerational policy, both in the Church and in society. Some African countries and some African dioceses fall into crises after the passing away of their heads of state or the retirements of their bishops respectively, just because the succession was not well prepared.

As noted by Ela, "the future belongs to those who shall know to hand on to the present generations the reasons to live and to hope."³⁷⁷ The youth of the Church can properly effect this only with a life of witnesses and witnessing of Christ's life and Gospel, as the Saints did. Christ, the Owner and Founder of the Church, was very young. He was and is "the companion and friend of youth."³⁷⁸ Following and imitating Him in His apostolic life and holiness, young people can make changes and transformations in the Church and the world. That will be the youth's own way to renew and refresh the Church from within.

With regard to this, the recent papal exhortation is calling to holiness as way of happiness and freedom.³⁷⁹ Preaching the Gospel in its radicality, today, means to join holiness to our words. Holiness has authority and power in the preaching and transmitting process. We cannot be a preaching men and women of God if we are not ready to sign up our preaching with holiness. Being ready for holiness, in today's context of terrorism and Christian persecution, also means to face and suffer martyrdom, individualism, secularism, indifference, relativism, refusal to social commitment and some other plagues mutilating the heart of the Gospel proclaimed.³⁸⁰

As the Church, we cannot be, or claim to be, cantors of tradition and transmission, but being absent from the web's world of digital communication and information. Young people are a great opportunity to mark the Church's presence in this new world's media of digital technology, which constitute another means for transmission and education.

AN INTEGRAL HUMAN EDUCATION OF THE YOUTH

To Prepare the Present and Future: Teaching the Youth

In the address to the youth at the closing of Vatican II Council, it was said:

It is you who are to receive the torch from the hands of your elders and to live in the world at the period of the most gigantic transformations ever realized in its history. It is you who, receiving the best of the example of the teaching of your

³⁷⁷ Jean-Marc Ela, *Ma foi d'Africain*, 194.

³⁷⁸ Paul VI, "Message aux Jeunes," 654.

³⁷⁹ Francis, *Gaudete exsultate* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2018), 100-102, 108.

³⁸⁰ Francis, *Gaudete exsultate*, chapter three.

parents and your teachers, are to form the society of tomorrow. You will either save yourselves or you will perish with it.³⁸¹

Preparing the present and future of the Church means teaching the Youth. If we teach the youth today, we are preparing their future and ours. We are preparing the future of the Church. Even when they are still delinquent and prodigal, we still need to implore God's mercy upon them and strive for their education. They are hardened of heart and wasteful today, just as tomorrow they might become blessed heralds of the Gospel and heroes Church.

The question of education was boldly highlighted in the two African synods. Education is the key to the present and future of each human institution and society. If you teach your child, s/he will teach the future. But if he or she remains uneducated, similarly his/her future too will remain uneducated. He or she will make the future analphabetic.

In a great number, the poor of the future will mostly be counted among those who did not go to school, to the true school of integral humanism. Many of them are found in Africa. Yet, it is through education that we hand over patrimony received. Hence, there is a link between education and transmission, education and tradition. In other words, without the education of young people, the Church cannot pass on the treasure of revelation received from Christ to the coming generation.

To succeed in this, "young people need witnesses and teachers who can walk with them, teaching them to love the Gospel and to share it, especially with their peers, and thus to become authentic and credible messengers."³⁸²Hence, the famous statement of blessed Paul VI is still current. "Modern man [or woman] listens more willingly to witnesses than to the teachers, and if he [or she] does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."³⁸³

Catholic schools and education should be at the fore-front of education as proposed by *Ecclesia in Africa*.³⁸⁴Many of the first African leaders were trained by the missionaries. In training them, missionaries did not only transmit intellectual and moral education, but also that of spirituality and theology, a certain integral human formation. But today, missionary schools are among the most expensive schools in Africa. The poor cannot afford tuition in Catholic schools today, whether at the primary, secondary or higher levels. If, for example, the very first batches of African leaders freely benefited from Catholic education in the sixties and seventies, today, with neoliberal capitalism, it becomes difficult, especially for the Catholic schools, to train for free as it was formerly. The Church is challenged by a growing materialistic society, with its dictatorship of money that makes the cost and standard of life beyond the reach of the poor. Catholic schools of or for charity become less and less possible, and the poor are the first victims.

³⁸¹ Paul VI, "Message aux Jeunes," 653.

³⁸² Benedict XVI, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* on the Word of God (Vatican City: Libreria Edictrice Vaticana, 2010), 104; and *Africae munus*, 61.

³⁸³ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* on the Evangelisation (Vatican City: Libreria Edictrice Vaticana, 1975), 41.

³⁸⁴See John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 102.

An Integral Human Education of the Youth

The education of the youth has to be holistic and integral. It should be considered according to a wholly human dimension. It should be an integral human education bringing together the intellectual, moral, technical, economic, social and spiritual aspects of education. In fact, the youth of today are living in a cosmopolitical environment. The Nations of this global world are more and more interdependent. The destinies and problems, concerns and joys of different people are also interconnected.³⁸⁵

In this regard, the youth should be taught human ecology, in which the dignity of the human person is rediscovered and valued in the image of God. They should be taught interreligious and ecumenical dialogue. They are called to the culture of political, religious and cultural differences, especially within the context of tribal and ethnic groups which, sometimes, bring about tribal and ethnic violence in some parts of Africa. For about three decades now, there has been an escalating growth of wars and violence. As such one may call the youth of these decades the generation of war and terrorism. But the culture of diversity and complementarity, in a global and multipolar world, might arm them against religious intolerance, fanaticism, and terrorism, not without shaping in them the spirit of human pacific coexistence. In fact, given the prevalence of violence and barbarity of their time, some young people praise more a warrior's victor than a peace-doer. Therefore,

The *pastoral care of youth* must clearly be a part of the overall pastoral plan of Dioceses and parishes, so that young people will be enabled to discover very early on the value of the gift of self, an essential means for the person to reach maturity. In this regard, the celebration of World Youth Day is a privileged instrument for the pastoral care of youth, which favours their formation through prayer, study and reflection.³⁸⁶

In his "seven necessary wisdoms for educating the future", Edgar Morin speaks of teaching the human condition which is complex, multiplex or multidimensional.³⁸⁷ For him, integral human education also underlines the question of teaching human earthly identity,³⁸⁸ which demands to take into consideration the question and planetary destiny of the human being, so that it should have a global and planetary consciousness. Human earthly citizenship signifies to study and comprehend humanity as planetary destiny.³⁸⁹ Indeed, ecological and planetary crises gush forth from a certain lack of sufficient understanding of the human global and earthly identity.

The youth of today is or has to be concerned with the questions of climate change and ecological challenges. It is to echo this that Pope Francis speaks of "ecological education and spirituality."³⁹⁰ This education has in view an alliance or

³⁸⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 114.

³⁸⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 93.

³⁸⁷ See Edgar Morin, *Sept Savoirs Nécessaires Pour l'Éducation du Futur* (Paris: Unesco, 1999), chapter 3, in <http://www.agora21.org/unesco/7savoirs> (accessed March 18, 2018).

³⁸⁸ Morin, *Sept Savoirs*, chapitre 4.

³⁸⁹ Morin, *Sept Savoirs*, chapitre 7.

³⁹⁰ Francis, *Laudato si*, chapter six, 202-246.

connectivity between humanity and natural environment.³⁹¹This earth is humanity's first fatherland or motherland. It is part of human condition, because of what it provides. Human global and planetary consciousness would help us to avoid some predicaments related to racism, ethnicism, xenophobia, contempt, hatred and many other discriminatory acts in human relations and interrelationship.³⁹² What is at the root of these plagues is human incomprehension. So, in fostering and teaching human mutual comprehension, humanity as body would live and trek towards a true pacific coexistence.

Rediscovering and Teaching African History, Humanities and Antiquities

As much as possible, African humanities and antiquities should be rediscovered and taught to young African people, so as to build and boost African and national patriotism; to help them love and value their numerous and rich cultures.³⁹³ Gustavo Gutiérrez calls it a liberation by faith, in order to drink from one's well.³⁹⁴ In fact, it is a holistic liberation, which will rise up from a deep African conscientiousness intake or undertaking, that our future and destiny is not in the past, present, values and culture of other people,³⁹⁵ no matter how beautiful and better they might be.

Apart from the poor political, social and economic contexts in Africa, the tragic flux of African youth to Europe and for ventures of fortune and hazard, all over the world, are also due to cultural alienation and a certain lack of African self-esteem. *Ecclesia in Africa* has already made an appeal in that direction to the youth: "Dear young people, the Synod asks you to take in hand the development of your countries, to love the culture of your people, and to work for its renewal with fidelity to your cultural heritage, through a sharpening of your scientific and technical expertise, and above all through the witness of your Christianity."³⁹⁶

³⁹¹ Cf. Francis, *Laudato si*, 209-215.

³⁹² See Morin, *Sept Savoirs*, chapitre 6.

³⁹³ Read on this Jean-Philippe Omotunde, *Manuel d'Études des Humanités Africaines*, volume 1 (Paris : Menaibuc, 2007).

³⁹⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *La Libération par la Foi. Boire à son Propre Puits*, 2^{ème} édition (Paris : Cerf, 1988), 22.

³⁹⁵ Fabien Eboussi-Boulaga, *A Contretemps*, 13.

³⁹⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 115.

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CONCLUSION

The Church is the Church of the youth. She belongs to them as their mother, as the house for the Kingdom of God in which young men and maidens together, old men and women, children are called to praise and worship (cf. Ps 148:12). The youth are the youth of the Church. They belong to the Church as her children, the bud for her present and future. The Church cannot survive without the youth, nor the youth without the Church.

To build a Church with the youth means to look into some worrisome problems at political, economic and social levels, such as corruption, bad governance, dictatorship, war, social justice, unemployment, etc. African leaders should not transform the political office as their sick bed and grave, to the detriment of the young generation. This is why there is a need for justice, in politics, economy and society; and the politics, the economy and society of justice with common good, human dignity and human divine vocation as its focal point.

Finally, for youth to be the present and future of the Church and of the world, integral human education should be fostered and implemented in the formation of the youth. This presupposes rediscovering and teaching African history, humanities and antiquities. As such, if the youth is the present and the future of the Church, the Church also is the present and the future of the youth.

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CONSECRATED LIFE AND FORMATION MATTERS

**THE PROCESS OF SCREENING, SELECTION AND ADMISSION
OF CANDIDATES FOR RELIGIOUS LIFE AND THE PRIESTHOOD**

(Part 1)

Sr. Josephine Enenmo, OLA³⁹⁷

ABSTRACT

Whereas, in certain parts of the world, vocation directors travel up and down all year and are happy to find a few candidates who show interest in exploring religious or priestly life, vocation directors in Nigeria do not seem to have to 'dig too deep' to find candidates. This essay shares the author's years of experience in the formation of candidates especially the process of discernment of vocations and admission into consecrated life in Nigeria. It uses what is now known as the 'Iperu model' to describe a process of interviewing candidates which would be of benefit not only to trained formators and superiors, but also to people coming into the formation ministry for the first time. The author concludes that it is important to put into practice a prudent selection process that will foster both the individual candidate's growth and the good of the Church.

INTRODUCTION

I wish to express my gratitude to the editor of the *Voyage* for inviting me to write this article at this moment of my transition from the Institute for Formators, Du, Plateau State to another mission. This affords me the opportunity to reflect on my experience of formation. I must begin by acknowledging the growth that has taken place in formation ministry in Nigeria. Before the founding of the Institute for Formators, many priests and religious were trained outside the shores of Nigeria for formation. Thanks to the vision of the Nigeria Conference of Women Religious

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(NCWR), the Institute was founded in 1990 to train formators locally. This has helped religious Institutes in Nigeria to improve on their method of forming candidates especially for religious life. I write this article as a person who has been involved in the various stages of initial formation since 1996. In 1997, Divine Providence placed me in a very vital position to teach some courses in human development to novices in the inter-novitiate programme at the Dominican Priory in Ibadan. I have also been invited to be a member of the interview panel not only of my religious community but also of other religious institutes and societies of apostolic life in Nigeria. In recent years, I have been invited to direct workshops alongside other formators on many aspects of formation. Among these are the following: the dynamics of priestly formation; the process of interview and/or evaluation of candidates as well as evaluating formation programmes. My experience during these long years of being involved in formation ministry has immensely helped in my personal growth, for my religious community as well as for the candidates I have come in contact with.

The formation ministry is an enriching ministry. Using the image of a porter or the image of a palm oil miller in our Nigerian context, one realizes that one cannot be a porter or an oil miller without one's hands being soiled by clay or by oil. Consequently, my experience of being a formator for over twenty four years has concretely taught me that being a formator is also being in the process of formation. I have grown in many ways as a result of this ministry. I must admit that candidates have in various ways experienced my strengths and my weaknesses and seen me grow through these. The only way candidates can acquire and internalize the values we propose to them is, if formators model them clearly and consistently. Formators are not super humans and should not pretend to be by any means. Having been involved in the formation of formators for the past seven years and more, I have been further enriched by the sharing of priests and religious on their process of accompanying candidates in their various formation programme. Therefore, this write-up is a combination of ideas from all these multiple experiences.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

Nigeria today, like many other African countries, is marked by poverty, religious and ethnic conflicts, violence, insecurity and human trafficking. The environment is ravaged for the sake of cooperate/personal profit, leaving more and more people without job or means of livelihood. Coming along with information and communication technology is the alluring power of internet pornography. There are parents who have abdicated their responsibility of raising their children, outsourcing such responsibility to nannies, and many preachers have taken to prosperity gospel. Integrity and our village norms, including respect and traditional values are fading away. One can go on and on. It is from this environment that God continues to call many young people to follow him in the priestly or religious life, and this gives us a sense that 'all is well with the Church in Nigeria', a sense of vocation boom.

The scenario described above makes it increasingly obligatory to have experienced and well trained formators to accompany candidates. The current context of the situation of life of the candidates for priestly and religious vocations raises some challenges for the Church as well as for religious Institutes and dioceses especially in the area of discernment of vocation and formation. It is important to think carefully about admitting into formation programmes individuals who have unresolved psychological issues hence the need for a carefully thought out selection process. As one welcomes a candidate into a formation programme, it is important to offer him/her a context that will facilitate the integral human development of his/her personality in view of the priesthood or religious life. It seems important that we begin with the period of aspirancy.

ASPIRANCY

The journey of a religious vocation begins when a person expresses some interest in religious or priestly life. Many authors have described this as a "come and see period" which was Jesus' invitation to his apostle at their first encounter with him (cf. Jn. 1: 38-39). This desire to come and see was beautifully exemplified in an encounter with a young woman. At the celebration of the feast of Our Lady of Apostles i.e. Saturday before Pentecost, a young woman walked up to the sister sitting beside me and said "Sister, I want to come with you."

The sister, thinking that she was asking for a ride said "Where do you want us to drop you?"

The young woman responded, "I want to be a sister."

I listened very attentively to this conversation because I had earlier challenged three sisters of different congregations on their method of accompanying aspirants. From these discussions I discovered that once a candidate indicates interest in religious life, she is rushed into the formation programme with little or no room given for reflection, accompaniment and discernment. The task of vocational discernment is easy to set aside or do poorly, and today there are enormous pressures against doing it well either because there are fewer candidates applying to join us or because of the need for more hands for the apostolate. We seem eager to accept these candidates into the religious life or the priesthood without giving them the necessary assistance to discern, as far as possible the will of God.

An individual begins a vocational journey when s/he expresses some interest in religious or priestly life. In most Congregations/Dioceses, some people are entrusted with the task of accompanying prospective candidates. Their task is to journey with this candidate to enable him or her discover the will of God. No matter the richness of the formation programme we put in place, the kind of persons we select is very important. We are reminded "the harvest is great but the laborers are few. Pray the master of the harvest to send laborers into the harvest" (Lk. 10: 2; Mt. 9: 37-38). Therefore, we should not be in a hurry to admit candidates without spending some time in prayer and without proper accompaniment. Accompaniment of the youth in their search for a vocation is a slow process and the duration varies

from one person to the other. The need for patience and respect of the personal journey of the individual is vital.

In most religious institutes and congregations, some people are entrusted with the task of accompanying prospective candidates in the process of discernment. Their task is to journey with the prospective candidates to enable them discover the call of God. But how do we engage in this process? Various methods have been adopted by many congregations. However, there is need to reflect a little more deeply on why we adopt some of the strategies used. We need to question ourselves in order to know for whose benefits these models are adopted – are they adopted for the benefit of the candidate or of the Congregation or of both? To begin this reflection, three models of aspirancy that has been adopted by some congregations of women religious in Nigeria will be discussed.

First to be considered is a one-year non-residential aspirancy model. Following this model, the prospective candidate is advised to aspire for at least one year before she joins the congregation. During this period, she is encouraged to get to know this particular congregation as well as other congregations, she visits the community frequently, is invited for live-in experience, and when she is ready, she is invited for a final selection interview.

This model gives the candidate the advantage of needed space to explore and then make up her mind whether or not she wishes to become a religious, and then to decide which congregation to join. Its disadvantage, if it can be called a disadvantage, is in the fact that the candidate may find her vocation elsewhere and may not return to the initial congregation.

The second model is one in which the prospective candidate is given employment in one of the apostolates of the congregation. She is provided accommodation (where possible in the convent or in a nearby house), and receives a wage for her work. She is invited to share in some parts of the life of the community, for example, prayer, celebrations, etc. and when she is ready she is invited for an interview. Its advantage is that the candidate gets to know the congregation from a close range and earns her living as she discerns her vocation. Its disadvantage, again if it can be so described, is that she might experience the vulnerability of the sisters and might decide not to join them.

Third model is one of residential aspirancy. The candidate, as soon as she indicates her interest, is invited to the community for a live-in period of at least one month. Then she is told to go back home and to prepare for a three-month experience. During the three months, aspirants are given lectures on religious life, the history of the institute etc., and are involved in the apostolate of the congregation. At the end of the three months the candidates are interviewed and given a prospectus to begin a one-year residential aspirancy. The advantage is that candidates are closely observed and sufficient time is given, hopefully, to discern the choice of religious life on both sides. Its disadvantage is that candidates run the risk of getting too involved in the apostolate – baking, sowing, farming etc. A young woman complained about a congregation thus: “all we do is sew, sew and sew this is not what I want. I have been in the programme for five months and I am not satisfied.” Surely there is more to religious life than the apostolate!

Certain questions come to mind: what is the purpose of this one-year residential period of aspirancy? The fear that if the candidate is allowed to come, see and then go or step back she may not return could be one of the reasons for getting an aspirant to make a commitment to join the congregation so quickly. Yet, this period to come, see and decide if she wants to spend another month or months is an essential aspect of the discernment process. What happens if the candidate does not continue with the congregation after spending the year with the congregation? Would she be considered by other congregations as one who has been admitted into religious life previously? In some cases this aspirant is given a uniform to indicate that she belongs to a particular group. What about helping her to settle back into the society from which she came?

The Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes state that aspirancy is a time of transition from family life to community life. It is a time in which the candidate is helped to value her previous life experiences and is gradually introduced to the Institute. Candidates should be made to understand that those who are interested in religious life have not already become members of the institute.³⁹⁸ Since the modality of growth and response to the call is different from person to person and following the directive quoted above, one could argue that the second model in which the prospective candidate is given employment in one of the apostolates of the congregation but given the space to live separately from the community so as to be free to visit the community when she wants is more profitable for discernment on both sides. This model could be further developed according to the needs of the candidate and/or the congregation. In some cases the period could be extended beyond the one year proposed. For example, the candidate could be given the opportunity to repeat her West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE) or be given further accompaniment/counseling as might be considered necessary as she continues working in the establishment.

Whichever method of aspirancy is adopted, experience has shown that it is very important to visit the candidate in his/her home setting. Meeting the youth where they live and work and also inviting them to spend specific periods in a community must be seen as essential aspects of the period of aspirancy. Usually these would afford an opportunity for mutual acquaintance between the interested youth and the community before envisaging admission into the postulancy. All these occasions must be centered on personal accompaniment, which is an indispensable tool for discernment. Each congregation has her own criteria for discernment. Taking these criteria into account is indispensable for all those who, directly or indirectly, have a role to play in the vocation ministry.

During the period of aspirancy, which can last from a few months to some years, a number of facts need to be ascertained about the individual's life so as to have a sense of who s/he is and to get a sense of his/her vocational call. This is the beginning of the discernment process and it is mutual. You want to help the candidate explore his/her vocation and his/her suitability for your particular way of life and the dynamics that underlie his/her inspiration. In brief, the crucial question

³⁹⁸*Directives on Formation* n 44

has been, is this candidate capable of freely saying yes – to the life s/he wants to live? At some point during the aspirancy, some people or one person has to take responsibility to ascertain whether the candidate is ready to begin the process of formation. The seriousness of this exercise cannot be over-emphasized – the candidate we admit today is the priest/religious of tomorrow. *Renovationis Causam* states that

Most of the difficulties encountered today in the formation of novices are usually due to the fact that when they were admitted they did not have the required maturity. It certainly is not required that a candidate for the religious life be able to assume all of the obligations of the religious life immediately, but he or she should be found capable of doing so progressively.³⁹⁹

The *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes* suggests that “the possibility of making such a judgment justifies the time and means employed in reaching it”⁴⁰⁰ therefore admission should be delayed whenever that seems a better option. In our rush for candidates we sometimes overlook or forget this important aspect.

SELECTION OF CANDIDATES

The growing diversity in the range of candidates coming forward to prepare for priestly/religious life demands a more detailed method of screening to enable proper discernment. To have a clear focus, as a team, there is need to have a clear picture of the kind of candidates we are looking for. How do we identify a candidate that is suitable for the priesthood or for religious life as lived by this congregation? This question, I suppose is at the heart of many formation teams. Yet, a clear, direct answer is rarely, if ever given. Any adequate answer must be based on criteria that are relevant, concrete, realistic, and observable. I guess that most selection teams are looking for indications that candidates are positively choosing the priesthood/religious life and not just expressing the desire to be a priest/religious to avoid the challenges of life out there. Formators are looking for candidates that have the capacity to develop their talents and personality in a healthy manner during their period of formation. That they have the potential to benefit from relatively long period of formation rather than for ready-made candidates for ordination; for candidates who show they can live celibate lives. Though difficult to assess, we are seeking candidates who have reached a certain level of maturity in various aspects of life. This can be ascertained from observing the candidate’s behavior with his/her colleagues and listening to him/her as s/he narrates his/her life story. However, because this area is delicate and important, it is also essential that candidates undergo psychological assessment. This should be done separately from the selection interview.

Unfortunately, the term “psychological assessment” has become a threat to many candidates and formators, and some superiors are accused of using it to threaten candidates during their period of initial formation. One candidate believed she was sent for psychological assessment because she challenged the formator.

³⁹⁹Cf. *Renovationis Causam*, 4

⁴⁰⁰*Directives on Formation*, 42

Another said he was told that the priest who carried out the psychological assessment said he had no vocation and so recommended that he should be sent away. Psychological assessment should not be seen solely in terms of “screening out unsuitable candidates”. It has much to contribute to establishing the most fruitful ways of meeting the candidate’s needs and developing his/her potential. Having worked with some candidates after they received the result of their assessments, I can say that when they are properly prepared for the assessment and when they accept the feedback, they are able to own up their giftedness and begin to work on their weaknesses. In this sense, psychological assessment provides useful information so that the time and resources spent on the formation of a candidate can be more specific and effective.

As we prepare candidates for psychological assessment it is important to explain to the candidate, in clear language, the purpose of psychological assessment to reduce tension as well as enlighten him/her on its benefit for personal growth and vocational discernment. The candidate’s consent must be obtained in an explicitly clear manner. It is also important that s/he signs a consent form giving his/her permission for release of information. Those who are to have access to the report should be specified in the form.

THE PROCESS OF INTERVIEWING A CANDIDATE

Use of questionnaire for interview

Many congregations give the candidate a questionnaire to complete before the oral interview. On this form could be found a certain amount of family data – parents, number in the family, brothers/sisters, position in the family, who they live with – health records, studies etc.

Medical test/report

Many Congregations insist that prospective candidates submit a medical report from a hospital of their choice to the vocation director. While this is praise worthy, some candidates have submitted medical reports that have not been found credible. Experience has shown that it is advisable to carry out medical test in a reputable hospital chosen by the Congregation while the candidates are in the community for the final interview. Candidates should be told what medical tests would be carried out and then they should be asked to sign an informed consent form for same – giving permission to the congregation to carry out named tests and receive the report for these. The outcome of the test should be shared with the candidate. In my opinion, although this could be capital intensive, the Congregation should pay for the test.

It is essential that members of the interview team take the needed time before the oral interview, to study the results of the medical test and the responses to the questions so as to ascertain the accuracy of information given.

I would like to discuss briefly four methods of interviewing candidates.

1. A team of six sits round with the candidate in the middle and they interview him/her one after the other. This can be quite intimidating.

2. A candidate goes from one room to the other to be interviewed by three different persons. While this may not be as intimidating as the first method, it may not give the interviewers time to discuss common concerns.

3. A team of three in a single session. This was my experience at the beginning of my formation ministry. I must say that emphasis was laid on gathering data. The session ended with a final judgment about the suitability of the candidate. While this provided a quick process of interviewing many candidates, the process placed the team under considerable pressure to make a decision about the suitability of candidates and gave little room for further discussion or clarification. The result was not satisfactory.

4. A team of three interviews the candidate in three distinct sessions with each session having a definite focus of discernment. This method is commonly referred to as 'the Iperu model'. I have practiced this model since 1998 and I have found it very useful. Following the first interview, there is the opportunity in the second and third sessions to explore certain points that emerged earlier, and to seek further clarification on facts not sufficiently investigated in the previous session. This greatly enhances the discernment process so as to arrive at a more mature decision. Furthermore, the possibility of meeting the team again gives the candidate the opportunity to gradually get used to the interview. Considering that some congregations have many applicants, this method of interviewing candidates might seem impossible as it will take a long time to meet all the candidates. Perhaps, where the group is large and the interviewing team is large enough, instead of six people sitting together in one setting to interview a candidate, the team could be divided into two to carry out this responsibility with each team of three interviewing the same candidates for the three sessions to achieve the same objectives. Below is my experience of using this method for interview.

First interview

The first interview is usually a brief session lasting between ten and fifteen minutes. To put the candidate at ease, it begins with an introduction of members of the team and a few questions to get the conversation flowing. Confidentiality is assured, and the candidate is asked to briefly say something about the following:

1. Family background – where s/he comes from, occupation of parents, brothers, sisters, stable or moving from place to place. Who has s/he lived with?

2. Religious background – when was s/he baptized, received Holy Communion, confirmation, Church attendance, involvement in church activities etc.

3. Educational background – examination results, how many times before s/he got the present result. For example, it was observed that a candidate, 18 years

of age, sat for the secondary school certificate examination in two states. When she was asked why, she gave no convincing reason. The interviewers kept this information in mind as the interview progressed.

4. Life after school—what has s/he been doing since s/he left school? Has s/he held any paid job? What has s/he been doing with the money earned? Are there any lengthy periods unaccounted for?

5. Health—does the candidate have any health problems? What sicknesses has s/he had?

Conclusion and assessment – the candidate is told that s/he will be called again for two more times and that the interview will follow the same heading and format. The interview team discusses general impression of the candidate, and each member of the panel makes his/her opinion known as regards the suitability or otherwise of the candidate at this point.

Second interview

This is the main interview session and lasts for about an hour. Here, a long interview is better than a short one as this gives the team the opportunity to confirm and build upon findings of the previous session as well as get other fresh details of the candidate. It continues the conversation that began in the first session. The dialogue flows from one aspect of life to the other in the following order:

1. Family background—the candidate's early life, interpersonal relationship with parents and siblings, who in the family s/he was closest to and why. In a few words how would s/he sum up his/her childhood?

2. Educational background – how could s/he describe primary school experience? What happy and sad memories has s/he of those days? Was secondary education in a mixed or single-sex school? What was the happiest or saddest memory of secondary school? Was s/he ever punished? Did s/he change School? If so, why? Was there any involvement with a group (cultism)? Were there friends at school?

The candidate discussed above, who wrote secondary school certificate examination in another state, was again asked about her choice of place for the examination. She insisted that she went to that state because her friend was there. This took a good part of the time for the second interview and, noting that she was not willing to say more, the interview progressed.

3. Occupational/work history—has the candidate shown some ability to commit self? Is s/he reliable? Has s/he the ability to manage relationship, to manage conflict with authority? Is there an awareness of what s/he contributes to conflict? Again the candidate discussed above blamed others for the conflicts that she experienced in life.

4. Relationships—the candidate is encouraged to talk about relationship with both sexes. The candidate should be allowed to freely talk about his/her experiences. How close has the candidate been in relationship with the complementary sex? What did s/he learn from that experience? Has a person of the same sex ever tried to relate with him/her in a sexual way? What does s/he think

about celibacy? Would s/he be willing to remain celibate? If yes, what makes her/him think so?

This is a very delicate area and we must not shy away from exploring this aspect of life. Therefore we must thread delicately on this holy ground and not be intrusive asking questions about details that are not relevant. Experience has shown that it is beneficial to talk about sexuality with the candidate during interviews just as we ask questions about family, education, work etc. To buttress this point, I wish to share an experience of meeting a deacon that I was opportune to interview before his admission into the seminary. He said to me, 'Sister, you interviewed me a few years ago'. I was unsure what his next comments would be so I just nodded. He went on to say that because he talked about his experiences and was accepted for formation he had nothing to hide rather he was able to continue exploring and working through these experiences during accompaniment. He was grateful to have been able to share all before he was given the admission. Even if the candidate is found unsuitable for religious or priestly life, such sharing could be a source of healing for the person concerned if handled properly. Furthermore, certain help could also be offered to the candidate, for example, counseling where necessary.

5. Personality – It is a matter of knowing: who is this person before me for interview? What are his/her strengths and weakness? What big decisions has s/he made so far? How did s/he make them? What was his/her greatest crisis? How did s/he handle it? What does s/he usually do when angry? Has there been any significant trauma or loss? How did s/he react or manage? What does s/he do when s/he does not have to do anything? Is this person able to relax? What does s/he want from life? What things are most important in his/her life?

Team assessment after the second interview – the panel is to ascertain if there is consistency in the candidate's answers, and verify his/her level of understanding as this is more important than any academic performance. It is also a matter of ascertaining how mature the candidate is. How integrated? Each member of the interview team is to take time to discuss their impressions about this candidate, and again, their disposition towards accepting or not accepting him/her? A straw vote is also taken at this point.

Third interview

This session focuses on the spirituality and vocation of the candidate. It lasts between fifteen and twenty minutes. The panel is to tidy up issues that are carried over from the previous session. Having discussed some of the issues that came up during the first and second interviews of the candidate who wrote the examination outside her state, the team decided to help her explore further the issues that came up. She finally admitted to having gone to a "miracle centre", a School where she was assisted during the examination so as to make the required credits. When asked what this meant she remained mute.

How does the candidate pray? Is s/he a member of any Church society? Over the past year that s/he has aspired with you, has s/he got any new

understanding or insight about life, about God, about Jesus? If so, can the candidate explain? Has his/her stay with the community helped his/her spiritual life? How?

Regarding vocation, how does s/he know s/he has a vocation to be a religious/priest? Has s/he had a deep conversion experience? Could s/he be confusing this with a call to religious life/priesthood? When did s/he first notice that s/he had a vocation? Has s/he any doubts? When did s/he first hear of this religious community? What influences and attracts him/her to this Congregation? What obstacles/difficulties does s/he see on the way? What would s/he do if s/he is not given admission? Has s/he entered another Congregation/Diocese? Has s/he spent time in any formation house before? If yes, why did s/he leave? (It is necessary to visit that congregation to ask verbally why she left or why she was asked to leave).

Team assessment after the third interview seeks answers to the following questions: does her/his sense of vocation seem genuine or not? Do I sense that this young person desires this way of life above all others, or is it just the only choice at the moment? What alternative does this person have (or would have if his/her situation was different? Are there possibilities to suggest that s/he can grow and mature through formation? This again is followed by some discussions by the team and then a straw vote as regards suitability. The team comes to a final decision as regards whether or not the candidate is considered suitable and makes recommendation to the relevant superiors if s/he is not present at the interview.

At some point in formation ministry or the other we have faced some doubts as regards the suitability of a candidate for acceptance into the formation programme or for progressing to another phase of formation. What do we do at such times? With careful accompaniment and prayer, one could discern, to a certain extent, the will of God. I can recall times when the decision has been, either from the formators or superiors, to 'give him/her a chance'. For some candidates this has proved a spring board for growth while for some others this has proved to be a wrong decision as in most cases the outcome has not been favorable. Some candidates who were 'given a chance' to continue with formation in spite of the doubts experienced by formators/superiors continued life as temporary professed with this doubts accompanying them even nine years after. This has prompted some people to say "when in doubt, send them away". Could one really argue this point to a single conclusion? I do not think so. Since individuals mature at different pace, it is important that close attention be given to the reason for the uncertainty. From the word go, formators should explain to candidates that formation is about discernment. If it becomes necessary to tell a candidate that s/he is not suitable for religious life as lived by this particular congregation, at any stage, this should be done with understanding and compassion. But when it is obvious that, with all good intentions, a particular candidate is found to be unsuitable for the priesthood or the religious life, we should have the courage to take a decision to ask the person, in charity, to search for the will of God elsewhere.

It is important to put into practice judicious selection process that will foster both the individual candidate's growth and the good of the Church. The process of the selection of a candidate for the priesthood or religious life gets carried

out all through the initial formation right up to the time of ordination or final profession. First of all, the admission criteria permits one to discern the initial seeds of a vocation and, afterwards, a regular evaluation of the strengths and challenges the future priest or religious has met at each of the stages of formation and how he/she has coped with the challenges. Following the admission of the candidate, there is need to elaborate a type of integral human formation that can allow the candidate, from the point of entry to truly take charge of his/her life and make his/her own God's plan for him/her. There is need to empower the candidate to be responsible for his or her formation. To this end, the candidate must take part in a process of growth and in an on-going self-assessment of his or her stated objectives and those goals of the formation process which foster maturity.

COLLABORATION WITHIN THE 'ECOLOGY OF MISSION': AN AFRICAN CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Collaborative ministry concerns the dynamics of relationships between the clergy, consecrated persons and lay faithful, that is, how they are able to work together as Christian ministers, each in his or her own right, being mutually supportive and acting in fellowship with the wider church⁴⁰¹. However, in recent times, the issue of collaboration in ministry has become one of great importance with the passage of time, especially, as

⁴⁰¹ Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, "Collaborative ministry': Consecrated Life within the ecology of mission". In Kanu I. A. (Ed.), *Consecrated persons and mutual relations: The dynamics of collaboration within the ecology of mission* (pp. 56-75), Decent Global, Lagos, 2018, p. 56.

continuing cultural, economic and political changes have brought present conditions to such a point of development that completely new delicate and complex problems have arisen. This paper discusses not just the issue of collaborative ministry, but introduces an innovation as it colors the discourse with an African cultural perspective. The major question looming at the horizon of this work is: what has the African worldview to offer in the evolving discourses on collaborative ministry? In response to this question, this piece has explored the African background for African categories that would make discourses on collaborative ministry more meaningful to and at home in Africa. Having discussed the African worldview and developed models for collaborative ministry in Africa, this piece strongly submits that collaborative ministry studied from the African cultural perspective enriches the concept and makes more meaning to the African. For the purpose of this research, the contextual method of inquiry would be employed as it emphasizes circumstances and experiences of each people for the appropriation of the Christian faith. The complementary approach would also be patronized, especially as it expresses the nature and rhythm of the African universe.

Keywords: Collaboration, Ecology, Mission, African, Cultural, Perspective.

Introduction

A cursory glance at the historical development of the theology, spirituality and ecclesiology developed by the Church, especially during the Second Vatican Council, teach us that the different forms of life in the Church cannot and should not be compartmentalized, but are always in correlation with one another. And this perspective is based on the concept of the nature of the Church. St Paul, around 90 AD, described the Church as “the fullness of Christ and of fellowship” (Ephesians 3:19)⁴⁰². The early Fathers of the Church referred to the church as the *Ecclesia*- ‘the called out ones’, ‘the elect’, ‘the saints’ and ‘the school of truth and the fellowship of adepts’⁴⁰³. These perspectives define what quality of collaboration should be found in the Church.

The Second Vatican Council describes the singular constitutive nature of the Church, presenting her as *Mystery*⁴⁰⁴. From Pentecost, there exists in the world a *new People*⁴⁰⁵, which, vivified by the Holy Spirit, assembles in Christ in order to have access to the Father⁴⁰⁶. She is gathered from all nations and merged into such an intimate unity by the power of the Holy Spirit that its reality cannot be explained by recourse to mere sociological formula⁴⁰⁷. Only in this transcendent perspective can we rightly interpret the relationships among various members of

⁴⁰² Kanu I. A. Introduction. In Kanu I. A. (Ed.) *Consecrated persons and mutual relations: The dynamics of collaboration within the ecology of mission* (pp. 4-5), Decent Global, Lagos, p. 4.

⁴⁰³ Kung H. *The Church*. New York: Image Books.1981, p. 32.

⁴⁰⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, In A. Flannery (Ed). *Documents of the second Vatican Council* (pp.350-428). Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1964, No. 1.

⁴⁰⁵ *Lumen Gentium*. In A. Flannery (Ed). *Documents of the second Vatican Council*, No. 4.

⁴⁰⁶ Kanu I. A. The theological foundations of mutual relations. In Kanu I. A. (Ed.) *Consecrated persons and mutual relations: The dynamics of collaboration within the ecology of mission* (pp. 4-5), Decent Global, Lagos, 2018, p.7.

⁴⁰⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, In A. Flannery (Ed). *Documents of the second Vatican Council*, No. 9

the Church⁴⁰⁸. Intimately related to the idea of the Church as a mystery is the image of the Church as the body of Christ; unity in Christ involves a mutual communion of life among her members⁴⁰⁹. The very life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit builds up organic cohesion in Christ and unifies the Church “in communion and in the works of ministry”⁴¹⁰. As the body of Christ, the Church is also the Sacrament of salvation, with a visible social organism and an invisible divine presence intimately united⁴¹¹. In this relationship, the social structure of the Church serves the Spirit of Christ who vivifies it⁴¹². The intimate reciprocal connection of the two elements, therefore, confers upon the Church her special *sacramental* nature⁴¹³ and thus, challenges her towards collaboration.

This notwithstanding, with the passage of time, the issue of collaboration in ministry has become one of great importance in the Church, especially, as continuing cultural, economic and political changes have brought present conditions to such a point of development that completely new delicate and complex problems have arisen. This paper provides a context for discussing the issue of collaborative ministry in the Church from an African cultural perspective. The uniqueness of this discourse springs from the contribution that the African cultural worldview makes to the discourse on collaborative ministry. The phrase: ‘Ecology of Mission’ is very significant in this paper because it serves the understanding of the Church as an ecosystem in which we find mission in different layers and levels, but all of them in mutual interconnection⁴¹⁴.

The contextual method of inquiry would be employed for the purpose of this study. This is important because it emphasizes circumstances and experiences of each people for the appropriation of the Christian faith. Contextualization removes theology from the ivory tower of merely academic engagement and situates it on the ordinary experience of people. Contextualization is cognizant and also respectful of the distinctiveness of the various human conditions and pays attention to them in their particularity⁴¹⁵. The complementary approach would also be patronized, especially as it expresses the nature and rhythm of reality in the African world.

Consequently, my reflection would be divided into four parts:

1. What the African perspective has to offer
2. The imperatives for a cultural perspective
3. Understanding African cosmology

⁴⁰⁸ Lumen Gentium, In A. Flannery (Ed). *Documents of the second Vatican Council*, No. 4; 7; 8; 9; 12; 18; 21.

⁴⁰⁹ Lumen Gentium, In A. Flannery (Ed). *Documents of the second Vatican Council*, No. 9

⁴¹⁰ Lumen Gentium, In A. Flannery (Ed). *Documents of the second Vatican Council*, No. 4.

⁴¹¹ Kanu I. A. The theological foundations of mutual relations. In Kanu I. A. (Ed.) *Consecrated persons and mutual relations: The dynamics of collaboration within the ecology of mission* (pp. 4-5), Decent Global, Lagos, 2018, p.8.

⁴¹² Lumen Gentium, In A. Flannery (Ed). *Documents of the second Vatican Council*, No. 8

⁴¹³ Gaudium et Spes (1965). In A. Flannery (Ed). *Documents of the second Vatican Council* (pp.903-1001). Dublin: Dominican Publications. No. 42

⁴¹⁴ Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, ‘Collaborative ministry’: Consecrated Life within the ecology of mission. In Kanu I. A. (Ed.), p. 56.

⁴¹⁵ Joseph Ogbonnaya, *African liberative theologies*. In *Introducing African liberative theologies* (pp. 26-46), New York: Orbis Books, 2015, pp. 31-32.

4. African cultural models for collaboration
5. Articulating an African cultural perspective of collaboration

What has an African Perspective to offer?

The Western educational system has extolled the achievements of the West and denied African contributions so that what is known of Africa in many instances is limited to the usual stereotypes of the primitive, the savage, the inferior, etc⁴¹⁶. This is evident in the writings of many Western scholars.

Linnaeus, writing in the 18th century, argues that all creatures were arranged by God in a great chain of hierarchy. In this hierarchy, the *Americanus* were considered tenacious, contented, free and ruled by custom. The *Europeanus*, he says are light, lively, inventive and ruled by rites. The *Asiaticus* are stern, haughty, stingy and ruled by opinion. *Africans* are cunning, slow, negligent and ruled by caprice⁴¹⁷. Gobineau, writing in the 20th century, developed a racial anthropology, which argues that Europe had attained civilization while others are yet to⁴¹⁸.

As a child of the same racial climate, Hume writes: "I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even an individual eminent in action or speculation"⁴¹⁹. While Hegel avers that: "In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness had not yet attained to the realization of any substantial existence⁴²⁰", Levy-Bruhl questions the veracity of an untutored African knowing God⁴²¹. Baker did not spare the Negro: "The Negro is still at the rude dawn of faith-fetishism and has barely advanced in idolatry.... he has never grasped the idea of a personal deity, a duty in life, a moral code, or a shame of lying."⁴²²

Unfortunately, while this was part of the curriculum of the western educational system, here in Africa, African students were starved of information about their rich heritage and the achievements of their ancestral home, while being stuffed with an overdose of the history and achievements of the West. There is, therefore, the need for an honest re-evaluation of what is African. Saint Pope John Paul II, in *Ecclesia in Africa*, observes that the African continent: "is endowed with

⁴¹⁶ Innocent Onyewuenyi, *The African origin of Greek philosophy*. University of Nigeria Press, Enugu, 1994, p. 33.

⁴¹⁷ Linnaeus, C. *System of nature*. Stockholm: Laurentius Salvius, 1758, p. 57.

⁴¹⁸ Gobineau, A. *The inequality of human race*. London: William Heinemann, 1915, p. 36.

⁴¹⁹ Kanu, I. A. *An Ontologico-Existential Hermeneutic approach to classical and contemporary issues*. Augustinian publications, Nigeria, 2015, p. 10

⁴²⁰ Hegel, G. W. F. *The philosophy of history*. New York: Dover. 1956, p. 93

⁴²¹ F. O. C. Njoku. *Essays in African philosophy, thought and theology*. SNAAP Press, Enugu, 2002, p. 199.

⁴²² F. O. C. Njoku. *Essays in African philosophy, thought and theology*, p. 199.

a wealth of cultural values and priceless human qualities which it can offer to the Churches and to humanity as a whole⁴²³.”

These values became more visible through the writings of Leopold Sedar Senghor, Aime Cesaire and Leon Gontran Damas in the 19th century. This did not only change the course of the intellectual history of Africa, but has also affected the way the gospel message is proclaimed to the Black Continent⁴²⁴. Since then, African theologians began to debate on the value of the gospel message announced to Africans by Western missionaries⁴²⁵. The 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were years of passionate and fruitful discussions. It is in this same spirit that this paper echoes the relevance of an African cultural perspective in the discourse on the theology of collaboration.

The clause “African cultural perspective” is employed to reflect that every culture makes a contribution from its house of experience to the universal themes of theology, thus, making theology relevant to the reality of life.

To speak of an African cultural perspective does not in any way undermine the differences obtainable in Africa. It rather points to the many similarities and points of convergences in Africa because of which a scholar can make limited generalizations⁴²⁶.

Theological Imperatives for an African Cultural Perspective

Before we undertake the study of collaborative ministry within the context of an African cultural perspective, it would be necessary to investigate the imperatives for such a study. The imperatives are taken from the Scripture and the history of the Church.

a. Imperatives from the Scripture

Jesus came from the Jewish background whose religiosity, prayers and practices of worship were well defined. However, His attitude towards the Jewish cult was one of Fidelity and autonomy. In fidelity, Jesus had respect for the traditions of His time. He came not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17). He was faithful in observing the offering of sacrifices in the temple (Matthew 21:12), the service of Word in the synagogue (Matthew 6:6), observing the day of the Sabbath, the feasts of Passover, Tabernacle, and Dedication (Matthew 26:17-19). However, His fidelity did not lie in passivity, but

⁴²³ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Post Apostolic Exhortation. 2000, No. 42. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa.html.

⁴²⁴ Bujo, B. and Muya J. I. *General Introduction: African theology today*. In Bujo, B. and Muya J. I. (eds.). *African theology: The contribution of the pioneers*. Paulines, Nairobi, 2006, p. 7.

⁴²⁵ Bujo, B. and Muya J. I. *General Introduction: African theology today*., p. 7.

⁴²⁶ Kanu, I. A., *Towards an Igbo Christology: A Cultural Christological Construct in Post-Missionary Africa*. Germany: Lambert Publications. 2016, p. 22.

represented that of a “critical yes”, a reforming fidelity, that placed a demand of purification to the worship of his time. His autonomy found expression in His challenge to fellow Jews to spiritualize and interiorize the Jewish religion⁴²⁷.

When Jesus preached the Gospel, He used categories familiar to His audience. We hear of absentee Lords and Tenant revolts (Matthew 21:31-45); Small family-run farms (Matthew 21:28-30); debts and debtors (Matthew 18:25-35); extortion and corruption (Luke 16:1-9); uncaring rich (Luke 12:18); day labourers paid merely subsistent wages (Matthew 20:1-6); these graphically reflect the detail of the picture of Palestinian countryside during His time. St Paul writes, “To the Jews I became a Jew, in order to win Jews... I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some” (9:20 & 22). In this context, St Paul was talking about mission, in a way that brings the Christian experience into the cultural experience of the people⁴²⁸.

b. Imperatives from Church History

Justin the Martyr holds that different cultures were inspired by God and should be appropriate for His service. He saw culture as a prefiguration of Christ: a *Logos spermatikos* (seed bearing word). He taught that the *Spermatic Logos* has been implanted in the heart of every human culture since all things were created through Christ, with Him and for Him⁴²⁹.

Clement of Alexander established a fundamental theory- a harmony of faith and Greek culture, which places Greek philosophy at the service of faith.

Philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness until the coming of the Lord, and even now it is useful for the development of true religion, as a kind of preparatory discipline for those who arrive at faith by way of demonstration. ... philosophy was given to the Greeks directly; for it was a “schoolmaster”, to bring Hellenism to Christ, as the law was for the Jew”⁴³⁰.

As the Church expanded from Palestine to Rome, it became clear that it was going into a new culture and would have to have new ways of expressing herself. In 312 Constantine and Licinius issued the Edict of Milan decriminalizing Christian worship. This paved the way for the initiation of large numbers of people to Christianity and the shaping of their belief systems on the Greek and

⁴²⁷ Kanu, A. I. *Towards an Igbo-African Christology: A cultural Christological construct in post-missionary Africa*, p. 58

⁴²⁸ Kanu, I. A. & B. A. C. Obiefuna, *Inculturation as the Reconciliation of Cultures: Implications from Africae Munus*. A paper presented at the 27th Annual Conference/Meeting of the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN). April 20th - 13th. At the Redemptorist Conference Centre, Ibadan, Oyo State, 2012, p 12.

⁴²⁹ Kanu, I. A. *Towards an Igbo-African Christology: A cultural Christological construct in post-missionary Africa*, p. 59.

⁴³⁰ Kanu, I. A. *Towards an Igbo-African Christology: A cultural Christological construct in post-missionary Africa*, p.58

Roman cultures. St Augustine taught that “as faith runs on earth and takes its citizens from all nations and languages; and faith is not to be pre-occupied with customs, laws and institutions, neither is it to reject or destroy any of these, but rather it should observe and conserve them so that they do not constitute an obstacle to the religion that teaches the true worship of God”⁴³¹.

The African Cosmology and Inter-Subjective Relations

The structure of the African cosmos is the basis for an African theology of collaboration. It is a universe of particularities that, however, exist in a thermodynamic system- where every creature as an independent but interacting entity, negotiates another’s existential highway for mutual survival⁴³². Negotiation is very important in the African universe because it is a world that one shares with the other in an atmosphere of inter-subjective relations. This inter-subjective relations only plays out without chaos when the individual is able to skillfully bridge his or her interiority with the individuality of the other.

African universe has physical and spiritual dimensions. In the spirit realm, God represents the Chief Being, and sits at the apex of power. In the physical world, human beings dominate, occupying the central position in the scheme of God’s creation. The structure of the African universe can be illustrated in three levels: the sky, the earth and the underworld: “the sky is where God *Chukwu* or *Chineke* and angels reside; the earth where human beings, animals, natural resources, some devils and some physical observable realities abide; and the underworld where ancestors and some bad spirits live”⁴³³.

THE AFRICAN COSMOS



Figure 1: African Cosmos

⁴³¹ Kanu, I. A. & Elizabeth Ezenweke, Revisiting the Lessons of the Interaction between Faith and Culture in North Africa. A paper presented at the International Conference on Sustainable Development. Vol. 8. No. 2. pp. 67-71. Uyo: International Research and Development Institute, 2012.

⁴³² F. O. C. Njoku, Ana Atutu Igbo philosophy: An African perspective on the problem of identity and conflict resolution. Goldline and Jacobs publishers. USA, pp. 119.

⁴³³ Ijiomah, C. African philosophy’s contribution to the dialogue on reality issues. *Sankofa: Journal of the Humanities*. 3. 1. 81 – 90., 2005, p. 84.

The African universe persists because of a healthy inter-subjective relation. The spiritual and physical realms, although they have separate existence, interact. This is reflected in the above diagram as the three circles representing the spiritual worlds of (God), the spirits and the physical world of human beings overlap and, therefore, interact. There is really no demarcation between the physical and spiritual worlds, between the visible and invisible, the sacred and profane; as there is a cooperate existence of reality in the African universe. This is seen in the fact of the possibility of certain elements to move from one structure to another to commune with other elements. In this interaction, human beings commune with God, the divinities, the ancestors and vice versa⁴³⁴.

African Anthropology

The human person in African ontology was created by God, and this makes life sacred and thus deserving of respect and dignity. This is why the Igbo-African bear the names: *Chi-nyere ndu*: God gave life; *Nke-chi-yere*: the one God has given; *Chi-n'eye ndu*: God gives life; *Chi-nwe- ndu*: God owns life; *Chi-ji-ndu*: God owns life. Among the Yoruba such names also abound: *Araoluwa* – Wonder of God; *Araoluwanimi* – I am God's wonder; *Ayanfeoluwanimi* – I am God's beloved; *Ereadura* – Reward of prayers; *Eriadurami* – Testimony of my prayer; *Ewaoluwa* – Beauty of God.

It is because the human person is understood as *Ewaoluwa* – Beauty of God that the Igbo cannot but call the human person *Mmadu*, which means that 'there is beauty'. The human person is not *mmadu* because he or she has a physical beauty. If it were based on this then many human beings would be referred to as 'Njodu' (there is ugliness). We are *mmadu* because of our ontological connection with God who is Beauty itself.

The divine presence in us, which one could refer to as the *Chi*- the spark of the divine in all human beings, provides a unity even in the midst of the plurality of humanity. This unity helps us to develop a philosophy of relationship with the other, *Ibem*. The Igbo would refer to the 'Other' as *Ibe*, which means 'a piece of' or 'a part of', as in *ibe anu* (a piece of meat) or *ibe ede* (a piece of cocoyam). Since the 'other' refers to my own piece, it would, mean that to love the other is to love oneself, to help the other is to help oneself and to respect the other is to respect oneself. In a paradoxical way Ekwulu writes that:

The term *ibe* brings out the reciprocity tension between the self and the other. The self is always implicated in the other. The self's reference to the other always points back to the self. I am, as it were, in the other and the other is in me.

⁴³⁴ Ekwealor, C. C. The Igbo world-view: A general survey. E. Oguegbu (Ed.). *The humanities and all of us* (pp.29-33). Onitsha: Waterside, 1990, p.30.

He is my piece as i am his piece. That which is different from me is 'my piece' or 'my other'. That which is different from us is part of us⁴³⁵.

One can, therefore, argue that the differences among human beings is absolved in identity, for that which is different from me is part of me, *ibe m*, and, in turn, identity is absolved in the otherness, because I am part of the other who is different from me. Identity and otherness are in a sense two related concepts, for the one implies the other⁴³⁶. This anthropology can be a solid ground for constructing an African theology of collaboration.

African Cultural Models of Collaboration

The idea of models employed here is within the context of a proposal that would serve as a basis for further study in the area of collaboration from an African perspective. While they might look strange, this proposal is in harmony with the economy of the incarnation and the teaching of *Ad Gentes* that calls for borrowing from the customs, traditions, wisdom and learning of local people.

In harmony with the economy of the Incarnation, the young churches, rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the Apostles, take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance (cf Ps. 2:8). They borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, or enhance the grace of their Savior, or dispose Christian life the way it should be⁴³⁷.

Ad Gentes teaches further:

From here... the Christian life will be accommodated to the genius and the dispositions of each culture. Particular traditions, together with the peculiar patrimony of each family of nations, illumined by the light of the Gospel, can then be taken up into Catholic unity. Finally, the young particular churches, adorned with their own traditions, will have their own place in the ecclesiastical communion, saving always the primacy of Peter's See, which presides over the entire assembly of charity⁴³⁸.

In this regard, five African cultural models of collaboration would be entertained. And although they are treated as different models of collaboration, the nature of the African worldview, allows for an interaction in meaning.

a. The 'Nri' Negotiative Model of Collaboration

⁴³⁵ Ekwulu, B. I. *Igbo concept of Ibe (the other) as a philosophical solution to the ethnic conflicts in African countries*. In B. I. Ekwulu (Ed.). *philosophical reflections on African issues*, 2010, p. 188.

⁴³⁶ Kanu, I. A. *African philosophy, Identity and the Otherness*. A paper presented at the philosophy week of Saint Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary, School Auditorium, Makurdi, Benue State 13th May, 2017, p. 10.

⁴³⁷ *Ad Gentes*, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, No. 22

⁴³⁸ *Ad Gentes*, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, No. 22

The story of the Igbo, no matter how briefly considered, would be incomplete if one omits the Eri-Nri contribution⁴³⁹. Tracing this history, Afigbo avers that Eri clan originated from the regions of Omumbala River, in Aguleri; from there they fanned eastward and established various communities⁴⁴⁰. Uzuoku describes Eri as the father of all Nri; and tradition says that he came from *Chukwu*⁴⁴¹. It is reported that the earth was not firm when he came into it. To solve the problem of flood, he employed blacksmiths from Awka to use their bellows to dry the flooded land. There was also no food for people on earth to eat. To provide food, he prayed to God and God demanded that he should sacrifice his first son and daughter to him. After the sacrifice and burial of his son and daughter, yam and palm tree began to grow out of the place where he buried his first son, while vegetables and cocoyam grew out of the place where he buried his daughter. If yam germinated from where Eri's first son was buried, it means that yam is the resurrected son of Eri, given to man to sustain life. Yam is also regarded as life⁴⁴².

In this myth, there is a cosmic drama between God, human beings, land and crops. Eri, the civilization hero enjoys a special relationship with Chukwu, and through Eri's sacrifice, humanity now enjoys a special relationship with the land which offers food for its sustenance. The ritual act performed by Eri established a covenant between Eri, his descendants and Chukwu. This explains why yam is very prominent in Igbo sacrifice and life, one which warrants its annual elaborate festival throughout Igbo land⁴⁴³.

These notwithstanding, we draw from this myth that collaboration can guarantee the survival of a people. Where there is no collaboration, even the most self-sufficient in the ranks of creatures would find it difficult to survive.

b. The 'Ife' Thermodynamic Model of Collaboration

Very interesting is the Yoruba mythology of creation, which can serve as a basis for an African theology of collaboration. The myth holds that Olodumare, the Supreme God, originally lived in the lower part of heaven, overlooking endless stretches of water. One day, Olodumare decided to create Earth. He sent an emissary, the Orisha Obatalá to perform this task, giving him what he needed to create the world: a bag of loose earth, a gold chain, and a five-toed hen⁴⁴⁴.

⁴³⁹ Madubuko, L. Igbo world-view. *Bigard Theological Studies*. 1994, 14, 2. 13.

⁴⁴⁰ Afigbo, A. E. *Ropes of sand: Studies in Igbo history and culture*. Ibadan, 1981, p.48.

⁴⁴¹ Uzuoku, E. E. Nri myth of origin and its ritualization: An essay in interpretation. In E. E. Uzuoku (Ed.). *Religions and African culture, Inculturation: A Nigeria perspective* (pp. 56-80). Enugu: Spiritan Publications. 1994, p.73.

⁴⁴² Madu, E. J. *Honest to African cultural heritage*. Coskan Associates, Onitsha, 2004, p. 43

⁴⁴³ Madu, E. J. *Honest to African cultural heritage*. p. 44.

⁴⁴⁴ Marta Moreno Vega, "The Altar of My Soul: The Living Traditions of Santería," One World/Ballantine, 2001. <http://www.religioustolerance.org/ifa.htm>

These different elements had their purposes. Obatalá was instructed to use the chain to descend from heaven to the water below. When he got to the last link of the chain, he poured the loose earth on top of the water and placed the hen on the pile of earth, and ordered it to scatter the earth with her toes across the surface of the water. When the hen was done, Obatalá climbed the chain to heaven to report his success to Olodumare, who then sent his trusted assistant, the chameleon, to verify that the earth was dry, after which Olodumare gave the earth as name: *Ile Ife*, the sacred house⁴⁴⁵.

After the creation of the earth, Olodumare returned to the uppermost part of heaven. However, before his retirement, he distributed his sacred powers to Obatalá, the Orisha of creation, and Yemayá, the orisha of the ocean, who gave birth to a pantheon of orishas, each possessing a share of Olodumare's sacred power. Olodumare gave Obatalá the sacred power to create human life. Obatalá was the divinity that created our ancestors, endowing them with his own divine power⁴⁴⁶.

From this creation myth, we draw that in collaboration, you share power, and by sharing power, you do not lose power as a leader but balances power. This perspective is very important as collaboration may wrongly be understood as loss of power or control.

c. The 'Kola Nut' Symbiotic Model of Collaboration

Of the many cultural symbols in Igboland, none has received attention like the kola nut. It is very important and central to the life and ceremonies of the Igbo⁴⁴⁷. For the Igbo it goes beyond the red and yellow seed that you find in trays sold on the street and in kiosks. It is not just the biannual crop grown and stored in sacks and baskets soaked with water to preserve it. It is not just the seed crops grown in the central and western parts of Africa. It is more than all these. It is a food that must be eaten with relish; it commands adoration and many accolades and must be attended to with deserving feast⁴⁴⁸. It is a holy communion that unites the living and dead. It symbolizes a feast of togetherness, love and trust. The Kola nut is a symbol of Life *ndu*, this is why the Igbo say: "He that brings kola brings life", and to share in it is to be part of the project of the preservation of life. It is, therefore, not surprising that the poetry of the Kola breaks the day for the typical Igbo⁴⁴⁹.

⁴⁴⁵ Marta Moreno Vega, "The Altar of My Soul: The Living Traditions of Santeria," One World/Ballantine, 2001. <http://www.religioustolerance.org/ifa.htm>

⁴⁴⁶ Marta Moreno Vega, "The Altar of My Soul: The Living Traditions of Santeria," One World/Ballantine, 2001. <http://www.religioustolerance.org/ifa.htm>

⁴⁴⁷ Philips Nwachukwu. *What is this about Kola nut in Igbo land?* Vanguard Newspaper. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/04/what-is-this-about-kolanut-in-igboland>.

⁴⁴⁸ Philips Nwachukwu. *What is this about Kola nut in Igbo land?*

⁴⁴⁹ Philips Nwachukwu. *What is this about Kola nut in Igbo land?*

Every Kola can be broken into lobes, and these lobes signify numbers. And number is very important for the African. Some have 2 lobes, some 3, some 4, some 5 and some 6. Kola nut with two lobes is a dumb kola and is not eaten because it is understood as the *Kola of the Spirits*. When it has three lobes, it is called the *Kola of the Valiant*. As a matter of principle it is eaten only by warriors, brave men, the consecrated or ordained. The Kola with four lobes is the *Kola of Peace and Blessings*⁴⁵⁰. It is a sign of completeness and signifies four market days in Igbo society. The Kola with five lobes is the *Kola of Procreation, Protection and Good luck*. The Kola with six lobes is indicative of communion with the ancestors. No wonder the smallest part of it is not eaten but given to the ancestors⁴⁵¹.

This notwithstanding, among the lobes, there is always a female and male lobe. When these lobes stay together they remain alive, but when they separate they die and dry off. Their togetherness is a symbol of life, and their separation, death. It's a symbiotic relationship in the sense that they need each other to remain alive. Here in, the concepts of co-essentiality and co-responsibility begin to make a profound meaning.

d. **Proverbial Model of Collaboration**

One of the major traditional vessels where African philosophy, religion and culture have continued to be preserved is in African Proverb. Mbiti writes that: "It is in proverbs that we find the remains of the oldest forms of African religious and philosophical wisdom"⁴⁵². Their relevance in African life and philosophy is the basis for the Igbo referring to them *as vegetables for eating speech* and *as the palm oil with which words are eaten*. The Zulu of Southern Africa describe proverbs thus: *without proverbs, language would be but a skeleton without flesh, a body without a soul*. The Yoruba would say that *proverbs are horses for chasing missing words*⁴⁵³.

Proverbs are very important for our study of collaborative ministry within the context of the African cultural setting because they contain the wisdom and experience of the African people, usually of several ages gathered and summed up in one expression. Proverbs spring from the people and represent the voice of the people and express the interpretation of their beliefs, principles of life and conduct. It expresses the moral attitudes of a given culture, and reflects the hopes, achievements and failings of a people⁴⁵⁴.

1. **A person is a person because of other people**

It speaks of the importance of alterity in collaboration

2. **Sticks in a bundle cannot be broken**

⁴⁵⁰ Jon Ofoegbu Ukaegbu, *The Kola Nut: As an Igbo Cultural and social symbol*. IgboNet. <http://kolanutseries.igbonet.com/jukaegbu>.

⁴⁵¹ Jon Ofoegbu Ukaegbu, *The Kola Nut: As an Igbo Cultural and social symbol*

⁴⁵² John Mbiti, *African religions and philosophy*. East African Education Publishers, Nairobi, 1969, p. 89.

⁴⁵³ Kanu I. A., *A Hermeneutic approach to African traditional religion, philosophy and theology*. Augustinian Publications, Nigeria, 2015, p. 65

⁴⁵⁴ Kanu I. A., *African philosophy: An ontologico-existential Hermeneutic approach to classical and contemporary issues*. Augustinian Publications, Nigeria, 2015, pp. 55-56.

It speaks of the importance of collaboration

3. When spiders unite they can tie up a lion

It speaks of the power of relating with the other

4. If one finger tries to pick up something from the ground, it cannot

It speaks of the ontological need for collaboration

5. Behind an able man there are always other able men

It speaks of our achievements as the result of collaboration

6. It takes a village to raise a child

It speaks of the other as a complementary force

7. If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together

It speaks of the fact that you need the strength of others to reach self-realization

8. I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am

Your existence is ontologically linked with that of the other

9. If a lizard stays off from the foot of a tree, it would be caught

It speaks of the danger of avoiding collaboration

10. A tree does not make a forest

It speaks of the incompleteness of being without the other

11. If two or more people urinate in the same place at the same time, it would produce more foam

If more impact must be made, then collaboration is indispensable

12. When a bird builds its nest it uses the feathers of other birds

We have to collaborate with other people to get the job done

13. One person is not the whole world

Strength is in collaboration

14. It is by taking a goat around that you are able to sell it

It speaks of the importance of meeting the other

e. The 'Choosy Princess' Complementary Model of Collaboration

There was once a choosy princess who turned down the requests of those who asked for her hand in marriage. Her father was disturbed because of her choosy attitude and made public that any man who would win the love of his daughter would have half of his kingdom given to him. This was heard by a python that lived in the river and immediately it went about borrowing the parts of the human body and when it looked fully human, physically, it stormed the palace of the king in a grand style. Immediately the princess saw the human python, she was attracted to him, fell in love and decided to marry him. The human python departed with her and owned half of the wealth of the kingdom as the king had promised. When the python was returning with her to his home, just before the river, it turned into a python and went into the river with the princess. Those who witnessed this brought word back to the king that his son-in-law is not a human being but a python⁴⁵⁵.

⁴⁵⁵ Kanu I. A., *Sources of Igwebuike Philosophy*. International Journal of Religion and Human Relations. 9. 1. 1-23. June 2017. p. 10.

This bordered the king who assembled the wise men in his kingdom for a way forward towards rescuing the Princess. They came to the decision that to rescue her, extraordinary talents would be required for the mission. This included professionals like: a boat rider, a thief, a carpenter, a diviner, a hunter and a swimmer. When they got to the river, and did not know where to begin to find her, the diviner did some incantations and found out where the princess was hidden by the python. Having discovered her, the thief went into the river and stole the princess from where she was hidden. He handed her over to the skillful swimmer who immediately moved with her behind him. At this point, the python woke up from its slumber and angrily went after the swimmer. This was when the hunter came in and fired at the python. While the boat rider was heading to the shore with her, the anger of the python was stirred and it hit hard on the boat damaging a good part of it; and to save the boat from sinking the carpenter came in and mended the damaged part of the boat that they may continue on their journey. With a combined effort, the team was able to take the princess back to the king⁴⁵⁶.

We draw from this story that our differences are a basis for collaboration. Even what we consider as a negative potential in the other, like the case of the thief in the story, when properly harnessed can be very useful. Thus, weakness is not a reason for not collaborating.

Articulating an African Cultural Perspective of Collaboration

A discourse on collaborative ministry that requires an African cultural perspective would be almost incomplete if reference to the document on the First Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops held in Rome in April and May 1994, was neglected. Such exclusion would be even more serious considering that we are dealing with a topic which was at the heart of the key contributions of the African Synod. In this document, the Synod Fathers expressed the relevance of cultural perspectives in theological discourses.

The Synod observed that the structure of the African socio-political life, which is, the family and community is a key, not just for understanding the African life and philosophy, but also for important theological discussions that pertain to Africa:

In African culture and tradition the role of the family is everywhere held to be fundamental. ...African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life. In Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village. Indeed, community life in African societies expresses the extended family. It is my ardent hope and prayer that Africa will

⁴⁵⁶ Kanu I. A., *Sources of Igwebuiké Philosophy*. p. 11.

always preserve this priceless cultural heritage and never succumb to the temptation to individualism, which is so alien to its best traditions⁴⁵⁷.

The African family functions by way of shared responsibilities. Everyone is consulted, before decisions concerning the family are taken. When a task is to be performed, everyone gets his or her own share, regardless of age, gender or status. The result is that success is everyone's success, and failure is everyone's failure⁴⁵⁸. To take advantage of this cultural structure already disposed towards the gospel, the Synod Fathers stressed the particular importance of inculturation. And by inculturation they meant:

...the process by which "catechesis 'takes flesh' in the various cultures".(86) Inculturation includes two dimensions: on the one hand, "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity" and, on the other, "the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures".⁴⁵⁹

Inserting Christianity into the African culture in a way that the Gospel message would become culture and the African culture become a Christian message, the Synod Fathers developed the ecclesiology of the *Church as God's Family*, enriching ecclesiology from Africa's rich cultural heritage, and taking this as its guiding principle for the evangelization of Africa. The Synod, therefore, acknowledged the family as:

...an expression of the Church's nature particularly appropriate for Africa. For this image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust. The new evangelization will thus aim at *building up the Church as Family*, avoiding all ethnocentrism and excessive particularism, trying instead to encourage reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups, favouring solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among the particular Churches, without undue ethnic considerations⁴⁶⁰.

An important element which cannot be neglected in the idea of Church as family is the reality of openness to dialogue, without which there can't be collaboration. For the African, this begins from the family. It is in the family that the art of dialogue is learnt, and further extended to other persons or communities outside of the family. The Synod Fathers did not only observe that dialogue was crucial to evangelization, but saw collaboration as an important aspect of dialogue that should exist within each particular church:

⁴⁵⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Eclessia in Africa*, Post Apostolic Exhortation. 2000, No. 43. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa.html

⁴⁵⁸ John Aniagwu. *Collabotaive Ministry in the Church*. Unpublished material. 2013, p.8

⁴⁵⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Eclessia in Africa*, Post Apostolic Exhortation. 1995, No. 58.

⁴⁶⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Eclessia in Africa*, Post Apostolic Exhortation. 1995, No. 63.

Dialogue is to be practised first of all within the family of the Church at all levels: between Bishops, Episcopal Conferences or Hierarchical Assemblies and the Apostolic See, between Conferences or Episcopal Assemblies of the different nations of the same continent and those of other continents, and within each particular Church between the Bishop, the presbyterate, consecrated persons, pastoral workers and the lay faithful; and also between different rites within the same Church⁴⁶¹.

Although the African world is one of relationships, it is also a chaotic universe where conflicts are very possible and sometimes unavoidable. What is required of the individual African is not to brood over a world that is chaotic or to create a world where chaos is absent, but to negotiate the other's existential highway for mutual survival in the midst of the struggles, ironies and weariness of the present world. This is important as chaos is a fundamental ground for coming into being in African ontology.

This notwithstanding, conflicts in African ontology are regulated through Covenants. "A covenant is a solemn pact made binding by an oath by which people establish relations to henceforth treat themselves and their relatives"⁴⁶². It is the covenant that guarantees impartiality among the covenant parties⁴⁶³, mutual treatment and rights of partners, and respects due to their persons and property. Covenants provide the principles of truth and justice, and thus the part towards mutual co-existence. This helps us to understand why there is always an emphasis on the signing of contracts and agreements. Wherever and whenever a covenant is made and respected, a new life of relationship is born in the world.

The complementary nature of the African cosmos is another cultural element that enriches our discourse on the theology of collaboration. It is in fact, a preparation for the Second Vatican Council's concept of shared mission: *Est in Ecclesia unitas missionis, pluralitas autem ministerii* (In the church there is unity of mission and plurality of ministries). In the African universe, power is generated, shared and exercised. It is a universe of powers, with a rhythm that is a response to the exercise of power. God is the most powerful force and the initiator of movements, including collaboration. What we actually do in collaborative ministry is that we share in the Ultimate Power's power and generatively bestow power. In most cases where collaborative ministry fails, it is because people understand power as an element to be grabbed rather than shared. The distribution of power is resisted by authorities in many occasions for fear of diminution. The result is that rather than creating a balance of power, we create an

⁴⁶¹ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Post Apostolic Exhortation. 1995, No. 65.

⁴⁶² F. O. C. Njoku, *Ana Atutu Igbo philosophy: An African perspective on the problem of identity and conflict resolution*. Goldline and Jacobs publishers. 2014, USA, p. 120.

⁴⁶³ F. O. C. Njoku, A perspective of an African philosophy on the problems of identity and conflict resolution. *Mbari: The International Journal of Igbo Studies*. 1. 1. 2008. pp.40-41.

environment of conflict and competition rather than cooperation. Certainty, sureness and creativity is denied, while the gifts of the other are left unused and thus mismanaged.

As a result of the African's holistic awareness of belonging to a universe, in which everything is interconnected⁴⁶⁴, when he or she engages in collaboration, it is understood as fulfilling the mission of God, since it is a movement that begins from heaven to the earth, to humanity, in which we are involved and engaged. Our collaboration with one another is, therefore, in a way, a partnership with God for the fulfillment of His purpose. This is very different from the Western conceptualization scheme. From the Cartesian model, the Western pattern of thought is exclusivistic, depersonalized, objectivised and more concerned with analysis⁴⁶⁵; the African scheme of conceptualization is inclusivistic, integrative, non-reductionistic, concrete, personalized and subjectivised in all its manifestations, expressing the interconnectedness of reality- a world of relationship, harmony, continuity and complementarity. The dualistic and exclusivistic Western perception of reality understands a person in relation to the other in terms of "I and Not-I". This creates a dichotomy that brings in a strong divide between the "I and the other", which could set groups and individuals against themselves⁴⁶⁶.

For the African, the 'other' is part of him or her. It is not an exclusive 'other', but an 'other' that is part of himself or herself. This has huge consequences in his or her understanding of the theology of collaboration; the approach towards mission is done from the angle of concrete ecclesial community, and not from the perspective of the individual person and function. When there is an emphasis on the individual person and function, the consequence is the empowering of the individual sense of call, the basis for the consciousness of spiritual superiority and hierarchical relations, and the neglect of the community sense of mission which continuous to impede the development of a richer theology of mission in the church. And this is a major contribution that an African cultural perspective makes to the theology of collaboration.

Conclusion

The foregoing has studied the African cultural perspective of collaborative ministry. It began by asking the question as regards what the African cultural perspective has to offer in relation to a discourse on collaborative ministry. Having

⁴⁶⁴ Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, 'Collaborative ministry': *Consecrated Life within the ecology of mission*, p. 56.

⁴⁶⁵ Kanu, I. A. *African Philosophy, Globalisation and the Priority of Otherness*. A paper presented at the 2017 Philosophy Week of Saint Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary, Makurdi, Benue State Chapter of the Nigerian Major Seminaries Association of Philosophy Students. On 13th May, 2017, p. 8.

⁴⁶⁶ Kanu, Ikechukwu A. *Igwebuike as a Hermeneutical Hermeneutic of Individuality and Communitarity in African Ontology*. A paper presented at the 5th International Annual Conference of the Association of African Traditional Religion and Philosophy Scholars, held on 28th June, at the PG School Auditorium, 2017, p. 7.

discovered the rich African cultural background, it developed imperatives for an African cultural perspective from the roots of Scripture and church history. Since we are dealing with the African Cultural worldview, this piece also ventured into a study of the African worldview from which was developed African cultural models for collaboration. These models were developed from Africa's rich religious and cultural heritage, from African proverbs, mythologies and parables. Rising beyond the literal understanding of these heritages, the meanings echoing from behind the words were captured in view of their relevance to the development of an African theology of collaboration in the ecology of mission.

In the past decades, scholars from different backgrounds have discussed the theology of collaborative ministry. And each scholar has added to the development of the concept from his or her own rich cultural and theological background. Collaboration is obviously a developing concept. It is, therefore, not surprising that competing terms have continued to emerge: Total Ministry⁴⁶⁷, Local Shared Ministry, Every Member Ministry, Shared Mission⁴⁶⁸. As a developing concept, an African cultural perspective is very relevant and timely, as it would bring about the emergence of a theology of collaboration that is richer in content. The relevance of pluralistic perspectives cannot be undermined in our age of globalization.

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⁴⁶⁷ S. C. Zabriske, *Total Ministry*. University of Nottingham. Alban Institute, New York, 1991, p. 26.

⁴⁶⁸ Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, 'Collaborative ministry': Consecrated Life within the ecology of mission. In Kanu I. A. (Ed.) *Consecrated persons and mutual relations: The dynamics of collaboration within the ecology of mission* (pp. 56-75), Decent Global, Lagos, 2018, p. 56.

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**ABANDONMENT, DISMISSAL AND PROLONGATION:THE
ACCOMPANIMENT OF A CANDIDATE IN FORMATION IN THE TIMES OF
TRANSITION AND TRIALS IN THE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE**

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From my experience, I discover that the ministry of formation of candidates to the religious life is a sturdy apostolate. It is so because it calls for a strong person to occupy the position. It is a thankless labour. No matter what a formation director did, he/she is doomed to be a pointer and a talking point for years to come in the institute because the character of the formation director rubs off on the candidates at that point in time. Therefore, it is pertinent that the supreme moderator of an institute selects the person that is most suitable for the formation house at a given time.

I have worked in the formation house and my current work still borders on formation; hence, it feels I have been in formation work most of my years. Experiences and studies spur and allow me to share some thoughts on some aspects of formation.

WHAT IS FORMATION?

Strictly, formation is a pattern, a mould, a configuration that someone arrives at. It is presumed that there will be the object and another person the subject. The person who forms has something in mind to make out of the work at hand as in the case of the potter and the clay.

Religious formation is a process. By process, it is meant a procedure or a course in progression. It is a process of helping a candidate to go inwards and be connected with the resources that lie down deep within. It is therefore an inward journey aiming at conversion and configuration into the person of Christ. The Chief Director of formation is God, through the Holy Spirit. God then appoints a human director through the Major Superior to facilitate the process and works by/with the Holy Spirit through the human facilitator/ director.

In the process of formation, it is believed that God has infused His Holy Spirit into the candidate. The work of this human facilitator is to help the candidate get in touch, be connected, listen to God, and discern his or her vocation.

The work of formation is a life-long process and cannot be definitively finished here on earth. This is the reason spiritual direction, retreats, seminars/workshops and other forms of on-going formation are necessary to continue the facilitating process which took place in the initial formation or which began earlier from home.

WHAT ARE THESE PROCESSES?

A process is not something done one time off; it is done progressively. It is a combination of many things that work together for the common good. In the case of a formative process, theological and spiritual activities come to mind:

1. Accompaniment of the candidate which is a broad spectrum
2. The life example and active presence of the formation director

3. The rich and enlightened course contents taught in the formation house
4. The 'genius' of the formation director
5. The enabling environment/ prayerful atmosphere
6. A welcoming community
7. The 'glorious' system established in the institute
8. The good quality relationship that exists between the candidate and the director of formation
9. The manner of following the Charism of the institute.

All these and everything that facilitate the process of formation must be pursued with steadfastness. The formation director unfolds each course of action step by step.

ACCOMPANIMENT OF CANDIDATE IN FORMATION

The formation director must have good knowledge of Catholic faith and morals and must have:

- Experiential knowledge of God and prayer
- Wisdom that comes from listening to the word of God
- Love for the church and for human beings
- Enough time and good will to attend to the candidate individually without biases for any cultural/ethnic group.

It will seem that accompaniment is the main work for the director of formation. The director of formation journeys with the candidate on one-on-one. Although, there are many candidates in the formation house, each one is on formation individually; each one is on a personal journey with his/her God. The director has the responsibility to each candidate; helping each one to realize that formation is a personal journey and is helped to personalize the art of formation. There should be a balance between formation of the group and that of each person; a balance between the respect for the time envisioned for each phase of formation and its adaptation to the rhythm of everyone. Conscientious effort must be taken to initiate each candidate for religious life theoretically and practically into the concrete demand of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Experientially, not all the candidates enter into the formation process at the same level of human and Christian culture. Therefore, it is necessary to pay close attention to each individual, ensuring that each one advances at his/her own pace so that the content of formation and the way it is communicated are suitable to the one receiving it.

A formandi may not open certain issues with the formation director when he/she feels unsafe. In extreme cases the formation director could seek help, such as spiritual director or therapist. It is said that a stitch in time saves nine. When a candidate with a problem is given adequate consideration early enough and the problem is resolved amicably, everyone in the community will be at peace and the formation director would have done the will of God.

During the period of initial accompaniment, the candidate may not have integrated fully into formation process. The director needs lots of patience to journey with candidates and must not abandon the slow learners. Each person is unique; hence the candidate might need extra time or different approach. As a result, the director must be well trained to do this work.

The facilitator or director is a *midwife* in the work of accompaniment. The director acts like a midwife who helps to bring to birth new candidates and helps the candidates to bring to birth the best in each one of them and to bring out new things from the heart. Therefore, the director must give enough time to each candidate. If a candidate is slow or is not showing much progress as expected, it could be that the candidate is 'blocked' initially, but it is only patience and perseverance that can unravel the myth of such candidate.

A candidate might also feel more like an enigma in the formation house. The facilitator/director with prayerful mind can journey with such candidate. Anyone who is abandoned can portend jeopardy for the institute.

There are some cases when a candidate is seen as a 'sacred cow.' Even as difficult as that case might be, such a candidate must not be abandoned. I consider this as a time of trial for the institute and for the formation house. Such a facilitator/director must speak out because of the common good that is at stake. The institute cannot pretend too long that all is well in formation house when there is fire on the mountain.

THE EXCELLENCE OF AN ANIMATED COMMUNITY

Formation depends on a large extent on the quality of community living. A community is formative if it supports its members to grow in fidelity to the Lord. A lively community helps the candidates to adapt well and gives peace and sense of security to the candidates. A good community confirms the words that are spoken about the congregation to the candidates. This is where a candidate lives out what is taught. This is like a practical field where a candidate moves from theory to experiential arena. Therefore, the community should be marked with simplicity and charity.

However, having too many professed sisters in the novitiate community is counter-productive. Not everyone is appropriate to live in the formation house, hence, the Major Superior must not think of the formation house as a correctional house.

APOSTOLATE OF PRESENCE OF THE FORMATION DIRECTOR:

The apostolate of all religious consists first in their witness of a consecrated life. Paramount in the work of formation is the apostolate of presence. The person working in the formation house must be sufficiently free from any other duty. The director must be permanently accessible and see the formation house as a ministry ground where God is served through the acts of listening and dialoguing with the candidates and the formation director also serve as a role model for the candidates.

The apostolate of good example is vital in the formation house. In Greek culture, imitating a model was essential to the learning of virtue. The Greeks were convinced that virtues could not be taught by command but had to be learned from observation of its living expression in parents or teachers. The formation director is the living textbook of the virtuous life. The professed members who did not live the virtues are dangerous and have failed to live up to expectations.

EVALUATION OF INITIAL FORMATION

The evaluation of the candidate to the religious life at the initial formation is based on his/her ability to assimilate and deepen the religious identity. The focus of the director is to assess whether the candidate is prepared to be inserted into the world as faithful witness of the gospel. At the end of the assessment, the candidate might be advised to withdraw, the candidate might demonstrate the willingness to move on to the next level, or she or he might need to be on probation.

TIME OF TRIAL

Trial moment comes at any time. The death of parents or loss of a dear one might be the cause. It might also be moment of the dark night of the soul of the candidate. It might also be a resurgence of unfinished business and the candidate is bothered so much that everything about him/her is cloudy.

In the time of trial, the candidate must not be neglected. The reason being that when he/she 'falls out' from the institute, there is a probability that the candidate will aspire to join another institute. He/she will tell all the stories, true and untrue and may probably be admitted into another institute. We must not be in a hurry to dismiss a candidate and must not be in a rush to admit anyone.

However, an institute might be going through difficult times and at such times; the candidates in the formation house are worse hit. The problem might be because the formation director is weak or incompetent. It could also be because the institute is going through formative stage. Such an institute should seek the advice of the local ordinary or help from other institute that can offer credible assistance.

Moreover, there are new institutes who are still trying to establish their formation house. The founder or foundress has the duty to engage an experienced religious who is sufficiently free from other work to offer good services to the candidates in formation. In a situation where the formation director is working outside the formation house, the consequence is great. This is not going to help the Institute in the near future and the church will be seriously affected.

At the beginning of the establishment, it is assumed that the institute will not have competent personnel for this office, and therefore, whoever is employed to do this duty must be trained and be free to work with the candidates. It is not enough to just get somebody. The person who works in the formation house must be prepared.

Formation ministry is an exceptional work and calls for preparation and willingness from the person who will assume this post.

PROBATION: SHORT OR PROLONGED

Formation has different levels- initial and on-going. There are times when decisions will be made on each candidate. There will be times when the authority of the institute will not be sure of what to do with a candidate and so such a candidate is placed on 'awaiting trials;' on short or prolonged probation. In giving the assessment of a candidate in formation, those in charge must be reminded that formation is not achieved once and for all; it is a gradual process.

Probation in itself is purgative. The period can mar or truly purge a candidate of some inappropriate behaviour. Probation as a corrective measure must commensurate with the offence and must be specific in nature. It must also have duration and the candidate must be supervised. If the time is specified, this will push the candidate to work harder to achieve results on record time. If it is an endless and clueless probation, then this is counter-productive.

Probation may end well when the candidate is absorbed into the institute; it could also terminate with the dismissal of the candidate. When a candidate is to be dismissed, experts must be consulted, and Canon Law regulations must be dully followed. This will save the institute from embarrassment. Therefore, all the help must be given to a candidate before he/she is dismissed. When a candidate is dismissed without due process, it portends danger for any institute. He/she may become successful in the society. There are chances that we shall meet again somewhere. The institute might need something from this 'dismissed' candidate who is now powerful but bears a grudge against the institute.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Philosophical, apart from theological, studies must be taught in the male and female formation houses. This is to enable the candidates discover who they are and what they are called to become. It will also help them to have adequate knowledge of the good and evil.

2. Suitable method must be used to promote and motivate reading not only to pass examinations for academic pursuits but a kind that will promote the reading of spiritual books that will help them to live better. There must be following up on what is read and how it is influencing their lives.

3. Adequate measures must be put in place to help the candidates purify their intentions and properly discern their vocation even while in the formation house.

4. It is important to train the directors of formation to enhance their effectiveness.

5. It is not helpful to have community house in the formation house. It could be counter-formative.

6. The formation director must create the time for seminar/ workshop and be updated on the issues of formation.

7. There are many institutes coming up every day. The Conference of Major Superiors must endeavour to enquire how to enforce policies that will regulate the proliferations of religious institutes and be interested in the way formation is done in the “new institutes” and discuss them because in the end some might survive the tests of time and the ones that did not get much formation will be representing the religious body in the society.

CONCLUSION

Various institutes must take the formation of candidate serious. It is not about the number of candidates in the formation house; we should focus more on giving sound formation and think more of the future of the institute. In the end, it is not about quantity but about persons of high-quality.

Life is sacred, and persons are entities of great worth, and therefore, we should not allow anyone to be sacrificed on the altar of cheap popularity.

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

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Lead paper at the Conference of Formators Association of Nigeria (FAN) at the *Domus Pacis* Pastoral Centre, Akure, Ondo State, November 5-9, 2018, under the theme "Faith Deepening And Internalisation Of Core Christian Values: A Way Forwards In Our Witnessing As Priests And Religious In Formation."

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... .”⁴⁷⁰ 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 here⁴⁷¹ 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

⁴⁷⁰ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, (LibreriaEditriceVaticana: Varican City, 2013), 3.

⁴⁷¹ 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”⁴⁷², 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

⁴⁷² 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*⁴⁷³ 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."⁴⁷⁴

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.⁴⁷⁵ 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

⁴⁷³Emphasis mine.

⁴⁷⁴ 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.

⁴⁷⁵Karl Rahner, "faith", in *Sacramentum Mundi* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2010), 496.

the divine word and then, freely submits to the absolute claim of divine revelation.⁴⁷⁶ 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).⁴⁷⁷ 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.⁴⁷⁸ 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.”⁴⁷⁹

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*

⁴⁷⁶Karl Rahner, “faith”, 500.

⁴⁷⁷ Catechism of the Catholic Church, (Nairobi: Paulines publications Africa, 2005), 143.

⁴⁷⁸Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, (LibreriaEditriceVaticana: Varican City, 2013), 4

⁴⁷⁹Juan Alfaro, “faith” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, Edited by Karl Rahner (Mumbai: St. Paul’s, 2010), 500.

as St. Paul will express powerfully in his third letter to the Philippians, "I want to 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 struggle⁴⁸⁰ 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.⁴⁸¹ It derives from the Latin word, "virtus" which means *manliness* or *power*; hence explains the natural power or function of a thing⁴⁸² 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."⁴⁸³ Karl Rahner furthers this understanding by explaining

⁴⁸⁰ 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."

⁴⁸¹ Benson, "Are Values the Same as Virtues"

⁴⁸² Thomas Higgins, *Man as Man: The Science and Art of Ethics*, Revised Edition (Illionis: TAN Books and Publishers, 1992), 150.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid*, 150.

virtue in the widest sense “to be any developed capacity of man’s spiritual soul, or 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.”⁴⁸⁴ 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.”⁴⁸⁵ 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 vocation⁴⁸⁶, and mission itself will lose its meaning since it doesn’t stem anymore

⁴⁸⁴Karl 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.

⁴⁸⁵ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*(Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996), 63.

⁴⁸⁶ 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.”

from a believer who is convinced of what he/she is being sent to proclaim. This 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”⁴⁸⁷ 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.”⁴⁸⁸

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

Herbert Alphonso, *The Personal Vocation* Eight Edition (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2002) 38.

⁴⁸⁷ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 66.

⁴⁸⁸ Cornelius Uche Okeke, “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.

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 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 letter⁴⁸⁹ 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

⁴⁸⁹Edward 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.

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 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.”⁴⁹⁰ 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*

⁴⁹⁰John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications in Africa, 1992), 60.

affection of the Church...a place that would prepare me and other youths to become a priest like him."⁴⁹¹

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; 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.⁴⁹² "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."⁴⁹³

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).

⁴⁹¹Robert Cardinal Sarah, *God or Nothing* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015), 27.

⁴⁹²Cornelius UcheOkeke, "Contemporary pressures on Priestly Formation: A Formator's perspective" 26.

⁴⁹³Ibid., 27.

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 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."⁴⁹⁴ 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."⁴⁹⁵ 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

⁴⁹⁴Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium*, (Vatican City: LibreriaEditriceVaticana, 2013), 266.

⁴⁹⁵Robert Cardinal Sarah, *God or Nothing*, 3.

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). 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."⁴⁹⁶

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

⁴⁹⁶Evelyn 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.

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 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.⁴⁹⁷ 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.”⁴⁹⁸ *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.⁴⁹⁹

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*.

⁴⁹⁷Louis J. Puhl, *The spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on the Studies in the Language of the Autograph* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1951), 1.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 11

⁴⁹⁹<https://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/prayer/traditional-catholic-prayers/saints-prayers/suscipe-prayer-saint-ignatius-of-loyola>. Accessed on 29th October, 2018.

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 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.⁵⁰⁰ Neatness, godliness, prudence, modesty 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."⁵⁰¹

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.⁵⁰² 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

⁵⁰⁰Robert Cardinal Sarah, *God or nothing*, 124.

⁵⁰¹ Vatican Congregation For Catholic Education, *Directives Concerning the Preparation of Seminary Educators* (1993), 27.

⁵⁰² John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 47.

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 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 us⁵⁰³ 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

⁵⁰³Karl Rahner, "Virtues", 1794.

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 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 affectivity⁵⁰⁴” understood “as the capacity to love and to allow oneself to do so in a right and purified way.”⁵⁰⁵ 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

⁵⁰⁴ “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.” ⁵⁰⁴Vatican Congregation For Catholic Education, *Directives Concerning the Preparation of Seminary Educators*), 5.

⁵⁰⁵Ibid.

suspicion from the formator to the student. It asks us to be humane in our guiding and forming.

The attitude of love sustains the method and process of accompaniment needed to guide the young today as shown in the *Instrumentum Laboris*⁵⁰⁶ 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 identity⁵⁰⁷ on the one hand, and for the religious men and women, configuration to Christ.

22. *Truth and Mercy*⁵⁰⁸. “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.⁵⁰⁹ 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

⁵⁰⁶The Synod of Bishops, “Young People, The Faith and Vocational Discernment” *Instrumentum Laboris for Synod 2018*, 133,134,135.

⁵⁰⁷Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (2016), 30.

⁵⁰⁸I 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

⁵⁰⁹Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2015), 9.

conversation that seems to be defining the doctrinal and pastoral discussions in the Church today.

Oseni Ogunu, in an article published in the *Catholic Voyage* titled, “Mercy and Truth shall Meet together for renewal and fidelity in the Church”⁵¹⁰ 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 mercy⁵¹¹, *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

⁵¹⁰OseniOgunu, “Mercy and Truth Shall Meet Together for Renewal in the Church” 67-125.

⁵¹¹ 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.*

intellectual level or at the practical level. We must “awake the world” by our witnessing to truth and mercy. Acknowledging the contributions of some 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 holy⁵¹², 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

⁵¹²Francis *Gaudete et Esultate* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2018), 14. Also read nn 11-13.

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 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 Martin⁵¹³, 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 sexuality⁵¹⁴, 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 discernment⁵¹⁵ is another important area our witnessing to the values of truth and

⁵¹³Fr 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.

⁵¹⁴The 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.

⁵¹⁵ On discernment please read *Instrumentum laboris*, of the Youth Synod, 107-108 and 116-117 on conscience.

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 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 Akinwale⁵¹⁶ and the need for

⁵¹⁶ 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*,

religious especially sisters to renew their understanding of collaborative ministry in relation to social services in dioceses as noted by Cardinal Onayekan.⁵¹⁷ 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.⁵¹⁸ 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.”⁵¹⁹ This 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

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.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

⁵¹⁸ 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

⁵¹⁹ Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (2016), 52.

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 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).

**INTEGRAL FORMATION, THE COMMITMENT AND WITNESS OF
YOUNG PEOPLE AND CONSECRATED PERSONS IN AFRICA**

An exclusive Interview with Archbishop Anthony MUHERIA

(Catholic Archdiocese of Nyeri, Kenya, and a Delegate of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops at the Synod of Bishops, Vatican City, 2018)

The Catholic Voyage: What is your general impression of the Synod of Bishops now approaching its conclusion?

Archbishop Anthony Muheria: First and foremost, the Synod is a good experience. From all over the world we are able to share ideas and experiences. We see the Church in a wider context. Certainly, it has been a very good, positive experience. As well, the presence of other auditors has added a bit of spice to the Synod. You are able to see and hear the presence of young people, who also helped us in the moment of discernment. We have spoken a bit about that. It is a very good experience.

It is a wake-up call to us bishops, because I think it has been an abandoned sector of our pastoral. So to pay attention to them in a very specific way, and not merely pay attention to them as just a sector of the pastoral but thinking specifically that it is they who are going to carry the Church into the next level or frontier. Therefore, it is either we are going to strengthen their faith, so that it gets stronger, and so we are going to have better families; or, on the contrary, we don't do it and the Church will suffer the consequences of malnutrition of the next generation. So, the Church must take to heart the issues of: how do we meet the needs of the pastoral care of the young people; how do we change the methods and means of the pastoral care of young people; and how we give them a central role in the efforts to organize it. So, the Synod has been a very good experience for reflection and, as I said, it is wake-up call to bishops, it gives us time to think, so that when we go back to our Bishops' Conferences, we are ready to start some of the things we have heard here (at the Synod) while we await whatever will come from the Holy Father.

The Catholic Voyage: African young people are awaiting and expecting a lot from this Synod. What are the reality and principal problems of young people in Africa, say as distinct from other regions? What specific relevance has this Synod to young people of at this time in Africa, at least in Kenya?

Archbishop Anthony Muheria: My thoughts are both on Kenya and, even though it is difficult to speak of the whole of continent, I know the feel in Africa is more or less very similar. The reality of the Church is a mosaic; the problems of Europe are very different from the problems of Africa. But we need to listen to other parts because now the global world is inter-connected. We must also contribute the many good experiences we have had in Africa. In Africa the principal problems that worry young people are: formation for vocations, employment, and education.

At the same time, in Africa we have many young people who are in the Church, who are close to it; they are very happy, and are proudly aware that they are an integral part of the Church. Young people are the joy of Africa. Remember that the huge percentage of the youth in the Church today is from Africa – and from Asia, if we may add. So, the future of the growing church is in Africa. Thank God, the young people are not running away from our Churches in the strict sense. They are still connected to us. The years of youth must be years of joy. We must take away all this pessimism and negativity, and give optimism, hope, happiness so that they can enjoy their youth, with its problems, but be on top of them. Pope Francis is talking about accompaniment.

African young people face some unique and concrete problems, distinct from those of Europe. First of all, there are many young people in the Church in Africa, who are happy in the Church; we have vocations. The problem is to form those vocations, to give them hope when there is hunger, when there is poverty.

In addition, employment is a very big problem in Africa. Young people don't have jobs, so they don't have hope. Africa's young people also have the problem of ethnic hatred, which is very strong. We must talk to them about that, about the need to live in charity, to accept others, even if they are different, of other ethnic groups.

Thirdly, there is the problem of Education. Many of them don't have an adequate level of education. They haven't gone beyond primary and secondary school. The majority of young people do not have a career. That's a big problem for their ideals and their dreams. In addition to these concrete things, there are also problems of corruption in Africa. They have been seen; they are introducing them to corruption, into a structure of corruption, into a government of corruption... They see it as a normal thing; this is another problem.

Fourthly, there is the problem of the many emigrants in Africa. We have had this problem for more than ten years. And they come from countries of Africa: the Congo, Rwanda, many from Sudan, many from Somalia. There are many we receive there, but they live in very poor situations, without hope, without education. This problem is quite big. The United Nations helps us, but the aid that comes is very limited. It's not help to live, but help to survive. Then they try to survive up to a moment when they lose hope. Some have been in those camps for over 10 years; they don't know a normal life. Children who were born there, then even family life becomes difficult because people have nothing to do; then there are bad habits of life also... etc... It's a very big problem, but unfortunately, no one talks about it. There is no talk of the problems we have in Africa. Until there is a disaster in Africa, they won't talk about these problems in the press. They talk about Africans that emigrate from Africa to Europe, from Iraq, OK, they are many, but we have a far greater problem there.

But another set of realities are the obstacles the young people face, namely, the easy lure to go into new churches, new Pentecostals, new prosperity Gospel... In other words, they are not firm enough in the faith, to stand up, with conviction, for what they believe in.

I would quickly notice and hope that, as an immediate effect, we are going to dedicate more time to form them; that we are going to affirm them; that we are going

to mentor them; and hopefully give them the tools so that they can go through the new situation when they find themselves faced by other religions who try to seduce or convince them, or by the society of secularisation, or even by the greed that has come along with prosperity gospel and other ills that have come with it. Therefore, we must make them true witnesses. The Church in Africa was evangelised by very young people. The missionaries were very young when they came to evangelize Africa. And they were courageous, mature and they were able to do great things. Even now, the young people in Africa can take up that role in Africa if we assist them, so that they can rejuvenate the Church, by standing firm and making our Church even stronger in Africa, both in faith and knowledge but also in action, in self-giving in their mission.

The Catholic Voyage: *The Catholic Voyage* team knows that there some young Consecrated persons participating at this Synod. This is an encouraging thing: the Synod is also for your young Religious women and men. What is your message, invitation -- or even questioning, if you wish - to young consecrated persons in Africa today?

Archbishop Anthony Muheria: The Consecrated persons in Africa have always been a great example. The missionaries came and gave a great example of self-giving. They gave their lives. Many died. You remember that when they were coming, some died after one or two years, but they never relented, they went for the Gospel. They stayed with us, they gave out themselves, they taught us total, radical self-giving. I think that is what the young people look for.

Young people have very lofty ideals. We can't give them half-baked ideals or faith. Young people exact the highest justice. We also have the highest Truth, and we can't dilute it for them, and it is the same thing also for the faith. Then we must think about how to "package" how to "wrap" it better for them. It must be sold well; we must try to communicate well, ever better, the Christian Faith and morals to young people and others. At the same time, however, young people must see it "pure" with their own eyes. And that's difficult. They are idealists who want something that is worth giving their lives for. We pray the Holy Spirit to illumine and guide us also in this regard.

So, I encourage the young Religious men and women and also the young priest not to dilute their self-giving. The real satisfaction comes from a real giving fully. When we start half-giving, then it becomes very difficult for us to be faithful to the mission. We have great mentors and we have great heroes, whom we must emulate. So, the young Religious and the young priest must look up to those young missionaries who came to Africa. And also to Blessed Cyprian Iwene Tansi who, as you know, was a young priest who gave a tremendous example of holy life and witness to the Gospel. It is not outdated. Today we need similar self-giving. Not necessarily martyrs in the sense of killing, shedding of blood. We have saints like St. Theresa of Lisieux to emulate.

If we are willing, we can be formed. Not only the young religious women and men, but also the priests, even we the bishops, must be ready to give a more radical self-giving in the service of the Gospel. And we need those heroes more than even

now. The young people are capable, perhaps more than we the older ones. Because they have more energy, because they have more conviction, they are more driven, they are more enthusiastic. When age comes we lose a bit of enthusiasm, but these young people have it. I hope that that will bring a new rejuvenation to the action of the Church. Not just because they think they know more than the older ones, but because God counts on them now. This is their moment, this is the opportune time!

The Catholic Voyage: Kenya happens to be a privileged country in terms of growing number of Religious men and women, of Institutes of Consecrated persons, universities, and so on. These can contribute very much to the formation, isn't it?

Archbishop Anthony Muheria: Yes. We must very much thank God for the number of vocations in Africa. We must not take it for granted. We must form the young vocations. It is a great blessing now that we have them. Most probably we are going to be the ones to send missionaries back to other countries of older Christianity. But we must form them well in Christ. We must form them not in some half-baked Christianity, but in solid Christianity. At the same time, Christianity is not just knowledge; it is Christianity in life, it is a radically lived Christian life. And that is what we need a lot of formation for. We thank God for the vocations. We do not need to take it for granted. We must ask the Lord to send us more vocations, but we must form them – initial and permanent formation. This is true for the Religious, for the priests, the Bishop: it is necessary to form them in the seminary and formation houses, form them in the love of God, form them in virtue, form them in charity, form them in the virtue of chastity for God. This is not without struggle. Form them in truth and mercy, such that we must be ready to reach out to the people where they are, not just waiting for them to come, not just condemning them, but mercifully going out for them. Then, also form them in accompaniment, meaning being there for them humanly, being father or mother for them.

The Catholic Voyage: Thank you for granting us this opportunity and for sharing your thoughts.

Archbishop Anthony Muheria: You are welcome.

II.

GIVE WINGS AND ROOTS TO YOUNG PEOPLE: THE MESSAGE AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS 2018 FOR AFRICA AND CONSECRATED LIFE

*An exclusive Interview with Bishop John Akin OYEJOLA
(Catholic Diocese of Oshogbo, Nigeria, and a delegate of Catholic Bishops'
Conference of Nigeria at the Synod of Bishops 2018).*

The Catholic Voyage: *Good afternoon! Thank you for the opportunity for The Catholic Voyage to discuss with you about the Synod of Bishops on the Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment. We would like you to share with us your thoughts on this Synod*

and some aspects of its message, and help our readers to better understand it especially in relation to the young people and the Consecrated life in Nigeria and possibly Africa.

Bishop John Oyejola: Thank you. It is my joy to share my views with you.

The Catholic Voyage: *What are your general impressions of the journey of this Synod of Bishops, which is now coming to its conclusion?*

Bishop John Oyejola: It has been an interesting, challenging, brain storming experience and it spurred lots of reflections. I am very positive and optimistic about it, because it is a way of building future Church. We focussed on exploring deeper and showing that the youths are grace, strength and blessing for the Church. We therefore must seek to deepen their faith and build their capacity to be credible witnesses and productive citizens.

The Catholic Voyage: *Shortly before the Synod began; we heard in the news media that some groups say their voices are not represented in the Synod. From your experience, knowing the happenings inside the Synod, as a matter of fact do you think the voices of the youth are being heard at the Synod?*

Bishop John Oyejola: Absolutely! It is not possible to consult every person. However, many groups of young people were consulted, and all the five continents were represented. Even the bishops were represented throughout the five continents. And we spoke for our continents. So, all our youths were brought in to the table and the young people made interventions; we discussed issues that are facing them today.

The Catholic Voyage: *As you listen to the other Synod Fathers and participants in the Synod, have there been some proposals in particular that have struck you concerning how the Church-as-Family of God can effectively transmit the Catholic faith to young Africans today?*

Bishop John Oyejola: Yes. Basically, we discussed more in depth the issues facing our young people. They are issues like the breakdown of marriage and family life, sexuality crises, the lack of jobs to do, the lack of good governance cascading into more complex issues such as compulsive migration, loss of hope and violence. These are issues that really affect young people.

The Catholic Voyage: *There have been many Synods of Bishops since Vatican Council II. What, if any, do you see as being unique about this particular Synod? Practically what is the relevance of this Synod to Nigeria and its young people?*

Bishop John Oyejola: What I see as unique about this Synod is the desire to go out and work, to put into practice our resolutions. We made some concrete proposals on what to be done. Part of it is that they expect dioceses to have youth centres, places where the youth can come together. They expect us to go back and see how we can start creating jobs in a little way for our young people, to make them committed and

see how we can equip them into the faith, and help to strengthen and deepen their faith as well.

The Catholic Voyage: *Some young consecrated persons are also participating in the Synod. This is encouraging in the sense that the Church thus recognises the presence and role of young consecrated persons in society and church. They represent all young consecrated persons in Africa and the world. What do you consider the key message of this Synod to Consecrated Persons, at least in the present-day Nigeria?*

Bishop John Oyejola: One of the main issues raised about consecrated life is that those who are gaining admission into Institutes of Consecrated Life are members of the youth, they are young people. So, they should let them have the same mind that they are missionaries as well. Because they are very special to God's mind, they should see themselves in the image of Jesus when he was their own age. Jesus was already acting, bringing the Gospel to everyone. Young people, too, are challenged to behave like Jesus, not to look or focus at failures of those who are ahead of them but they must to look at Jesus as their ideal and live that life.

The Catholic Voyage: *One of the essential topics in the Synod's Working document is "discernment". Does theme appear as a key issue during the discussions at the Synod? If so, what in your view are the requirements and practical implications of discernment in the accompaniment of young people, including candidates in formation for Consecrated Life and Priesthood and in the diocesan pastoral ministry?*

Bishop John Oyejola: We talked about *discernment* not on its own alone, in abstract as it were, but in line with accompaniment, a journeying with. So, discernment is in two ways: you discern and I discern, and you tell me what you want to do. And I look at you, what is happening in your life, and help you to see things, assisting you to look at issues in this way or may be in other direction. So, we journey together, accompanying the individual. So, discernment is a process which you do, not just once but throughout the journey, as you journey together, in truth and mercy. That can be done in the atmosphere of friendship, care, openness prayer, and so on. These are some of the things that were suggested.

The Catholic Voyage: *I am curious from the viewpoint of pastoral experience. You have been a priest for many years now and you are a young Bishop. Pastorally, is there something in particular that gives you hope for the future of the Church in Nigeria, particularly in relation to the young people in Nigerian dioceses?*

Bishop John Oyejola: This question is of personal interest to me. I have been a youth Coordinator for my diocese and when I came into the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, I was chosen as Episcopal Chaplain for the Youth in the country, and that is the reason why I am in this particular Synod. Yes, I am very optimistic about the future of the Church in Nigeria. In Nigeria, there are many dioceses that have their chaplain for Youth. Even the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria has an office for the youth. And there is a priest there coordinating the programs for the youth throughout the country. We have a kind of outlined programs, such as: the

training of chaplains, the training of the president, secretary and treasurer of youth groups in all and each dioceses together, to empower them, to give them a sense of leadership. In many dioceses they are doing a lot of great things for the youth. Take Oshogbo for example, we are doing so much. Recently, because of the situation in the country, we have started a Catering Centre for young people. Almost all the first set got jobs instantly with pay above the minimum wage in Nigeria. The first set comprised of 32 people, the 2nd group had 47 people enrolled, and now we have 65 people doing the course. They are growing in number. The elite people in the region need persons to assist them. For example, families need person to take care of their children, or take care of the house for them. However, they need people who are trained. Not just trained, but trained from good centres, such as are the Catholic training centres. So, people appreciate that the Catholic training centres offer quality training and they are ready pay money for the services offered. Graduates from these centres, once employed, would have free housing as well, and they have one month salary free during their holiday period, making it thirteen months' salary in a year. So, it is a good package for them. If they are able to manage and save money very well, in no time they can start their own business as well. So, this is really helping young people. This idea is coming up also in the area of agriculture. Part of what we discussed at the Synod is: How can we get financial support for those who have plans so as to help them carry out such plans? For example, for such program, in the case of my diocese, I need tractors. One tractor will cost me about sixteen million Naira (which is about US\$40,000) in Nigeria. If I can get somebody who can get me two tractors, in five years time I would have produced more than forty young people who will be self-sustained, having their own farms. This has a ripple effect, because it's going to produce more food for the country, they are already self-employed and gradually the problem of unemployment, the lack of jobs, will reduce; there will be enough food for many regions of the country, and we shall have more peace.

The Catholic Voyage: *Let us talk about the Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria (CYON), present in many dioceses. The Synod of Bishops is challenging to all countries of the world. But in Nigeria particularly, how will the Synod help to revamp, renew and reinvigorate the CYON such that it can produce creative and courageous initiatives, and be more practical and solution-oriented?*

Bishop John Oyejola: Young people in Nigeria are very vibrant and active. What we need to do more is for the Bishops to have more interest in it, by training more priests for that purpose. Right now, in Oshogbo diocese for example, we are training two priests. One of them is at the Salesian Pontifical University, Rome, and another is in Kenya, such that one is coming back next year and the other is spending another two years before returning. When they come back, they will be two priests fully assigned to that particular apostolate. They will know what to do because they are trained for that particular apostolate. You do not send just anybody for that such special apostolate; no, send someone who is already skilled in that apostolate,

prepared for that mission. Because it is a serious mission. I will try to sell that kind of idea to other bishops: please train people for that area and bring them to that job. Even when they finish training, do not immediately take them away; rather, let them go and practice that apostolate, let them do work a long time in that field. But it is not enough to train people. They need resources, too. Youth apostolate is a kind of venture on which you have to spend money. In the long run, it will yield interest for the Church. This is very important.

The Catholic Voyage: *For nearly over fifty years or so the Church in Africa has been talking about money for its evangelizing mission, particularly in terms of ensuring her financial self-reliance and self-sustenance. African theologians and pastors have discussed it. Some had even proposed a moratorium of the Churches in Africa on the financial request and dependency on funds from abroad. Obviously, the urgent appeal for financial self-reliance -- which is understood to be complementary to Christian solidarity -- is in addition to the equally widespread felt need for cultural self-reliance and self-reliance in personnel. And you have just referred to this problem now: the need for money. Money influences people's way of thinking and their planning and execution of projects. Now, while it seems the Catholic Church in Africa has by-and-large obtained the self-reliance in personnel, the other serious questions remain. Where will the money for pastoral care of young people and for other apostolates come from? Concretely, what are the specific measures, and the strategic plans and policies of the Church in Nigeria, indeed in Africa, so that in the next 20-40 years, the Church in Nigeria would not still be in the situation we are today but rather, as a matter of fact, she will financially rely on and sustain herself and her evangelizing mission, at least for the most part?.*

Bishop John Oyejola: Attaining self-reliance for a local Church is determined mainly by the prosperity of the local people otherwise the Church would have stopped being a local church. It is they who would enrich the church. Our effort has been to improve the lot of our people. If we don't invest on them, we would eventually spend whatever we invest elsewhere on them except we are no longer the compassionate face of Christ. The kind of governance in Africa is not helping issues at all. Many dioceses are trying their best. As said earlier, in my diocese we have gone into farming in order to attract and support the local people in farming. There is land everywhere. We train farmers free of charge to improve their yield and marketing skills. An interesting part of it is that when we train these young people, some money will come into the diocese. We are even thinking of the area of agricultural value chain. In this way the church can buy their produce at fair price to process or store in order to reduce the loss suffered by farmers from unfair middlemen. We continue to lobby the government to look into the unfair market situation for rural farmers through relevant policies and initiatives.

Also, we face a lot of challenges. We have to pay the school fees of some of the children, then also the hospital bills. We cannot close our eyes to some of these problems when the government is not doing its part. So, there are lot of areas or avenues through which the little money we have goes out. But many dioceses in

Africa, particularly in Nigeria, are making efforts to be self-reliant and self-sustaining. Truly, it is not a good thing that we are always going out to beg for funds. Yes, this frequent practice does not give you, as Africans, dignity and sufficient freedom.

The Catholic Voyage: *In what concrete ways do you suggest Bishops and the Religious women and men can collaborate in the pastoral care of young people in the evangelization of Nigeria, since we all are co-responsible for it?*

Bishop John Oyejola: In this sphere of youth apostolate, I see that Priests and Bishops are men. If we can have more female religious who can collaborate in that area of apostolate, it will be better. When I was a chaplain the young ladies will come and talk to me about things that have to do with women. I had to say, "Come and talk to the Rev. Sister here". It is only on one-on-one, because the Rev. Sister is easy for me to approach. But if a Sister is not there, and the young girls need help, it may become difficult to accompany. This is one of the areas of ministry where collaboration is necessary. The Religious Superiors could allow the Sister to work in the diocese in the youth ministry. The Religious Institute can either train them and allow them to work in that apostolate in the diocese; or the bishop trains them and give the trained Sister a sufficient time to do the apostolate in the diocese. It is not just nor proper that the Bishop trains a Sister, and then immediately after her Superiors come to say they need her for other place or/and apostolate. So, if the Bishop trains a person, her Institute should give the person the opportunity and time to actualize the goal, the purpose of the training and see the result for which the person was trained. No doubt, there are many other areas of apostolate where Bishops and the Religious can and should work together in the diocese. It is not enough to be praying. Prayer is very important and necessary. But prayer without work is dead.

The Catholic Voyage: *Most of us know the story of the young African St. Augustine and his conversion. But, today, it may be asked: Who are other models, if any, of holy life that we can present to the young people in the Africa?*

Bishop John Oyejola: Of course, there are people whom we can present to young people in the area of holiness and sainthood. The purpose of church naming saints is to challenge people, as she says: "Look, these people we are proclaiming saints were once human beings like you. He or she lived a holy life, following Christ. It is now your own turn to be like that person". There are lot of people you see as ideal people: we have St. Kizito, St. Mother Theresa of Calcutta, St. John Paul II.... In our own areas, too, in Africa, there are lot of people living among their parents and families. They know those who are living an exemplary, holy life. The children and young people see us; you can't hide from them. They know our sincerity. That is why many of them, when they see how sincere you are they open up themselves to you for help. They know there are lot of people who are making efforts every day to

be holy. They are making effort in the right way and people know it. And these young people see them and they try to emulate them and model their life after them. So, you see them coming for prayers, for pilgrimages, for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and so on: it is because they are encouraged by other people's lives which are modelled after Jesus' life and the life of other saints, too.

The Catholic Voyage: *What is your dream, if you have one, for this Synod and for Nigeria? As a pastor, what do you envisage as the more important and outcome of this Synod of Bishops for the Africa?*

Bishop John Oyejola: Yes, I have a dream. As a pastor I dream always. My first dream is that I want to see the local church giving wings to our young people to fly, and giving them roots to be firm on ground. It simply means spurring them to have the confidence to explore life and the same time be firmly rooted in the faith to be resilient in the face of difficulties and be able to witness even unto death. That is, I will ground them in their faith, no matter what the challenges are, because we cannot live as Christians without challenges. It is normal to have a cross; everything has its own trademark. The only trademark of a Christian is the cross. When we have a challenge, that is our own cross. So, we have to encourage our young people to know that when they have challenges, they are not to run away from them; they are to face the challenges with the hope that they are going to overcome them. They must trust in Christ, because Christ is the Emmanuel: he is always with us, till the end of time. That is my dream.

The Catholic Voyage: *All the themes of the Synod are important for the universal Church. Though you may have hinted at it, one must ask: specifically, what issues raised at the Synod do you consider more relevant and urgent for the Church in Nigeria of our time?*

Bishop John Oyejola: I have mentioned some of them: attending to challenge of loss of hope issuing from break down in family life, poverty, war, violence, immigration and environmental degradation. For instance many young people from Benin City, Nigeria, are a case in point. Recently some Rev. Sisters went to give a workshop to children and young people in Benin City concerning migration. Many of the girls are still saying, "Let us go and experience what others are experiencing abroad" Even when these girls are told that it is dangerous, very risky, they still wish to go out. And I read in the news yesterday that the Government officials are even doing home-to-home education, asking families not to let their children migrate abroad. In fact, when they migrate they are not prepared psychologically for it. They don't have the proper skills. When they get there, they are not going to get a job; so, what are they going to be doing there? Often, they become prostitute, and this go along with human trafficking. These are the major issues in Africa: attending to poverty; how to help us reduce war and violence, and then migration of our young people and thus they lose their faith, lose their cultures, and lose their lives as well.

The Catholic Voyage: *This year, 2018, we celebrate the golden Jubilee of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). Africa is blessed with having a very large percentage of young people in the world and in the Church; the number is growing. In your view, in what ways can the Church-Family of God in Nigeria, including Consecrated Persons, concretely receive and advance the implementation of the Synod of Bishops on young people? Are there going to be strategic plans by the Bishops and their dioceses in this regard?*

Bishop John Oyejola: One issue we have in Africa is the language. We are already talking in that area. We see that the President of SECAM should try to call all, or at least the representatives of each country in Africa together, table this matter and let us have concrete plan. It should not just be a concrete plan: there should be a follow up to it, an evaluation of it after some years, to see: How far have we gone? What have we achieved? Where do we want to go? This is exactly what we have in mind.

The Catholic Voyage: *You highlighted the important and necessary issue of strategic planning and periodic evaluation by the SECAM after this Synod. At the same time, consider that, hopefully, very many people (even outside the Catholic Church) will read the final document and message of the Synod from different perspectives and contexts. As an African, what particular issues do you see that young people should be engaged with, and committed to? What do you consider to be their own roles, what should they expect from the Church? The diocesan Bishops will do something in favour of the youth, but what are the young people to do?*

Bishop John Oyejola: What we expect from the young people is to co-operate with the plan of the Church. Young people can dream very big. They want to become President of the nation in two or three years. Let them dream, but they should listen to experience of life, cooperate with the plan that the Church is already putting in place for young people. As I said earlier, I am happy that among those I trained as a caterer one of them was a graduate. I was happy; he came to me to say thank you very much. I said to him, now with this your new certificate, if one certificate is not working, the other will work for you. In the same way, if some of the young people can humble themselves and be open to corrections and directions, I think they will do very well.

The Catholic Voyage: *in what practical and specific ways do you envisage and hope that the diocesan Bishops and the Religious Institutes can work in collaboration to facilitate and effectively advance the reception and implementation of the deliberations of this Synod the pastoral care of young people?*

Bishop John Oyejola: The first thing is for each diocese to have diocesan pastoral plan. The Pastoral plan is a roadmap developed together. In my diocese, all the Religious have a copy of the Pastoral Plan. They know where they have to come in; and after finishing that, we had a meeting with all the priests, and a meeting with all

the Religious men and women. Everybody knows where they come in. That gives direction to all pastoral initiatives. But if there is no kind of specific pastoral plan, a road map, there will always be a problem. I think every diocese should have the Pastoral Plan, as a road map. In this way you do not start afresh every time. Our diocesan Plan lasts for five years. After five years, we will do evaluation, and then rewrite and update, considering: What have we done? What have we not done? What are the ways forward? We draw a new pastoral plan for another five years, If possible, we organize a Diocesan Synod where everybody participates for us to grow, and move forward.

The Catholic Voyage: *In the light of the interventions at the Synod of Bishops, what do you think are the possible implications and prospects of the Synod for (a) the formators in our Formation Houses and Seminaries, and (b) Vocations Directors?*

Bishop John Oyejola: Of course, the Synod dwelt on this issue. A particular view was pushing everything to the seminary and formation houses, it appears that there will be too many programs for the Seminary and they will not have enough time to carry out these programs. The formators themselves must be ready to take the work of formation as a real vocation. It is like Eli and Samuel. They are to *discern* with the young people; they are to journey with them. Not all of them will become priests or Brothers, or Sisters. But let them see that, yes, you are good person; however it is not in this place you are going to thrive or blossom. The candidates themselves must be ready, and be open; they have to be "friends" in the journey, not a kind of master-slave relationship, but friends, those who are working together, in accompaniment. This is very important. And we expect them to be well prepared; not everyone should enter the seminary. Those who have the aptitude, the skills, and the interest are to be considered. All this, of course, also applies to those who aspire to enter into Formation Houses of Religious institutes.

The Vocations Director, too, has a responsibility. The Vocations Director should not have a particular interest in this or that person. There should be no God-fatherism there, and no tribalism. That is why we talk about accompaniment and discernment. Even if it is my brother who wants to enter the seminary or the Formation house but does not have the aptitude and other important requirements, I will have to tell him, "Brother, this is not your way. You will not be happy here. Everybody is looking for happiness".

The Catholic Voyage: *You made an intervention on Formation and empowerment of Catholic Youths in Africa. What did you tell the members of the Synod?*

Bishop John Oyejola: I have shared a part of what I said at the Synod during this conversation. Here is my intervention (*He shows the written text of his intervention at the Synod, which is completely presented below. Ed.'s Note*):

As many African states (Nigeria inclusive) are still in the process of maximizing their full economic potentialities, the Church in Africa is also consistently growing as the faith is taking firmer root in the continent.

Both the African state and Church, however, are confronted with a threat that might not only shatter her dream but also pose a serious crisis to the entire globe. I am referring to the tragic condition of youths in Africa.

Youths and children make up about 63% of our population. Unfortunately, up to 71% of them are confronted with the threat of uncertain future as they languish in pitiable conditions. Most of them work hard to secure not just their own future but those of their families as their aging parents are frequently denied of their pensions and very few are capable of providing for the family. It is sad to mention that even though Africans have strong bond with their root and heritage as a people, over 60% of African youths are convinced that migrating to the western world is the sole security for their future and that of their families.

Almost 7 or 8 out of every 10 young people believe that migrating away from home holds the key to their future. A considerable number of these youths lack formidable formal education and knowledge of technical skills. A number of them lack the proper mental, physical and social preparation for migration. Yet they are often desperate and determined to do so through often life-threatening means, due to the dire economic and political situation of the continent.

The conditions in which many of these young and vibrant Africans migrate are miserable and inhuman. In the search for greener pastures, there is often the loss of core cultural values and moral principles. They become easy pawns for abuses of every sort and are often victims of traffickers and captives of modern slave traders *cum* owners.

I am of the opinion that more pastoral aid and support should be given to the youths. The youths should be better catechetized and well-grounded in the social teaching of the Church in a manner that they are able to make mature decisions and learn to turn deserts into lush gardens. The Church has to find means of providing technical support for skilled and unskilled youths, thereby filling up the gaps created by successive political administrators. A wholesome mental formation and reorientation will go a long way in producing creative and passionate youths who will be totally dedicated to the task of building their nations and correcting the mistakes of the past.

The Catholic Voyage: *Finally, what word of advice and encouragement do you have for the Formators in the Formation Houses and seminaries, the Vocations Directors, and Christian youth leaders in Nigeria drawing from your experiences these weeks of the Synod of Bishops?*

Bishop John Oyejola: First, for the formators. Formation can be challenging. When I was a youth chaplain, I would not take nonsense; and so they gave me a nickname:

"Marshall", a difficult man. Yet, they will still come back to me, when they want the truth. Many of them did not like me. So, I was not doing things for them to like me. I was doing things for them to be good people. But in the long run, they not only like me, they love me. So, I will encourage the formators not to do things to make them become popular among the seminarians or among candidates for Consecrated Life. But they should do things that would make young people and candidates in formation see the Formator as somebody who is truthful, sincere and direct. Because you cannot lie to young people. If you lie to them today, tomorrow when they discover you have lied to them, they will hate you forever. But today, when you are doing the right thing they may not like you, while in the long run they will see you did the right thing and will come to love you. In a word, formators may find some challenges in their apostolate, but they should not give up but must continue to strive and do the best they can.

So also for the Vocations Director, and the Youth Leaders. They should just do the right thing. All of us are called to be witnesses to the truth. There is only one Truth, and that is Jesus Christ.

The Catholic Voyage: *Thank you for the time and the opportunity to share with us your thoughts concerning the Synod of Bishops on young people as it relates to Africa, especially Nigeria, and the Consecrated Life today.*

Bishop John Oyejola: It is my joy, Fr. Ogunu.

BEING A PRIEST AND PROUD TO BE

Agharese Arase

National Human Rights Commission, Abuja (Nigeria)

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.

Keywords: Priest, Identity, Human Rights, Christ, Church,

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.¹¹ Every 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).¹³The 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."¹⁸ Ultimately, 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."²² The 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 public 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 the

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.”²⁹Good 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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THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN THE FORMATION OF A COMMITTED CHRISTIAN IN THE SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of a Christian family in the spiritual and social formation of a committed consecrated person. It addresses the family as central in the life of a child and the inalienable right of the child as a member of the family. The family, therefore, serves as the child's first domestic Church and micro-society. As a result, the child's family

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should respect and uphold the rights of the child. It also discusses the role of the family as the first Local Church and the evangelizer of the child. As primary evangelizers, parents initiate the primary growth in the spirituality of their child in words and practice. Pope Francis calls the parent-children evangelization Kerygma, "the most beautiful, most excellent, most appealing, and at the same time most necessary." Such gestures of faith in action nurture the spiritual growth of the children kindle the child's desire to embrace a higher commitment to a life of total self-giving in the service of the Lord and the Church. The call to total consecration, therefore, is an additional call to a Christian that requires total submission to the will of God through the observation and practice of the publicly or privately professed Evangelical Counsels: Obedience, Poverty, and Chastity in a stable state of life recognized by the Church. As some of the disciples of Jesus Christ withdrew when they could not embrace Christ's teaching on the Eucharist, so would a consecrated person who did not understand or accept the implications of the religious commitment question the rationality of the vows until such a person separates him or herself from the religious community. When the consecrated person decides to withdraw his/her religious obligations and returns to his or her former way of life, parents ought to respect such decision and strive to reintegrate him or her with the full rights of the member of the family and society.

INTRODUCTION

The role of the family in the formation of a committed consecrated person is dominant in God's creative work. At creation, God made them male and female and gave them the mandate to increase and multiply. When man disobeyed God his creator, God, in his infinite love and mercy wishing to restore man to his original glory of paradise, chose the human family. A committed consecrated person is likely to originate from a stable family where a man and a woman are lawfully united by the sacrament of matrimony and raise their children according to the mind of Christ. The Church and other authors teach that the family is the first Local Church and spiritual formator of the child. Through such stable families, God call and form an authentic and committed consecrated person. A consecrated person, according to the teaching of the Church, is one that hears and answers God's call to live a stable form of life in an institution approved by the Church.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS

The parental obligation in the formation of a Christian cannot be overstated. The role of parents toward the overall development of the child begins at the child's conception. The paternal concern, love, and care commence from the moment of conception and grow with the birth of the child. Because of the cares and concerns, parents invoke God's blessings and protection of their child. They begin to have extensive dreams about the education, moral, and perhaps the spiritual development of the child. They become the child's first natural and religious and the child's first Domestic Church. As parents endeavour to understand the material and health needs of the child they trace the sign of the cross on the forehead of the infant

prior⁵²¹to baptism; thus, parents claim their child for God and informally make the child a Christian. Thus, *David, M. T.* referencing Pope John Paul II and St. John Chrysostom states that the role of parents as the first evangelizers of their children is to embody the gospel love in all their daily words and actions.¹ Steven Meyer, S.T.D. refers the family as the Micro-church that is comprised of the communion of the baptized, father, mother, and the children. He also states that the family, for Chrysostom, is like the Church as the family is a communion of baptized persons living in unity under the Headship of Jesus Christ that has visible and invisible dimensions.² Two types of activities make homes as Churches, he says, prayer and the centrality of Scripture.¹ Similarly, S. J. Pope states that the practices shared in Christian households provide a necessary foundation for family members' emotional health, moral and spiritual growth, social commitment, and ecclesial identity.³

In his Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, the Holy Father Francis believes and teaches that parents should provide the initial growth in spirituality to their children. Francis encourages parents to become the first evangelizers of their household. He states in an unequivocal way the importance of the contribution of parents in the evangelical mission of Jesus Christ. Francis writes that catechizing the children by the family and in the family is paramount in the formation of Christian families. He calls family evangelization Kerygma, "the most beautiful, most excellent, most appealing, and at the same time most necessary" that the Gospel message should resound in and among families.⁴

1. DMT, p. 3. Parents are the first evangelizers of their children

2. Meyer, *St. John Chrysostom. The family as Micro-Church*, p. 1, para. 2. The family is a community of the Baptized and Christ as the both the visible and invisible head.

3. S.J. Pope, *A place for everyone. Pastoral Challenges to the family*, p. 2, para1. Families that practice their religion build up the spiritual and emotional life of their children

4. Pope Francis, p. 47, n.58. Family evangelization is the most beautiful task parents can embrace

5. Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, p.67, n. 85 & 86.

6. Meyer, Steven, *St. John Chrysostom. The family as Micro-Church* para 3.

7. Matt.18: 20

8. Sam. 3: 1-11, 17: 13.

9. D.M.T., pp. 2-3.

10. Gen 1:28 .

11. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, (2004). *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* , n. 209

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13. CIC, Can. 573 §1 & 607 §1.

14. Luke: 35.

15. Michael Burbidge, Families Need Contact with the Consecrated Life, p.3, para. 2

16. Luke 6: 38 .

17. Matt. 10:42; Mark 9:41

18. CCC 944 -945.

19. Matt. 8:18 -22, Luke 9:57 – 62

20. John, 6:51 -68

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The universal Church that has been called to cooperate with parents through pastoral initiatives to achieve the mission of educating their children is deeply joyful, grateful, and comforted when families embrace the Church's pastoral ministry and continue faithful to the Gospel teaching. The Church also encourages such families to remain steadfast in the testimony they give as Domestic Church. Families should be glad and consoled when they realize that they are partners with the Church to enter upon an ecclesial experience of communion among persons, which reflects, through grace, the mystery of the Holy Trinity from which they learn endurance, the joy of work, fraternal love, generosity, continuous forgiveness, and divine worship in prayer.⁵ This aspect of steadfastness in the spiritual and moral education of their children bears witness to the centrality of the family in the development of a solid and authentic Christian and a consecrated person.

Meyer, Steven writes that when a family becomes the Local Church, Christ is the visible and invisible head who presides in their midst when they gather in prayer, read the scriptures, and share their meals.⁶ This is an undeniable truth because the Lord says, "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am in their midst, (Matt.18: 20).⁷ From the Micro-church germinates the child's seed of faith, love, and stability; and God could choose a person to the consecrated life as Samuel, the son of Elkanah and David, the son of Jesse, were chosen for a specific purpose. (Sam. 3: 1-11, 17: 13).⁸ *David* writes that John Paul II affirms the parental role especially during the early stages of the development of the life of the child. He states that parents symbolize God for their children and that "Within the 'people of life and the people for life,' the family has a decisive responsibility."⁹ Part of this responsibility is to nurture stable children who would become reliable and committed Christians and or Consecrated persons in the service of God and his Church or in the society.

Parental responsibility to their children as a Micro- church is not limited to reading and oral encouragement and taking them to weekly or daily masses. It requires that parents send their children to catechism classes, take them to regular Sunday Masses (and Church for people that live far from the parish Church), and receive the sacraments especially the sacrament of reconciliation. Parents are to encourage their children to join pious societies and perform spiritual and corporal works of mercy. These aspects of parental responsibilities were what I received from my parents who were poor and semi-illiterate. They did not have the money, they had the faith and the authority that helped my siblings and me to embrace the Catholic faith, and in my case, a religious.

THE FAMILY

Although the modern society had developed various units called family, such as single-parent family, family through civil union, heterogeneous, and homogeneous member-families, an original family could be defined as a group of people knitted together through the union of lawfully married male and female who

bear children and live together in a household. In the African context, the family encompasses both the nuclei and distant blood relatives, (the extended family system). The natural family, therefore, is critical and the only appropriate environment for developing and nurturing of a whole person for the Church and the society. This is true as most of the parents of first candidates that received the call to the priesthood or the religious life were persons that were properly united according to the marriage customs and tradition before the advent of Christianity in Igbo Land. Some of these parents became converts to Catholicity at or after the ordination of their child

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace states that God plans that Adam and Eve, the first created persons should begin a family. Therefore, God gave them the authority to procreate when he commanded them to “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, (Gen 1:28).”¹⁰ Thus, in God’s plan, the family is to be “the primary place of ‘humanization’ for the person and society.” It is also the “cradle of life and love” where children learn the love and faithfulness of the Lord, and the need to respond to God’s faithfulness and love in return.¹¹ It is in the family that children learn their first and most important lessons of practical wisdom that are interconnected with Christian virtues. Because God regards the human family at creation, Jesus was born and lived in a concrete family and accepted all its characteristic features. God conferred to man the highest dignity on the institution of marriage, making it a sacrament of the new covenant. The family, therefore, can be defined as a divinely instituted organization born of the intimate communion of life and love founded on the marriage between one man and one woman. Being a divine and human institution the family has its own specific and original social dimension of interpersonal relationships that is a primary and vital cell of society.¹²

THE CONSECRATED PERSON

A consecrated person is one who God called from a family to embrace a life whose ultimate end is to build up the Church of God through love for the salvation of souls. The Code of the Canon Law of the Catholic Church,¹³ refers to a consecrated person as one who strives to live a life of perfect charity in the service of the kingdom of God thus, serving as an outstanding sign in the Church of the heavenly glory. The consecrated life, therefore, is an additional call to a Christian that requires a complete submission to the divine will through the observation and practice of the publicly professed Evangelical Counsels: Obedience, Poverty, and Chastity in a stable state of life recognized by the Church. Through their authentic Christian life, a family participates through prayer in nurturing the spiritual growth and stability of the one taken from its midst and who has accepted this additional positive step to co-operate with the grace of God to embrace the life of holiness and total surrender to the will of God. Consecration sets a person apart. He or she is synonymous with the Igbo Land sacrificial animals offered to the gods (*Iheagorola Arusi*) the untouchables abandoned in the wilds. Thieves would not steal, nor would a poor man sell them. The animals find themselves befitting environment for their abode

and progeny. The family and the community that understand this aspect of the life of a consecrated person would redesign their expectation from *Aturu ha jichuola Chineke Aja*, (the lamb they have offered to God). Realizing that he or she is a sacrificial animal that is set apart for the glory of God, the consecrated person is to understand and uphold the dignity befitting his or her consecration.

THE HOME OF A CONSECRATED PERSON

The consecrated person belongs perpetually to the family of the universal Church, the Domestic Church, and nuclei family. Because of this trinitarian belonging, the universal Church, the Domestic Church, and the nuclei family are obliged to support candidates to and consecrated persons with supplications to God to enable them to remain faithful and bear fruitful witness to God through the Church. With prayers like this, the family becomes like the Blessed Virgin Mary who hears the prophecy of the old Simeon, meets her only son viciously tortured and carrying the heavy cross on the way to Calvary yet encourages him to accomplish his mission for the redemption of humanity, (Luke: 35).¹⁴ She does this because she is convinced that the cross of her son is for the liberation of humanity bound by the chains of godlessness. The family that understands the mission and the elevated state of their child as the building up of the kingdom of God rejoices in both the poverty and riches their child, (when the child comes home, and requests for Garry and other edibles or comes home with a loaf of bread). Such resignation to the will of God for their child is an expression of the utmost conviction that the life of consecration is beyond the glamour, pomp, and jubilation of the day of ordination to the priesthood or religious consecration. It is a life of supreme sacrifice that the poverty of the family should not destroy.

Bishop Michael Burbidge stresses the importance of the family in raising people for the consecrated life. He writes that the family should be the foundation from which seeds vocations are received, planted, and the nurtured. Although parents nurture the seed of vocation with the help of God's grace, parents might not grasp the full demands of the life of Consecration. Therefore, Burbidge reiterates the responsibility of the consecrated persons to assist parents and family members to understand the responsibilities associated with their call. A fair understanding and knowledge of being set apart for the service of God in the Church, parents and family's perspectives might change. They would consider encouraging their consecrated child to fully embrace and adhere to the obligation of the life of consecration which include obedience and docility to the will of God.¹⁵ When families understand the essence of the life of consecration as the perfection of the love of God, they have understood that they offered to God an acceptable oblation that would begin on earth to yield its benefits. Because of this deep conviction, their view of the benefits of the priestly and religious life deviates from the natural gain to spiritual benefits. Christ doubtlessly would fulfill his promise that abundant gift, pressed down, shaken together, and running over that would be poured into their laps, (Luke 6: 38).¹⁶ If Christ guaranteed a heavenly reward for anyone who gives

these little ones a glass of cold water because they belong, Christ,(Matt. 10:42; Mark 9:41).¹⁷ how much more blessings would Christ bestow on the family that offers their child to God through the Church as a perpetual victim?

A Consecrated life is, therefore, according to the Code of the Canon law of the Catholic Church, a stable form of Christian living by those faithful who are called to follow Jesus Christ in a more exacting way recognized by the Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church also states that the consecrated life is a life consecrated to God and it is characterized by the public profession of the Evangelical Counsels of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, in a stable state of life recognized by the Church.¹⁸Through their authentic Christian life, families participate in nurturing a person that cooperates with the grace of God to embrace the life of sanctification. Thus, the Code of the Canon Law refers to consecrated persons as people whose ultimate life- end is to build up the Church of God for the salvation of souls through striving for the perfection of charity in the service of the kingdom of God and, having been made an outstanding sign in the Church, for the heavenly glory.

The role of the development of a stable and consecrated person begins from the family - the Micro-church and the first evangelizer of the consecrated person. As the embodiment of the treasures of the Christian faith, parents, through their practical Christian life become the model for their children.¹⁹Thus, a stable family supports the spiritual journey of the child till Christ is fully formed in the child and a song of thanksgiving and praise resounds from the whole Church for the consecrated person that has become the sign of the eschatology.

THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE CONSECRATED PERSON

The light of faith, love, and stability that a family kindled which produced a consecrated person or an authentic Christian contribute to the growth of Christ's body the Church and kingdom of heaven. However, the authentic Christian- family- belief plays a little role in the eternal commitment of a consecrated person. During his earthly ministry, many became the disciple of our Lord Jesus. Discipleship was interesting, and many followed the Master. Their faith failed when the Lord Jesus preached the Eucharist. Many of his disciples withdrew because of Christ's teaching that his Flesh was real food and his Blood true drink for all who would enter the kingdom of God. The Lord turned to the twelve and asked them if they were to go. The fruit of this question is the unparalleled profession of faith that Peter made for himself and on behalf of the rest of the Apostles, "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the word of eternal life"²⁰. As many of the disciples of Jesus withdrew their discipleship due to the Lord's teaching they found difficult to accept, so do many who zealously embraced the life of Consecration turn back when they encounter the responsibilities and obligations of consecrated life they did not comprehend. Moreover, in the modern world, the prevailing culture of materialism and hedonism conflict with religious practices. When a religious begins to experience such internal conflicts, the effect would be to start to rationalize and compromise the call to

complete self-giving to the service of God and the Church. Such rationalization could result in disobedience as such religious would perform a task that his mind deems observable.

A disobedient religious is less likely to keep the other two vows, Poverty and Chastity. The Consecrated Life and its Role in the Church and the World state the difficulty to respond to the vocation to the life of Consecration is the idea of total surrender of oneself that some who felt they are called encounter. The inability to understand and make a total commitment to God and the Church prevent some people to make the fundamental and lasting commitment. What will the family do when their son or daughter had made a contrary decision? Does he or she no longer belong to the family? The child still belongs to the family and parents should embrace and reintegrate him or her into the family and society. The Compendium of the Church's Social Doctrine based on the biblical viewpoint teaches that the family is central in the life of the child and that the rights and dignity of the child as a member of the family are inalienable rights. As the first natural society of the child, the Church places the family at the center of the child's social life without compromising the rights of the child.²¹ As parents fulfill their role as the first nuclei and Local Church for and the first evangelizers of their children, the dimension of the perseverance of their consecrated child moves from their parental care. The candidate or the consecrated person becomes an adult. As an adult, his choices and decisions can no longer be questioned since his faith in and love for God no longer depend on the faith of his parents.

CONCLUSION

The role of the Christian family, therefore, is indispensable in the growth of the seed of a committed consecrated person. Parents are to view their role as the role of a Domestic Church and first evangelizers of their children through which the seed of vocation of their child to a life of consecration is propagated. They are to understand as the blessed Virgin Mary understood the vocation of Jesus and supported him to accomplish the redemption of humanity. Hannah also offered Samuel to God before Samuel heard and answered the voice of God. Similarly, God called David. All those that God called, he entrusted them with a specific mission. Parents and families are to persevere with the sacrifice they have offered to God, not letting poverty or riches distract and destroy the grace God has bestowed on them through the call of their child. Nonetheless, the perseverance of the consecrated person relies on God's will and Mercy. And the family should accept the will of God and reinstate their child should he or she make decision short of perseverance in a religious community.

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Endnote

**OF WORDS AND SYMBOLS:
A THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO THE CBCN COMMUNIQUE ON THE
KILLINGS IN MAKURDI DIOCESE**

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(NB: The following reflections, here systematically formulated, were originally presented by the author during debates with some of his confreres and friends in a group social media chat. Their conversations followed the timely strongly worded Communiqué of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) which expressed the Church's grave concern over the spate of violence in Nigeria, not excluding the murder of 02 priests and 17 parishioners in Benue State on 24 April 2018 and, then, the massacre of many innocent Nigerians in Plateau State. The Bishops "are devastated by these acts of insensitivity and disrespect for the dignity of human life". The Communiqué provoked widespread and, at times passionate, comments, debates and reflections in the Church and society in Nigeria. Besides the Communiqué, an historic nationwide peaceful protest by Christians, supported by Catholics Bishops, was being planned. Editor's Note)

The intellectual faculty is said to be one of the most distinguishing qualities that separates the human community from the rest of the animal kingdom. It is not only that human beings possess the rational faculty but are conscious that they possess it. But another most distinguishing faculty in man/woman is the faculty of speech. Though distinct from the faculty of the intellect, it is intrinsically connected to the intellectual faculty. Hence, speech is more than an articulation of sounds. It is an intelligent articulation of intelligible sounds. These intelligible sounds are called words which are nothing but vehicles of thoughts. Words are carriers of thoughts, ideas, and meanings.

Though completely non-tactile and imperceptible, words are nonetheless very powerful. They can set off a series of chain reaction of unimaginable proportion of which the effects or consequence, either beneficial or harmful, often outlive the author of those words. The power of words not only lie in the one who utters them, but sometimes even more in the very ideas or thoughts they convey. To understand the Greek concept of *logos* and the Hebrew concept of *dabar*, is to grasp the power of words or speech. It is, therefore, of little wonder that the concept of Logos was employed by early Christians and Patristic writers to capture the mystery of Christ Jesus. And so, no one with sound theological education can underrate the power of speech or word either in its ordinary day to day usage or its theological context or usage.

Although powerful, words are at the same time limited. As a vehicle of human thoughts, ideas and meanings, words sometimes fall far short of being able to

convey these “passengers”. It is like attempting to use a supersonic airplane to convey astronauts to space, yet we know that supersonic airplanes are indeed very powerful and superfast. And so, words, for all their power, don’t always succeed in conveying the ideas, thoughts, meaning, emotions, values etc. we may wish to transmit.

But man is not left hopeless and helpless in the face of the limitations of words. Where words fail or what words cannot convey, symbols become a much more suitable vehicle. If words are powerful, symbols are even much more powerful. What can be said in a thousand words can be captured by a single symbol. And so, symbols like words, are also conveyors or vehicles. But they are more economical, more effective and more efficient than words because they synthesize in a single expression what is expressed by thousands of words. Symbols travel faster and remain longer even after the sound or echo of a word has long ceased. In fact, the words of the Psalmist readily come to mind in understanding the nature of a symbol. Speaking about the heavens and the skies, the psalmist says: no words are used no sound is heard, yet their voice (message) goes out to all the earth, their message to the outmost ends of the earth (Ps.19: 3,4). Such is the nature of symbols. They do not utter a sound, yet their message is powerfully etched in the hearts and minds of their “hearers”. And so, while words speak to the exterior ears of man, symbols speak to the interior ears of man such that one whose auditory sense is defective can clearly hear and understand the sounds of symbols. This is wittingly expressed in an Igbo proverb: *anaghiagwaochintina agha esu*. This means that: “You don’t tell a deaf man that war has broken out.” S/he may not hear the booming sounds of the heavy guns but s/he certainly will see and feel the anarchy around him/her.

As we do know, the entire structure of our Christian liturgy and spirituality is firmly built on the framework of words and symbols. It is not built only on either words or symbols alone but on both. And so, we must not dismiss or minimize the importance of words. In spite of its inherent limitation, it remains a valid and important vehicle for communicating ideas, thoughts and meanings. They remain important especially as symbols also have their own limitation. Symbols can be misunderstood especially when used inappropriately or in a wrong context. This is why words and symbols must often go together. Symbols help to capture what words are unable to capture and words help to clarify what symbols intend to say. In this mutual relationship, symbol offers words the vocabulary it lacks and words offer symbol the voice and clarity it lacks. Commenting on this mutual relationship between word and deed (symbol), the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council notes that, “the plan of Revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them” (Dei Verbum #2). It is in this mutual interchange that the intended message is communicated in a very powerful and enduring manner. In fact, this union of words and symbols gives rise to a new reality called sacrament. Words alone do not make a sacrament neither do symbols alone make a sacrament, both must come together to make a sacrament. And our basic catechism teaches us

that the power and effects of sacraments are transcendental, that is, they are able to effect changes or transformations that go beyond the natural realm. How else can we explain Baptism, Holy Eucharist, Holy Orders, Reconciliation, etc. And so, when words and symbols unite together as sacrament, a synergy of energies and powers is created, which is capable of transcendental effects. Whereas, such transcendental effects cannot be possible if only either of the two is used. Certainly, some effect will be possible when used separately but that effect cannot be of a transcendental quality or character. The union of word *and* symbol is best encapsulated and exemplified in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Sublime Sacrament insofar as he is both the Word and Symbol of God.

What has the above got to do with anything? A lot! The killing of two priests: Frs. Joseph Gor and Felix Tyolaha, along with their parishioners in the diocese of Makurdi has raised the angst among Catholics and non-Catholics. But it has also raised the expectations of the flock of Christ who look up to their shepherds not only for words of consolation and reassurance but more importantly for direction. As members of the flock of Christ – both those in the church and the other flocks outside the church – are continually mowed down by terrorists, the sheep have been looking up to their shepherds for an effective and determined course of action. After the initial silence, the college of shepherds issued a very powerful statement not only condemning the atrocities but even pointedly asking President Buhari to resign. There is no doubt, the statement of the bishops is powerful and unprecedented. And as we are wont to say, it speaks truth to authority, as they have always done. Indeed, their Communiqué did state that for two years they have been speaking to Buhari concerning the configuration of the security apparatus which leaves the entire security of the country in the hands of an ethnoreligious section of the country. And so, the bishops have been speaking. Their latest “speech” is one in a series of “speeches” and I suppose the most powerful of all them all.

But it is the opinion of ordinary sheep like me that words, powerful as they may be, are no longer sufficient. It is absurd if not ludicrous to continue to multiply words on a man or woman who has lost his auditory faculty. And so, when the sounds of words are no longer meaningful to a deaf man, one must employ a different set of sounds to convey the pains, anxiety, anguish and disappointment of the people. When words fail, symbols come to the rescue just as faith comes to the aid of the senses which are unable to grasp the full reality of things. Our shepherds may have spoken powerfully but they have not spoken sufficiently. And for this, ordinary *christfaithful* like me remain rather disappointed and disillusioned.

Our shepherds must move beyond words to symbols, or rather employ both words and symbols. In short, our bishops must be *sacramental* in their approach to the current crisis in Nigeria. The church is a sacrament, and the ministry of which they – the bishops – are both recipients and custodians is a sacrament. Therefore, their approach and response to issues and problems must be *sacramental* in character. Recall, what was said earlier on, viz., a sacrament consists of both words and symbols.

One may ask what sort of symbol(s) is/are required of our bishops? There are quite a number of them. (a) *Peaceful Public Protest*. Take for instance, the symbol of a peaceful protest. Imagine for a second if all the bishops in Nigeria are to lead, contemporaneously, the priests, consecrated persons, and members of the lay faithful of their respective dioceses in a peaceful silent prayerful sit-down protest in front of the government house of their respective States for an entire week, what will likely be the effect? At the risk of being labelled unreasonably optimistic, I think such an action (symbol) will send a powerful message that cannot be easily ignored by the Federal and State Governments. In fact, one can point to a recent and related action as a precedent. Rochas Okorocha of Imo State in his usual arbitrary and provocative manner renamed Assumpta Avenue—originally named after the Assumpta Cathedral which is located in that Avenue—to Buhari Avenue. Irked by this affront, the Catholic community in Owerri began rallying round to hold a peaceful protest in the metropolis. Without waiting for that to happen the governor hurriedly did a backtrack. Yes, symbols are powerful and effective.

Sometimes, strong reservations and even oppositions are raised, particularly by members of the clergy and consecrated persons, against holding peaceful protests as a possible course of action. One of the usual arguments is that peaceful protests can easily become violent and bloody because of the likelihood of being hijacked by hoodlums thus provoking possible backlash from security forces and pro-government supporters. The multiethnic and multireligious character of the country are further adduced as added reasons why such protests, even when peaceful, should never be adopted as a possible course of action. These arguments, which more or less bother on fear, are often presented as advocating a more prudential approach since the logic is that it is preferable to avoid a course of action that may provoke more violence.

While granting that we do have a volatile ethnoreligious mix in Nigeria yet, one can confidently say that in reality, there is very little likelihood of mobs of Muslims youths attacking peaceful protesting Christians in places like Lagos, Oyo, Enugu, Benue, Abeokuta, Owerri, Port Harcourt, Abuja, etc. and even in the so-called Muslim dominated States. It is even much less likely to have the police shooting at bishops, priests and religious who should be at the vanguard of the peaceful protests. Even the most ruthless dictator knows where to draw the line. And so, the argument that a peaceful protest might turn violent and bloody may seem plausible yet it is very misleading. And let us even grant that possibility, would it be the first time a bishop or priest will be shot in public? Why fear being shot on the streets while protesting against injustice when you can as well be hacked down while lying in your bed or sitting inside the church as happened to the two priests in Benue? And so, the same death we think we are avoiding by refusing to take up a *sacramental* action will certainly catch up with us while engaged in perhaps a less noble activity.

It is very instructive that the brutal murder of Frs. Joseph and Felix took place after the Good Shepherd Sunday. In the Gospel reading of that Sunday, Christ the Good

Shepherd assures us that he will rather lay down his life for his sheep than allow the wolves to harm his sheep. And here we are debating whether it is prudent to go beyond mere words for fear that one or more persons might be shot. Yes, no one should recklessly expose his life to danger, but one must not mistake cowardice for prudence. In the name of prudence some theologians, priests and religious are feeding the flock on a diet of fear: fear that a peaceful protest might turn violent. This diet of fear is transforming Christians into helpless and hopeless people who simply throw up their arms resignedly to fatalism mistaken for faith. While these theologians quote Aquinas and church documents, lives are being lost daily in Benue, Plateau, Kaduna, Taraba, and other parts of Nigeria. I guess the lives of those commoners are nothing in comparison with the lives of our bishops, theologians, priests and religious. I consider it a very grave sin to feed the flock of Christ on a diet of fear. And yet, the first words of the Risen Lord are: "Do Not Be Afraid", "Fear Not Little Flock".

I acknowledge that our bishops are human. They are no different from any of us in terms of their humanity. I believe that they, too, can be overcome by fear and the dread of being brutalized and even killed. Like every responsible and prudent person, they too can be overwhelmed by the thought that an attempt to express their displeasure in a symbolic gesture of peaceful protest can set off a chain of events of undeterminable consequences, hence their reticence in taking that course of action. I believe that they love their flock even more than some vociferous priests like us. I believe that whatever be the case, they are not acting in bad faith but rather out of genuine or what they believe to be genuine prudence. Yet, the fact remains that there must come a time when they have to fold the sleeves of their episcopal robes, replace their shoes with a pair of sandals, and descend from their cathedrae into the streets for a peaceful but frontal confrontation with the evil going on in our country. The life of Oscar Romero of El Salvador exemplifies this. After several hesitations, he realized that words were no longer sufficient. He had to complement words with symbols. He paid the full price with his life and became a "sacrament" for the Church in Latin America. He understood that when you confront evil, evil will leave you bruised and even dead. Christ confronted the evil of sin, and evil left him not only bruised and humiliated but left him hanging on a cross. In fact, he had to show his disciples the marks of his bruises to let them know he's the same Jesus. To expect that we will go on a peaceful prayerful protest and return home with our habits and cassocks still immaculate and unruffled is being unrealistic. We may come back disheveled, harassed, brutalized and even killed, but we like our Risen Lord will triumph over evil. Like Christ we must pray intensely in the garden of Gethsemane but we must be prepared to step into the streets and courtyards of the Chief highpriest and Pilate and be ridiculed by the jeering crowd as they hurry us to Golgotha.

It is without say that the Hierarchy of the Church in Nigeria cannot keep silent or stand aloof in the face of the ongoing mass massacre of families and other forms of anomalies in our national polity. Indeed, they have an obligation to actively resist every form of evil in the society. This pertains to their prophetic ministry. There's no

question that their resistance must be non-violent, but they must strenuously resist evil even when such resistance provokes violence on them. Peaceful prayerful public protest can be considered as one among several forms of non-violent protest against the present evil in our society.

(b) Undertake *diplomatic initiatives*. Another important non-violent method could be the use of diplomatic pressure. The CBCN, as a matter of urgency, must create a unit within the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN), that will be responsible for high level diplomatic engagements within and outside Nigeria. Part of its task is to help create a network of local and foreign, governmental and non-governmental pressure groups that will force the Nigerian government to take the needed steps that will bring to resolve the ongoing crises in the Country. The Catholic bishops in Nigeria must leverage on its universal status in employing diplomatic pressure as a powerful tool for protesting and resisting government endorsed injustice in the society. Needless to say, a high level of professionalism will be required to make such a unit effective.

In addition to the possible courses of actions proposed above, there are several other *symbolic* gestures that the CBCN can undertake in reinforcing its message against the unrelenting violence that has enveloped Nigeria. We shall articulate some of them in the following paragraphs.

1. The ministry of the episcopacy is a *ministry of memory*. As custodians of the apostolic tradition, they are custodians of the memory of not just the past but of the present tradition. Thus, part of their ministry is to ensure that the church never forgets. This is why the CBCN must ensure that the local church does not forget—especially witnesses of the Christian faith. As part of fulfilling the mnemonic dimension of the episcopal ministry, the CBCN, but particularly the respective bishops of the dioceses in the Middlebelt, should establish the identity (names and faces) of all those who have died in religious violence and build a mausoleum in which their names and possibly their faces can be engraved. It becomes a perpetual memory for successive generations of Christians to keep in view the price their forebears paid for their faith in Christ Jesus. This symbol is not merely mnemonic but catechetical. It becomes a symbol that reminds successive generations the price one may be required to pay for embracing the Christian faith.

2. While not everyone who died in religious violence can be strictly declared a martyr, The CBCN should undertake to identify specific individuals whose death qualifies them to be declared *martyrs*. I want to believe that among so many of our murdered brothers and sisters, some of them can be declared martyrs or confessors. Leah Sharibu, though not a Catholic is nonetheless a confessor, indeed, an ecumenical confessor of faith. She chose to renounce her freedom rather than renounce her faith in Christ Jesus. She therefore is a model of Christian faith for men and women of our epoch and of our local context. Her testimony confirms the Gospel message that to follow Christ and stand for truth may require the renunciation of one's property, freedom and even life. Her witness represents a very

powerful critique against the false gospel of materialism and spiritual hedonism that has infected hundreds of thousands of Christians in our day.

3. Every authentic Christian ministry and action, especially sacramental actions, flow from the church's *life of prayer*. Therefore, the above proposed *sacramental actions*, that is, the peaceful prayerful public protest and other forms of non-violent resistance cannot be detached from prayer. Consequently, the CBCN should establish in our local church's liturgical calendar a day to commemorate all victims of ethnoreligious violence. Just as the experience of the early martyrs became inscribed in the universal calendar of the Church, so too must the bishops of Nigeria and of Africa in general also inscribe in our local liturgical calendar the painful experience of individuals, families and communities that have lost their lives to ethnoreligious violence. It is, indeed, a greater violence to continue to pass in silence the painful memories of thousands of victims of ethnoreligious violence.

4. In addition to the annual liturgical celebration of victims of ethnoreligious violence, a specific day and hour of the week, e.g. Fridays, should be set aside as a day of *public devotion* in all parishes, rectories, chaplaincies, seminaries, and religious houses throughout the country. This public devotion would include recitation of the holy rosary, meditation on the word of God and Eucharistic adoration. This spiritual devotion will provide the vital force that will inspire all other forms of public actions that express the church's disapproval of the current political situation. This national day and hour of public devotion should not be a one-off event but a continuous one until the country overcomes its present crisis. We recall how the CBCN rose up to the challenge by composing the Prayer for Nigeria in Distress during the dark and dreary days of the Sani Abacha dictatorship. The country appears to be in an even dire situation and hence the need for all to unite our spirits in prayer.

Some may wish to interpret this short essay as an indictment of our bishops, but my intent is far from that. Any Christian, especially priest or consecrated person, who understands the nature of the church and the dignity of the episcopal ministry must give due deference and honor to the shepherds appointed by Christ to watch over his flock whatever may be their shortcomings. And so, this short essay is not intended in any way to ridicule or castigate our bishops. I dare not commit such opprobrium even if I may not entirely agree with or appreciate their course of action. More so, the deep consciousness that I live in a very brittle glass house has taught me to be circumspect of pointing to the shortcomings of others. It must, however, be clearly understood, that refraining from pointing out the shortcomings or failures of others, whether moral or otherwise, is not the same as critiquing the positions, policies, principles or opinions of others.

Thus, this essay is purely a theological task arising from a strong conviction that theology must be at the service of the magisterium in all circumstances. A theologian, must be capable of rising above the din of uncritical and emotive debates and articulate theological principles that will inspire meaningful course of actions for the church of God. This short theological treatise is, therefore, geared towards offering a theological foundation for non-violent resistance in the form a peaceful prayerful public protest (the 4 Ps) as a legitimate course of action for the church

especially when confronted with grave dangers. From our theological analysis, it is obvious that far more than just a duty or an obligation that derives from a socio-ethical or political right as citizens, peaceful prayerful public protest has solid and sound theological foundation. It is rooted in the church's theology of sacraments. When the church, therefore, engages in public protest, it is not merely a social action, it is sort of a *sacramental* action which flows from the very nature and life of the church which is herself a sacrament. In fact, this is what distinguishes the public protest of the church from all other forms of social or public protests. Since sacraments are not to be trivialized, peaceful prayerful public protests by the church are not to be trivialized. And since sacraments are important and even necessary means of salvation, peaceful prayerful public protests and other forms of non-violent protest are not only important but are sometimes necessary especially in very grave situations. They can become *saving means* of transforming a society. And so, when such necessity arises, the custodians of the mysteries (sacraments) of God has a moral and spiritual obligation to lead the flock of Christ to *celebrate* this *sacrament* even if it means having to lay down one's life. Sacraments, as we have seen have transcendental transformative power and effects. The Church in Nigeria and in Africa as a whole can through a series of sustained sacramental gestures bring about effective and enduring change in our land that has suffered enormously. We must, therefore, rise up to this challenge and expectation.

BOOK REVIEW

Bénézet BUJO, *Religious Life: A Sign of Contradiction*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa. (2017). ISBN: 9966-60-23-3

Reviewer:

Rev. Dr. Mary Joan Iwenofu, IHM⁵²²

Religious Life: A Sign of Contradiction is written by Rev. Professor Bénézet Bujo, a priest of the Diocese of Bunia in the Northeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Prof. Bujo, since 1989, has been a professor of Moral Theology and Social Ethics at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland. He has authored many books on intercultural morality and African Theology.

This book by Prof. B. Bujo is a well-researched, articulated, reflective, rich and beautiful meditation given as a retreat to the Congregation of the Sisters Servants of Jesus (Wamama Watumishiwa Yezu) of the Diocese of Bunia in Ituri (Congo Kinshasa). Prof. Bujo with his decades of experience has in a unique manner offered such a rich and calculated meditation as a great African Theology who has encountered countless religious on numerous capacities in different parts of the globe. Drawing upon this experience, he offers us something of what is essential to religious life with particular reference to the three evangelical counsels in African context. He enriches the meditation by taking into account the African woman religious background as an African and modern situation. This he did without losing sight of the classical teaching on the subject matter. He used a very simple, down-to-earth, lucid, succinct language and African stories and examples to drive home his message and to aid both the young and elderly religious to comprehend the text.

The book has two unequal parts. Part one examines the vows and explores their impact on the life of the religious and her environment. He interestingly points

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out briefly the rudiments of the African tradition that could be useful to preserve the religious life alive in Africa.

Prof. Bujo refers to the root of the vow of poverty (and the rest of other vows) as having nothing of one's self, except the life of God, losing everything for the sake of Jesus. He quotes St Paul's letter to the Philippians to buttress his statement: "More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ." (Phil 3:8). For him, poverty is not a state of destitution or loss but a freedom, a detachment from accumulation of material, unnecessary and unessential things. Poverty is a call to die to self and put on the love of Christ who had given away everything for our sake.

Prof. Bujo, considering poverty from African point of view notes that our African families are often socially poor. Therefore, "Our entering religion is not resented, at least by our surroundings, as protesting against riches. On the contrary, given the social and economic conditions of our people, the masses think that becoming religious or a priest is equivalent to entering a life of ease" (p.25). As an erudite scholar Prof. Bujo corrects the above idea and suggests that our life as religious is not 'social insurance' as our people think and claim but a life for others especially the poor and the needy. Therefore, an African woman religious life is a life of service for others, she is expected to be physically *present* amongst the poor and the needy, "praying with them and empowering such prayers with practical commitments." (p.25).

The vow of chastity according to him is not a question of never to marry because of certain commitment but it is a question of total self-giving to God for the sake of the Kingdom. Considering the situation of things today, he posits that the vow of chastity is a "radical protest and criticism of a world that lives as if pleasure was a natural need like food." (p.42). Thus, the life of a religious should contradict this notion of the world, food is meant for the stomach and the stomach is meant for food. He advances to say that the vow of chastity is then a demanding commitment and a difficult one; hence, it is only through God that we can dare to undertake the journey. He cited three great figures of Christianity that lived a life of radical and perpetual self-giving: Jesus the Founder, John the Baptist, the Precursor and Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles. These were celibates, though Jesus was one by nature, as Son of God, the other two gave up married life for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Prof. Bujo's insight and interpretations of the vow of chastity with reference to African culture is thought-provoking. He connects chastity with motherhood: "A woman religious that considers herself as mother to all others is one who understands well her consecrated virginity: she never stops being good to others, does all that she can to help the others blossom and develop" (p.47). Therefore, the spirituality of an African woman religious should not just end or concentrate on I am the 'spouse' of Christ. I am the 'spouse' of Christ is very much of Western expression, for him, I am 'mother' of Christ is very much better. He compares the women religious to our Blessed Mother Mary, though lesser than her, receive the Holy Spirit and give birth to Jesus in Bethlehem which means wherever God sends

us to proclaim the Gospel. He argues that our meeting other people should always be like Mary's meeting with Elizabeth. Just as John danced and rejoiced in the womb during the encounter, people should also recognize the presence of Christ in us and dance for joy for we have brought them true joy and Salvation. Thus, through the vow of chastity we are sent to bring life to people and not death as Eve did.

The first argument of Prof. Bujo on the vow of obedience is based on the Constitution of the Sisters Servant of Jesus, Art. 33: "Our obedience is a participation in that life of Christ, following him in the docility of the Spirit..." So, a religious who embraces this vow gives up what is precious to her above all other things in life, her freedom, her self-will. But in his own words, he considers the vow of obedience from another angle: evangelical obedience is a "radical giving of one's self to the Father so as to relieve the oppressed and free prisoners from the fetters of this world." (p.52). Therefore, we should think of the vow not only as the formal conformity to rules and orders but to master the virtue of humility embodied in Christ.

Prof. Bujo admonishes both the religious superior and the subject on the dimension of obedience with particular reference to African culture where leaders could not be questioned in some African communities. Most importantly, he postulates that the authority of the superior is relevant only if it has root in God who never destroys life but gives life. Her utmost duty is to give life to people, to be the advocate of people without rights and human dignity, etc. While the subject should recognize the authority of the superior and have the sense and conviction to do God's will for her through her superior.

He concludes the meditation on the three vows with a beautiful analogy; he refers to the religious as the standard bearers of bronze serpent who represents Christ. The Christ whom people look at and are healed and consoled. Thus, the religious should be the bronze serpent (Christ) that people will look at and be healed and consoled. They should always demonstrate the presence of Christ within them by their appearance. Prof. Bujo briefly describes how the religious communities should be oases in the desert. At the end, he articulates the modern idolatry to be rejected if we want to be true signs for others. They are uncontrolled desire for wealth (vow of poverty), disordered carnal desire (vow of chastity) and the obstinacy to doing our own will (vow of obedience).

The second part calls for the restoration of the vitality of religious life with ecclesia palaver. He points out the necessity to address every issue in the religious communities in the light of the Word of God and on the level of the Church as family of God. Prof. Bujo recognizes that the Word of God should be the model for all our human word to be uttered. He proffers three places we need ecclesial palaver for the growth of religious life in Africa: agnostic, irenic and therapeutic palaver. These are very important for positive progress in religious life especially for preserving the spiritual and bodily health of the religious community.

In summary, I found the book very inspiring. It offers valuable material for meditation. The book contains a comprehensive understanding of religious life from Scriptural, historical, theological and African traditional perspectives. The rationale behind the book is to give the religious especially the African women religious a new impulse to their religious spirituality as Africans which was met by the author. It is

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267

meticulously documented and reasoned with care and precision. A strong impression after reading the whole text is that this book has made an important contribution to the wider discussion of religious life in modern-day African cultures. Unfortunately, most of the footnotes were in either German language or French language, none was in English language which made the reading of the text a bit difficult. There was also lack of a useful selected bibliography for better understanding and further reflection of the subject matter. All in all, I would happily recommend the book for use in our formation houses and religious communities for spiritual reading and for those interested in religious life in modern-day African culture. In fact, my community has read and assimilated the book; we all enjoyed the invaluable content of the book.